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AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Meeting of the Parliament (Hybrid)

Tuesday 16 November 2021

Session 6



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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 16 November 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 the Rev Dr James Connolly, the minister of Dundee west church.

Rev Dr James Connolly (Dundee West Church): Presiding Officer and members of the Scottish Parliament, I thank you for the opportunity to address you this afternoon.

Presiding Officer,

“let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works”,

says the writer to the Hebrews in chapter 10, verse 24.

When I was a patrol leader in the boy scouts, I had the nickname “Spoon”. It was given to me because of the folding spoon that I used to check the food that the boys cooked when at camp. I took this very seriously, shovelling in a good measure just to make sure that it was safe to eat. Most of the time it was. That spoon was helpful and ever ready. Some resented it, thinking of it as interference, others were thankful, and most accepted it as something to be done.

Later, when I came to Fife, I was informed that, “You need a lang spoon to sup with a Fifer.” I had long ago put that folding spoon away, and now it seemed that I needed a lang spoon ASAP. What did it mean? I learned that it meant that Fife people could be challenging to get to know. As a clergyman, working for 16 years in Fife, I found that they, like us, are all Jock Thomson’s bairns. The lang spoon required humility, sacrifice and, sometimes, suffering, but mainly it required Christian love reaching out with unconditional positive regard to all.

I was introduced to another Fife spoon—a spon, which is a wooden double-backed spoon. It multiplies mixing and beating while using the same effort. Neal Robertson credited it, along with good Scottish water, with helping him to win the world porridge making championship. It is the appliance of science but with good Scottish ingenuity.

Finally, there is the metal pudding spoon. Noah, my six-year-old grandson, believes that it is magic. One side shows him his reflection the right way up while the other displays it upside down. When things seem upside down, we need to learn to turn the right way up.

The writer to the Hebrews, when using the word “stir”, is thinking in terms of “agitation” or even “irritation”. In truth, when looked at the right way around, that spurs us on to something good. I trust that we will continue to learn how best to

“stir up one another to love and good works”

and that we are ever ready to check and keep all safe, so that they may advance with care, knowing that Jock Thomson’s bairns are precious and to be cared for throughout life.

Business Motion

14:04

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-02148, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out changes to this week's business.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees to the following revisions to the programme of business for—

(a) Tuesday 16 November 2021—

delete

followed by Ministerial Statement: COP26 Outcomes

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Celebrating the First Anniversary of the Scottish National Investment Bank

and insert

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Celebrating the First Anniversary of the Scottish National Investment Bank

followed by Ministerial Statement: COP26 Outcomes

(b) Thursday 18 November 2021—

delete

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body Questions

2.45 pm Portfolio Questions:
Rural Affairs and Islands

and insert

2.15 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.15 pm Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body Questions

followed by Portfolio Questions:
Rural Affairs and Islands—[George Adam]

Motion agreed to.

Topical Question Time

14:04

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is topical question time. In order to get in as many questions as possible, short and succinct questions and responses would be appreciated.

Reproductive Health Facilities (Access)

1. **Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government, in light of reports of a legal opinion stating that local authorities cannot use their byelaw powers to implement buffer zones at national health service reproductive health facilities, how it will ensure that women have access to these services free from harassment. (S6T-00293)

The Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport (Maree Todd): Our programme for government includes a commitment to support any local authority that wishes to use byelaws to establish buffer zones. In the Scottish Parliament—and, it seems, in local government—we are all agreed that it is absolutely unacceptable for any woman to face harassment when accessing healthcare. I am not trying to shift the burden on to local authorities, but we do not share the view that byelaws cannot be used. We will work with local authorities to explore every possible avenue to find a way forward, and ministers will look at bringing together key parties as soon as possible to discuss potential solutions.

In addition, the Scottish Government looks forward to the introduction of Gillian Mackay's proposed member's bill, and I am happy to discuss her proposal with her.

Katy Clark: Does the minister not accept, however, that it is the Scottish Government's responsibility to ensure that women have safe access to national health service facilities? We know that seven hospitals and clinics in Scotland have been repeatedly targeted. Given that there seem to be legal problems, and that we do not want a postcode lottery in which some local authorities take action while others do not, will the minister now consider Scotland-wide legislation to create buffer zones around such facilities?

Maree Todd: The Government absolutely supports the principle of protected spaces, which is why we have said that we will support local authority use of byelaws. With regard to our progress on the issue, my officials will meet Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and local authority representatives next week to find a way forward. I also plan to convene a ministerial working group, so I will be taking the lead to bring

together interested parties, including COSLA, the health service and the police service, to urgently find a way forward.

I am absolutely determined to make progress on the matter. I have made it crystal clear that I do not disagree with Gillian Mackay on the issue. In many ways, I look forward to seeing her proposed member's bill. We will look closely at the detail, but I think that we largely agree on the principles.

Katy Clark: Does the minister not accept, however, that it would be far better if the Scottish Government introduced legislation instead of relying on a private member's bill or on local authorities to act in situations in which they have been advised that they do not have legal competence?

Maree Todd: We do not share the view that byelaws cannot be used. One of the main reasons that we are keen to work with local authorities on the issue is that we think that the use of byelaws would be the fastest way of finding a solution. It will take time for primary legislation to pass through Parliament and be enacted, and using byelaws would be far speedier than any other method in resolving the situation. However, I make it clear that I am willing to work with local authorities, the police and the health service and that I am determined to make progress on the issue.

Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): I thank the minister for her indication regarding working together on my proposal for a member's bill. Given that it will take quite a while for primary legislation to come forward and that there seems to be a legal impasse between the Scottish Government and local authorities, has the minister given any thought to what temporary measures we could put in place to ensure that women are not harassed when they access such facilities?

Maree Todd: As I outlined, I am keen to find a way forward, and I would like a speedy resolution to the situation. One of the reasons that I am keen to use byelaws is that I think that they would be the fastest way forward. Nonetheless, my officials are meeting COSLA and specific local authorities next week, and finding a fast solution will be one of the main items on the agenda. As I said, I am also keen to convene a ministerial working group and to bring urgency to the resolution of the situation.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I was proud to speak alongside Gillian Mackay in her members' business debate on the issue, joining members from all parties in our shared belief that somebody's right to freedom of speech does not trump somebody's right to medical privacy or the right to seek intimate medical care without molestation. The minister

shattered that consensus by saying that the Government was unmoved.

If the minister is determined to state that there is a difference of legal opinion, I note that the opinion that the Society of Local Authority Lawyers and Administrators in Scotland received was "unequivocal" that byelaws could not be used by local authorities to create buffer zones. Has the Scottish Government sought legal opinion to the contrary? If so, will she publish it?

Maree Todd: I do not need to rehearse the principles of publishing legal opinion. The Government supports the principle of protected spaces, which is why we have said that we will support any local authority that wishes to introduce byelaws to ensure that women have protected spaces and are not harassed as they access healthcare. Let me be absolutely clear: we are committed to that principle, and I am committed to finding a way forward.

Bail and Release from Custody (Consultation)

2. **Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government which victim support organisations it consulted with ahead of drafting the paper, *Consultation on Bail and Release from Custody Arrangements in Scotland*. (S6T-00284)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans (Keith Brown): In developing proposals for formal consultation, the Scottish Government discussed the issues informally with a range of partners, including the victims organisation collaboration forum Scotland, which is chaired by Victim Support Scotland. Public protection and victim safety are at the heart of the reform proposals, which are focused on reducing crime, reoffending and future victimisation.

Building on engagement with victims organisations that took place throughout the pandemic, we will continue to work closely with them and a range of other partners during the consultation and bill processes to ensure that their views are heard and that they inform future decisions in this critical area.

I want to deliver further improvements to the safety of the people of Scotland by refocusing the use of custody so that it is for those who pose a risk to public safety. The recorded crime rate remains at one of its lowest levels since 1974; it is down 41 per cent since 2006-07. I want to build further on our achievements by ensuring that custody, including the use of remand, is used appropriately and that enhanced support is provided to those whose offending behaviour is dealt with in the community.

Jamie Greene: The consultation includes a proposal to shorten the automatic early release trigger for criminals from when they have served

half of their sentence to when they have served just a third. We know that 30 per cent of prisoners who receive a sentence of less than four years go on to reoffend, compared with just 8 per cent of those who are sentenced to four years or more. The evidence is clear that the shorter the sentence, the higher the reoffending rate, which undoubtedly further traumatises victims of crime and does nothing to solve the problems of overcrowding in our prisons and reoffending.

What message of fairness and justice will be sent to the victims of crimes by releasing criminals a third of the way through their sentence?

Keith Brown: The proposals that Jamie Greene refers to are one or two among a whole list of proposals that seek to address a number of concerns, not least those that he has raised in relation to, for example, the high remand population. It is always true that discretion in these areas lies with the courts, which, when they pass sentence, can take into account the issues that Jamie Greene has mentioned. These matters are dealt with by the courts—that is the way that it should be.

We want to have a genuine discussion that is based on the almost consensual concerns that have been expressed by members from across the Parliament.

It is also true to say that, if we could further reduce the prison population, the amount of time and effort that could be spent on individual prisoners would be greater, thereby reducing even further the recidivism rate. The continuation of our policies that have led to some of the lowest recorded crime rates ever and the lowest number of recorded homicides ever is consistent with the proposals. However, we will wait to see what people come back with.

Jamie Greene: It is interesting that the cabinet secretary did not address the issue of reoffending, which I presume is covered in the consultation. Week after week, we come to the chamber and hear countless proposals for watering down sentencing guidelines, whether on how criminals under the age of 25 are treated or on automatic release triggers. Now there is the prospect of giving ministers the power to release prisoners simply out of fear of our prisons becoming full.

The move reeks of a panic-stricken Government that is looking down the barrel of a court backlog of tens of thousands of cases that are yet to be heard. We are frequently reminded by the cabinet secretary that decisions about remand and sentencing are, rightly, made by independent judges. He has just said so again. Why does he now think that ministers know better than they do?

Keith Brown: The member says that he presumes that something is in the consultation: he

obviously does not know. He should read those things before he comes to ask questions.

It is the case that discretion will remain with the courts. That is how we do things in this country. Independent courts decide on those things. It is also true that remand is at a very high level in Scotland. The member is right to be concerned about the backlog of cases, which is not peculiar to this jurisdiction and is due to the pandemic.

He made a point about automatic early release. It was the Conservatives who brought in automatic early release but then voted against it the last time that this Parliament voted on it. I do not know where the Tories are on justice. I do not think they have a clue what is meant by “soft justice”. We want smart, effective justice that ensures that the right people are in prison and that people are given the rehabilitation opportunities that they should have, so that we can continue to drive down the levels of recidivism, as we are successfully doing.

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): I welcome the launch of the consultation, which has been a core part of the discussion in the Criminal Justice Committee this session. The need to prevent indefinite imprisonment via remand has been mentioned on several occasions. Will the cabinet secretary expand on how the consultation will tackle the issues of prison population and remand?

Keith Brown: The member asks an important question—one that has already been alluded to by Jamie Greene. Parliament has been clear, in recent years, that too many people are being held on remand. That belief is shared by all the parties.

It is right that courts should make such decisions on the basis of the individual cases that come before them. The consultation looks afresh at the legal framework within which those decisions are made. If people do not accept that, perhaps they can offer an alternative way forward, but I believe that it is where the Parliament wants to concentrate its activities. We want remand to be used only when it is absolutely necessary.

The proposals emphasise the importance of putting public safety and victim safety at the forefront of decisions about remand. When an accused person does not pose a significant risk but requires additional support such as drug treatment or supervision in the community, bail should be the default option, with the necessary enhanced support provided.

I am grateful that the Criminal Justice Committee, of which the member is the convener, has focused on the issue, and I look forward to working with members during the consultation and the bill process. I appreciated the opportunity to have an early discussion of the issue when I

attended a committee meeting in September. At that point, I welcomed Jamie Greene's comments that there are human rights aspects to the matter, particularly in relation to the length of time for which people are held on remand.

I remind members that remand is now at 30 per cent of the prison population, which is too high. I urge those who have an interest to respond to the proposals for reform.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): The cabinet secretary will be aware that there has been a significant rise in the use of remand in Scotland, with the number of prisoners on remand almost doubling between April 2020 and April of this year. By the end of that period, close to one in four prisoners was on remand. Worryingly, 40 per cent of those on remand were aged between 16 and 20.

There is some evidence to suggest that requests for supervised bail orders are at a historically low level, with possible explanations being a lack of awareness of the programmes that are available and the scarcity of short-term funding.

Given that the consultation on bail and release from custody has just begun, and given that we need an answer to the problem in the short to medium term, will the cabinet secretary say whether the Government will make the judiciary more aware of supervised bail orders as an immediate or medium-term step, so that we can start to reduce the high number of prisoners on remand in Scotland sooner rather than later?

Keith Brown: As the member knows, I cannot speak for the judiciary, but they are aware of the alternatives that they can use. We sometimes have to ensure that people have confidence in those alternatives.

I hope that the consultation will shed some light on another issue with remand, which is what we can do to protect victims when those who are accused are placed on remand. There is more work to do on that.

The member has previously raised the issue of the high number of people on remand. We intend to address that issue, and I am grateful for comments that the member has made about that in the past. We all seem to agree that the situation must be addressed. If others have ideas about how to address the situation, they should come forward with those proposals and we will listen to them.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes topical question time.

Covid-19 Update

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is a statement by Nicola Sturgeon, who will give a Covid-19 update. The First Minister will take questions at the end of her statement, 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 and provide an assessment of the current course of the pandemic. First, though, I will give today's statistics. Yesterday, 2,771 positive cases were reported, which is 12.8 per cent of all the tests that were carried out. There are 779 people in hospital with Covid, which is eight more than yesterday, and 57 people are receiving intensive care, which is the same number as yesterday. Sadly, a further 17 deaths have been reported over the past 24 hours, which takes the total number of deaths registered under the daily definition to 9,406. I again send my condolences to everyone who has lost a loved one.

More positively, the vaccination programme continues to make very good progress. I confirm that 4,331,574 people have received a first dose and 3,930,317 have now had both doses. In total, 88 per cent of all those over 18 are now fully vaccinated with two doses. In addition, 76 per cent of 16 and 17-year-olds and 56 per cent of 12 to 15-year-olds have had a first dose. Until now, only a single dose has been recommended for those age groups but, following yesterday's updated advice from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, we are now preparing to offer second doses to 16 and 17-year-olds.

I will say a bit more about the progress of the booster programme later. However, it is worth pointing out that, on first, second and booster and third doses, Scotland is currently the most vaccinated part of the United Kingdom. That is down to the incredible hard work of everyone who has been involved in organising and delivering the programme, and I record my thanks to each and every one of them.

Today's weekly update coincides with the latest three-week review point for the remaining Covid regulations, and I confirm that, at our meeting earlier today, the Cabinet agreed to keep the current regulations in place with no immediate changes. However, we also considered, although we have not yet reached final decisions, the possibility of future changes to the vaccination certification scheme. I will say more about that shortly.

The numbers that have been reported in recent days here in Scotland, which I will come on to talk about in more detail, illustrate the need for continued precautions, and so, too, does the challenging situation that is again being experienced across Europe. Several European countries are dealing with a sharp increase in cases. Infection rates in Germany have reached their highest level since the pandemic started. The Netherlands reintroduced some Covid measures last week and Ireland has done so today. Austria has just introduced extremely tough restrictions on people who are not fully vaccinated.

All of that is a reminder that Governments everywhere are grappling with the same issues and dilemmas as we are. The threats that are posed by Covid are still very much with us, even though they have been mitigated by vaccination, and the race between the virus and the vaccines has not yet been won. The situation here, in Scotland, also bears that out.

Before I give an update on the overall trends in Scotland, I will say a few words about the impact of recent events in Glasgow. I will reflect more generally on the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP26—in a further statement to Parliament later this afternoon. However, while we cannot yet draw final conclusions, I confirm that there is no sign so far of any significant spike in Covid cases associated with COP26. Rigorous measures were put in place to minimise the risks of transmission. For example, everyone who entered the main summit site—the blue zone—had to provide evidence of a negative lateral flow test result.

Information that was published earlier today by Public Health Scotland suggests that, of the people who were officially affiliated with COP26, approximately four in every 1,000 tested positive for Covid through routine lateral flow testing. That contrasts with survey data for the Scottish population as a whole, which suggests that, last week, 12 people in every 1,000 had Covid. In total, since 15 October, 291 people with Covid across Scotland reported attending a COP-related event. That includes satellite meetings and demonstrations as well as the main summit. That represents less than half of 1 per cent of all those who tested positive for Covid over the past month and reported through test and protect.

All of that, at this stage, suggests that the mitigations that were put in place for COP26 were effective. I put on the record my thanks to delegates for their compliance, and indeed to everyone who worked so hard in the run-up to and during COP26 to secure the safest possible environment.

More generally, across Scotland, we have seen a gradual increase in cases over the past two

weeks, from just over 2,500 new cases a day to approximately 3,000 a day at this stage.

It is important to note that that headline figure masks some distinct variation between different age groups. For example, cases among the under-60s increased by 14 per cent during the past week, and much of that increase was in people under the age of 20. By contrast, cases in the over-60 age group fell over the past week by 11 per cent. That is likely to be due, at least in part, to the success of the booster programme, which is, of course, prioritised among the older population. I will say more about that shortly.

The decline in cases among older people may also explain why, despite the overall increase in cases, the numbers in hospital with Covid have reduced slightly in recent weeks. Three weeks ago, 917 patients were in hospital with Covid; today, there are 779. The number in intensive care has also fallen—albeit very slightly—during that time, from 59 to 57.

However, all of that said, the number of patients in hospital with Covid is still extremely high. If cases continue to increase, notwithstanding the age profile, we are likely to see hospital admissions and occupancy start to rise again.

In addition, the national health service is currently treating people who are in hospital for care that had to be delayed by earlier Covid countermeasures. As we go further into winter, we can expect other seasonal pressures—for example, flu—to increase.

All of that means that the NHS is under extreme pressure. We continue to work closely with health boards to address and mitigate those pressures as far as we can.

The vaccination programme continues to be critical in reducing the direct health harm that is caused by the virus. A moment ago, I mentioned that the decline in Covid rates in older age groups and the fall in hospital admissions may well reflect the impact of the vaccine booster campaign. I can confirm that more than 1 million booster jags have now been administered. More than 70 per cent of people in the over-70 age group have now had a booster. We know that a booster jag significantly increases the effectiveness of the vaccine. That high level of uptake is therefore extremely important, and we will continue to push it up as far as possible.

The programme took a further step forward yesterday with the launch of the online booking portal. Everyone aged 50 to 59—together with unpaid carers and household contacts of the immunosuppressed, and anyone eligible for a vaccine who has not yet had an appointment—can now book online at NHS Inform. Since yesterday morning, more than 54,000 people have made

online bookings, and more than 8,000 people have made bookings through the national helpline, which can be called on 0800 030 8013.

It is, of course, important to remember that boosters can be given only from 24 weeks after someone's second jab; therefore, for many in the 50 to 59 age group, appointments will only be possible from December onwards.

It is also worth pointing out that people living in Orkney, Shetland, the Western Isles and the NHS Highland health board areas will not use the online booking system but will instead receive information direct from their health board about local arrangements for appointments.

As I mentioned earlier, the JCVI updated its advice yesterday. In addition to recommending second doses for 16 and 17-year-olds, it recommended booster jags for people in their 40s. I very much welcome that, and the Scottish Government will move to implement that new advice as quickly as we can. We continue to work with health boards to ensure that the overall programme is delivered as rapidly as possible.

However, it is worth taking stock of the situation as of now. This winter vaccination programme is the largest and most complex that has ever been undertaken in Scotland. However, since the first week of September, more than 3 million flu and booster jags have been administered, and take-up rates have been encouraging; that is providing vital protection as we head into winter. Once again, I am hugely grateful to everyone who is helping to get jags into people's arms as quickly as possible.

I take again the opportunity to urge every single person who is eligible for vaccination—whether a first, second or booster or third jag—to please take up the offer without delay, and to get the flu jag, too, if they are eligible.

Getting vaccinated remains the single most important thing that any of us can do to protect ourselves, our loved ones and our communities. It is impossible to overstate how important it is to get vaccinated, so, if you have not already done so, please do so now. You could be saving your own life or the lives of your loved ones. You will be reassuring others, including those most at risk—some of whom have clinical conditions that mean that they cannot get vaccinated themselves. You will be helping those who are working in the NHS, and you will be maximising our chances of getting through the winter without the need to reintroduce any restrictions. In my view, choosing—without good reason—not to be vaccinated is deeply irresponsible. Getting vaccinated, on the other hand, is a civic duty and the most precious gift that we can give to others at this time.

The vaccination programme is, and will continue to be, the bedrock of our efforts to control Covid. However, other baseline mitigations remain in place, and they, too, are important. As I mentioned earlier, lateral flow testing appears to have been effective in limiting transmission during COP. That should remind all of us that those tests are an important way of detecting infection, particularly in those without symptoms, and therefore preventing onward spread.

I therefore again encourage everyone to take a lateral flow test at least twice a week—especially if you are attending events or mixing with people in other households. The tests can be ordered free through NHS Inform or collected from test sites and local pharmacies. Face coverings also continue to be a simple but important mitigation, and they remain a legal requirement on public transport, in shops and when moving around in hospitality settings. Please also continue to work from home when that is practical. I today ask all employers to look again at whether more workers could be supported to do more work from home over the winter period. Lastly, good ventilation is vital. If any of us are having people visit our homes, we should open a window, even slightly, to let some air flow through the room.

Within the public sector, we have taken significant steps to improve ventilation—for example, through funding for carbon dioxide monitors in schools. In September, we announced the establishment of a £25 million fund to help businesses to improve ventilation. That fund opens for applications next week. Businesses such as restaurants, bars and gyms will be able to claim back costs of up to £2,500 for measures such as the installation of carbon dioxide monitors or improvements to windows and vents. More information on eligibility has been published today on the Find Business Support website.

All those basic mitigation measures are important at this stage. However, some of them are also valuable long-term investments. For example, better ventilation will not only reduce the spread of Covid but will help to reduce the spread of other airborne viruses, now and in the future. There is an important point here that is worth stressing. When we talk—as many do these days—about living with Covid, it is important that we do not think of it as simply giving in to the virus. Instead, it is about making sensible changes that allow us to return to both greater normality and better health.

The final mitigation measure that I will talk about today is the vaccination certification scheme. It is the strong view of the Scottish Government that the scheme—together with the other measures that are still in place—makes an important and proportionate contribution to stemming Covid

transmission. The value of certification is also recognised in other countries, many of which require certification for access to a much wider range of services than is currently the case in Scotland. Wales, for example, expanded the scope of its scheme yesterday, such that it now applies to theatres, cinemas and concert halls, in addition to the same range of venues as in Scotland.

The Cabinet discussed possible changes to the current certification scheme at our meeting this morning. We intend to take a final decision next Tuesday, in the light of the most up-to-date data. In the meantime, later this week, we will publish an evidence paper and consult businesses on the practicalities of implementation, should any changes be made. Although final decisions have not yet been reached, I will provide an update on the issues under consideration. I should also say that we provisionally intend that any changes that we decide to make to the scheme will take effect from 6 December.

When the scheme launched, on 1 October, we judged that it was not appropriate at that time—given the imperative to drive up vaccination rates—to include testing as an alternative to proof of vaccination. However, we indicated that that would be kept under review. We will therefore be assessing, in the coming days, whether, on the basis of current and projected vaccination uptake rates, we are now in a position to amend the scheme so that, in addition to showing evidence of vaccination to access a venue, there will also be the option of providing evidence of a recent negative test result. That is already a feature of many other countries' certification schemes.

We are also considering whether an expansion of the scheme to cover more settings would be justified and prudent, given the current state of the pandemic. Again, let me stress that we have not at this stage taken a decision to extend the reach of the scheme. However, to allow us to engage openly with businesses in the coming days about the pros, cons and practicalities, I confirm that the kinds of setting that might be in scope are indoor cinemas, theatres and some other licensed and hospitality premises.

We would, of course, retain exemptions for people under 18, people who cannot be vaccinated or tested for medical reasons, people on clinical trials, and people who work at events or in venues that are subject to the scheme. Exceptions would also be retained for worship, weddings, funerals and related gatherings.

I will give a further update on that in next week's statement. If we decide to propose any amendments to the regulations on certification, Parliament will have the opportunity to discuss and debate those amendments.

I am acutely aware that many businesses want us to remove mitigations—including certification—not extend or tighten them. I understand that. However, all our decisions are and must be motivated by a desire to keep people safe and to get through what will be a challenging winter without having to reintroduce restrictions on trade. We want—if possible—businesses to stay fully open over Christmas and through the winter, while keeping Covid under control. If an expansion of vaccination certification can help us to do that, it would be irresponsible not to consider it.

As the detail of this statement makes clear, and as the situation across Europe shows, the need to carefully manage this pandemic still deprives us of easy options. Although we hope very much to get through the winter without reintroducing further restrictions, as some other countries are now starting to do, we have a duty to keep proportionate options under review, and we will do so.

To assist with and give an insight into the factors that guide our considerations, we are today publishing an updated strategic framework, which covers in more detail many of the issues that I have summarised. One of the points that it reiterates is that all of us across society—individuals, businesses and other organisations—must continue to play our part in helping to curb the spread of the virus.

For that reason, cabinet secretaries are continuing to work with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, individual local authorities and businesses on the actions that we need to take to reduce transmission—preferably without additional restrictions.

I will close by reiterating what we can all do to protect ourselves and one another.

First, please do get vaccinated if you are eligible and have not yet done so. As I mentioned earlier, that includes going for a booster jab when you are invited. It is never too late to get vaccinated, and it remains the single most important thing that any of us can do right now.

Secondly, please test regularly with lateral flow devices. Devices can be ordered through NHS Inform or collected from local test sites and pharmacies. If you test positive, if you are identified as a close contact or if you have symptoms of the virus, please self-isolate and book a polymerase chain reaction—PCR—test.

Thirdly, please comply with the mitigations that are still in place. Work from home when that is possible. Wear face coverings in indoor public places—for example, when you are in shops, on public transport or moving about in hospitality settings. Wash hands and surfaces thoroughly.

Meet outdoors if that is possible. That gets harder through the winter, obviously, but it is the case that outdoor environments are safer than indoor environments. When you meet indoors, try to open windows—anything to improve ventilation will help.

All those precautions still make a difference. They will protect us and those around us, and they will help to ease the burden on our NHS. I ask everyone to continue to stick with them, and I thank everyone for doing so.

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.

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): It is vital that everyone who can have the Covid jab goes out and gets it as soon as possible. The vaccine, including the booster jab, is our best weapon against the virus. That is why we have called for the reopening of mass vaccination centres, alongside the current local delivery programme, to ensure that we maximise opportunities for people to get their vaccine boosters. Will the First Minister agree to reopen mass vaccination centres, so that we can speed up the booster jab roll-out and protect people more quickly?

Today, the public were expecting a statement that delivered clear decisions. We all were. That was the message that the Deputy First Minister was sent out to give the Parliament last week. Instead, we are being told once more to wait until next week. The Government has delayed again, thereby creating wholly avoidable uncertainty.

Businesses are, once again, being left in the dark and are being treated as an afterthought. They might have less than two weeks to adapt to changes to the vaccination passport scheme at one of the busiest times of the year for the hospitality industry. That has a big impact on staff, too. The Government is showing a total lack of respect for Scottish businesses, which the Scottish National Party expects to shoulder the costs of its vaccination passport scheme.

Last Tuesday, the Deputy First Minister said that the Government would

“discuss options with business sectors in the course of this week.”—[*Official Report*, 9 November 2021; c 11.]

Can the First Minister give a clear answer and tell us the outcome of those discussions over the past week? The Government must know who might be impacted, so let me ask the First Minister the same question as I asked the Deputy First Minister last week. To which businesses, exactly, is the Government still considering expanding the

vaccination passport scheme? She mentioned in her statement “some other ... hospitality” venues. Which hospitality venues will have to prepare for that added burden?

The First Minister has just said:

“We want—if possible—businesses to stay fully open over Christmas”.

We know that the Government wants to keep its options open, but will the First Minister be clear for Scottish businesses and the jobs that depend on them? Does that statement mean that the SNP Government is considering closing businesses and premises over the winter months?

The First Minister: It pains me to say this, but Douglas Ross’s immaturity and irresponsibility in the face of the virus continue to be utterly breathtaking. I know that he has had other things on his mind in recent days, but is he oblivious to what is currently happening across Europe, where the virus is on the rise again and Governments everywhere are, once again, having to grapple with the most difficult decisions? We are seeking to do that in a responsible way. That is what we have done throughout, and we will continue to do it in the period ahead.

Two particular issues were raised. The first was vaccination. We are organising the current phase of the vaccination programme in the way that makes best use of resources and vaccinates people as quickly as possible. One of the things that I have learned in recent weeks is that, whatever we decide to do, Douglas Ross will probably oppose it. When we introduced a vaccination programme for younger teenagers that was not principally school based, that was criticised, but it turned out that we managed to vaccinate those younger teenagers more quickly than any other part of the UK did.

In respect of every dose of the vaccine, Scotland is right now the most vaccinated part of the UK. We are not complacent about that. We continue to press to speed up the vaccination programme every day, although the programme is going extremely well. Perhaps, once in a while, Douglas Ross could find it within himself to thank those who are working so hard across the country to ensure that people are vaccinated.

On Covid certification, it is simply not an option right now for any Government across Europe or much of the world to do nothing in the face of the virus. The easiest thing, of course, is to oppose everything that Governments decide to do to try to keep people safe. Douglas Ross bemoans the fact that the Cabinet has not taken a final decision yet. If I had stood up today and said that we had taken a final decision to expand the reach of the certification scheme, he would, of course, have criticised that and said that we were acting too

quickly and that we were not taking account of up-to-date data.

We have decided to consider the matter carefully, to take account of up-to-date data and to reach a decision next week. In the meantime, we will publish an evidence paper and consult businesses on the practicalities and the pros and cons. We will decide which businesses might be affected on the basis of the data and the evidence. In order to give people an update on what we are considering, I have set out today the sectors that we are considering. People need only look around the UK—there is such a scheme in Wales, and Ireland is extending its Covid certification scheme—and to many countries across Europe to see that most Governments are grappling with the same difficult decisions.

The easiest thing in the world right now, as Douglas Ross has found out, is to oppose everything. However, when we have a duty, as the Government does, to try to keep people safe, the decisions are harder than that. We will continue to take them with an intense degree of responsibility.

Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): I start by offering my condolences to all those who have lost loved ones and by recognising all those who continue to put in every effort on the front line to keep us all safe. I urge the Government to do more than just applaud and thank those people—it should recognise them and reward them when they come forward with pay disputes.

The Government has still not fixed the tools that it already has but is instead now considering expanding a system about which the Deputy First Minister has said that he has no evidence that it is reducing cases of Covid. The vaccine works: it reduces hospitalisations, death rates and cases of long Covid. However, it does not prevent people from getting the virus or from spreading it.

In her statement, the First Minister said that lateral flow testing helped to reduce transmission at COP26. She had been arguing the opposite in relation to the vaccination passport scheme. At every point in the process of developing vaccination passports, we have argued the importance of a negative test. Every scheme that the First Minister mentioned in her statement and response includes use of a negative test.

The First Minister should accept that she got it wrong and admit that testing should always have been at the heart of our Covid reduction strategy. She should also commit today to including a negative test in any reformed or expanded scheme, to engaging meaningfully with the sectors that will be impacted, to sharing evidence, to considering the practicalities and to providing a financial package that prevents businesses from going under and people from losing their jobs.

The First Minister: On rewarding those who have worked so hard in our national health service, I would dearly love to be a position to give them a higher pay rise than we have given. We will always seek to maximise that. However, it is important to put on the record that, this year, NHS agenda for change workers in Scotland are receiving the highest pay increase of any NHS workers in any part of the UK, including where Labour is in Government. Perhaps we should judge the Labour Party on what it does rather than on what it says.

The issue of inclusion of a negative test in the vaccination certification scheme is a finely balanced judgment. When we take a decision to introduce a scheme with the express objective of using it, at least in part, to drive up vaccination rates, it makes no sense to have an alternative to vaccination as an initial part of the scheme. It can be argued that our being currently the most vaccinated part of the UK is, at least in part, down to our vaccination certification scheme, which has helped to drive vaccine uptake.

There comes a point at which our consideration must change because we make a judgment that we have already got all the gains of increased vaccine uptake and can therefore move to include LFD tests. I understand the importance of LFD tests as part of a package of measures. That is why, every week as I stand here, I talk about the importance of those tests.

We have made judgments carefully up to now. We will not always get judgments right, but we will continue to make them responsibly and to take account of all of the evidence. As I said in my statement, we will publish an evidence paper this week. We will continue to talk to businesses and we will continue to arrive at the difficult decisions as carefully as possible.

I know that the Opposition parties want to say that we need to do nothing, and want to oppose everything that we put forward. That is an easy option. However, in Government, there are no easy options, particularly in the face of a global pandemic.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): If any proof were needed that vaccination certification is unnecessary and that there are better alternatives, it can be found at COP26. The First Minister just said that it was the safest possible environment. Using daily LFD tests, attendees were three times less likely to test positive for Covid-19 than the general population, in which vaccination certification is at large.

We know that LFDs are superior to vaccination passports in two significant ways. First, they provide an on-the-day snapshot of someone's Covid status, rather than their vaccination status.

That helps venues to ascertain who is sick and who is well. Secondly—and, perhaps, most important—it prevents the need for people to pass part of their medical history or evidence of recent treatment to someone who is not their clinician.

A mixed bag or combination of the two schemes will not cut it. Will the First Minister abandon vaccination certification entirely and instead build a scheme around lateral flow testing?

The First Minister: No, I will not, because my duty to keep the population of Scotland as safe as possible means that I cannot take the easy options that Alex Cole-Hamilton puts forward.

He misunderstands the package of mitigations that were in place at COP26, for which one of the protections was that delegates were asked to be double vaccinated before they arrived. We offered vaccination to people who were coming from countries where that was not available, and LFD tests were an additional precaution. It is easy to be selective, but it is better to look at the whole package of measures that were in place.

In relation to the wider issue, when there is a scheme that is partly about driving up vaccination rates, it makes no sense to offer an alternative to being vaccinated, because that undermines the objective of the scheme. That is important. Although they are hugely effective, vaccines have limitations. LFD tests are effective but also have limitations.

We need to use all the tools that are at our disposal to drive Covid rates down as far as possible and to keep people as safe as possible. That is the obligation and responsibility that the Scottish Government will—even when it means taking unpopular decisions—continue to take seriously every single day that we are in the pandemic.

Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP): A significant continuing impact of the Covid pandemic is the restriction on face-to-face meetings with general practitioners, which is impacting on people in my Cowdenbeath constituency and across Scotland. Can the First Minister advise what steps are being taken to improve patient access to GPs and whether the need for the current 2m infection control requirement in healthcare settings will be kept under review?

The First Minister: Our recovery plan includes working with GPs to restore face-to-face consultations and surgeries. Public Health Scotland has published updated guidance for primary care settings that covers key issues such as physical distancing, which is now 1m not 2m, access for patients and wider infection prevention and control. That will be kept under review.

We aspire to return to a greater availability of face-to-face appointments, but a number of patients will wish to continue with phone or video consultations. Where clinically necessary, the option to have a face-to-face consultation should always be available. Our winter funding package, which includes funding for accelerated recruitment to aid general practice, will help to increase NHS and social care capacity over the winter.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): In her statement, the First Minister recognised the substantial concern that exists in the business community about any extension of the vaccination passport scheme when some hospitality businesses are already reporting a 40 per cent loss of trade. Other businesses could face a similar loss of trade and additional costs for providing extra staffing with just two weeks to prepare for changes. If the Scottish Government goes down that route, will it provide a package of additional financial support for affected businesses, which is already badly required?

The First Minister: We will continue to consider additional financial support as necessary; in fact, I have just confirmed additional financial support on a different issue to enable businesses including bars and restaurants to improve ventilation. We will continue to look favourably at any argument that is made for that.

Murdo Fraser and others have to be careful with the argument that trade being down is a reason not to take measures to make settings safer. I appreciate that this is not a unanimous view, but I have spoken to many people who say anecdotally that the reason they are not going back to pubs and restaurants is that they do not yet feel safe enough, and that people's vaccination records being checked would make them feel safer and more likely to go back. There are arguments in both directions on the issue.

I understand how difficult it is for hospitality, the tourism trade and other sectors that have been badly affected, but the key to getting back to normal is keeping Covid under control and building people's confidence to start going back to normal life. We have to use every tool at our disposal to do that.

Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): A number of constituents have contacted me to raise concerns about the lack of access to general dental practitioners for all but emergency treatment and the fact that such treatment is often framed around minimum interventions. People moving to Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley have also had issues registering with a dentist. When will general dental practices resume more routine services?

The First Minister: From early November last year, when the full range of care and treatment was made available, we have been working to increase patient access to NHS dentistry. That has included additional funding for ventilation and improved dental drills.

We are in discussions with the British Dental Association to support dentists and put patients at the centre of building a sustainable NHS service. From February, we will bring in enhanced fees for a range of treatments, including a more comprehensive examination, supporting NHS dental teams to clear the backlog in routine care that built up during the pandemic. We have already provided £58 million of financial support, plus an additional £35 million-worth of personal protective equipment, to ensure that dental services can emerge well placed to care for patients across Scotland.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): A constituent contacted me after the instructions with a lateral flow test kit advised her to record the results through an NHS Scotland website. The UK Government website sends confirmation of her result within minutes, but my constituent discovered that the Scottish website can take up to 24 hours, which is useless when they require confirmation on the same day as the test in order to visit loved ones in a care home. Why are the wait times for the Scottish website so long? Is there a need for a separate Scottish system when the UK Government system works?

The First Minister: I am genuinely more than happy to look into that in a bit more detail. The advice for people doing LFD tests is for them to record the results of those tests through the UK website—I have been doing that myself every day for the past couple of weeks and I do it regularly. That is the advice, so I am not exactly clear what website is being referred to, but, if the details can be passed to me, I am happy to look into that and provide any further information and advice once I have had the opportunity to do so.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): Aberdeenshire's Covid case numbers are some of the highest in Scotland at the moment. What Government support is being given to the local authority and health and social care partnership as they try to mitigate any staff absences in schools, nurseries and care facilities and ensure the continued delivery of public services?

The First Minister: I certainly recognise the impact of the current situation in Aberdeenshire and other areas. We have made available to local authorities significant resources specifically for challenges such as those narrated by Gillian Martin. In schools, for example, we have provided local government with more than £200 million of additional funding over the past two years

specifically for the recruitment of more school staff to support education recovery; Aberdeenshire received around £12 million of that funding. Our guidance for schools and early learning centres, including on at-home asymptomatic testing, is contributing to keeping transmission rates among staff low.

In all settings, adherence to mitigations makes a difference and everyone has a part to play in continuing to minimise transmission.

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Several constituents continue to contact me about confusion around the booster roll-out in mainland Argyll and Bute, which comes under NHS Highland. People have received letters inviting them to attend vaccination centres that either are nowhere near them or do not exist at all, leading to considerable distress, particularly for older and vulnerable people, who are unsure where and when they will receive their booster. Given the importance of the vaccine booster campaign, will the Government act immediately to sort that out?

The First Minister: I know that officials have been talking to Argyll and Bute in the past day or so to resolve some of the issues that have been experienced. I will ask the health secretary to write to the member with an update following those discussions.

Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee City West) (SNP): Will the First Minister provide an assurance that, should it be deemed necessary to introduce measures such as an extension of mitigations or vaccination certification to avoid the kinds of restrictions that are being seen in Austria and the Netherlands, that will be done with as much notice as possible, guidance for venues to support the implementation, and continued engagement with affected sectors to understand the impact of any changes? [*Interruption.*]

The First Minister: "Not with her"—he is a charmer, the leader of the Opposition.

The answer is yes, we will continue to discuss with individuals, businesses and other sectors the very difficult options that will lie ahead of us if we continue to see Covid cases rise over the winter period.

Across Europe and in parts of the British isles, we are seeing the emergence of another very challenging situation. One of the lessons that we have learned throughout this pandemic is that often we have to take very unpalatable decisions in order to stop a situation deteriorating. The earlier we act to, for example, increase compliance with the basic mitigations that are in place, and do things such as improve ventilation, the more chance we have of avoiding some of the measures that we are seeing in countries such as

the Netherlands and Austria, and, as we have seen even today, in Ireland, much closer to home.

If we all step up our compliance with basic mitigations, recognise the vital importance of vaccination and get vaccinated as soon as we are able to do so—which measures worked during the previous peaks that we experienced in recent weeks—I hope that we will be able to get through the winter without having to reimpose any further restrictions. That is the Government's aim, but no responsible Government minister could stand here, in the face of a pandemic, as we go into another winter, and give empty promises about what might or might not be possible. Our solemn duty is to act in a way—however unpopular it might be—that keeps the country as safe as possible, and that is what we will continue to seek to do.

Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): Previously, I asked about flu vaccinations for those who are not prioritised for the Covid booster but are normally eligible for the flu vaccine. The NHS Inform website gives no information about how someone can get their flu vaccine if they are not in one of the Covid priority groups and are in an age group for which the JCVI has not approved a booster. How can those who are susceptible to flu get their vaccine?

The First Minister: It is possible to book a flu vaccine. I will ask the health secretary to write down and put into the Scottish Parliament information centre the detail of exactly how to do so, because we want to ensure that people fully understand the process.

For those in priority groups for the booster campaign, we are advising that, where possible, they get their flu vaccine and booster at the same time, which is better for them and allows us to get through the programme even more quickly.

For those whose booster will not fall due until later this year, which is the category that I am in, the advice is that it is safe to wait to get the flu vaccine at that time, in order to get both together. NHS Inform provides further information and advice.

With regard to those who are not in the priority categories for the booster, but are eligible for the flu vaccine—and there is a significant overlap between the two categories of eligibility—I will ensure that the health secretary provides information for the benefit of constituents about how stand-alone flu vaccines should be accessed.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I have been contacted by constituents who are past the six-month guidance date for their Covid-19 booster vaccination and are concerned about the waning efficacy of their primary vaccine doses. Has the Scottish Government received advice from clinical

advisers on the efficacy of the primary vaccine protection, and what reassurance can be given to those who are awaiting booster appointments? I remind members that I am part of NHS Dumfries and Galloway's vaccine team.

The First Minister: The JCVI advice is that the vaccine booster should be offered no earlier than six months after the completion of the primary vaccine course, which means no earlier than six months after a person has the second dose. As, I think, I have said previously in the chamber, the Scottish Government is interpreting that as 24 weeks. By the time that the JCVI advice was received, many people had already passed the six-month—24-week—period, so we are in a catch-up situation. However, the catching up is going well and we continue to do it at pace.

The advice from clinicians is that the immunity from the primary course does not suddenly fall off a cliff when someone gets to the six-month point, but there is concern about gradual waning. Therefore, we want to get the boosters done as quickly as possible, which is what the programme is working hard, and successfully, to do.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): My constituents are having problems in accessing vaccine boosters and the passport. For instance, if a constituent has had one dose in England and one in Scotland, I have been advised to tell them to update their address with their old vaccination centre in England in order to have their Scottish status updated. Constituents who have been vaccinated in Northern Ireland have been told to follow the advice for foreign vaccinations, and others who have been fully vaccinated in other parts of the UK cannot get their vaccine boosters because NHS Scotland does not hold the details.

Will the First Minister say what the Scottish Government is doing to fix what is an opaque and confusing system for many of our constituents?

The First Minister: I am happy to do so, and I will ensure that the health secretary writes to the member.

It is entirely my fault, but I am not sure that I was following all the examples that the member put to me. It is important that people understand what to do in all circumstances, such as when someone has had one dose in England and another in Scotland or when they are having their booster somewhere else.

There is a portal whereby people can update their vaccination certification, but, to ensure that we give clear information on what people should do and to ensure that I am answering the question properly and in full detail, I will answer in written form. As I said in a previous answer, I will also put the information in the Scottish Parliament information centre.

Siobhian Brown (Ayr) (SNP): All medical advice has indicated that the transmission rate, including the number of people who are unfortunately in hospital, is higher among people who have yet to receive the vaccine. As we head into the winter months, will the First Minister elaborate on some of the concerns that clinical advisers have about the pressures that the NHS will face if the trend continues as it is?

The First Minister: That is a really important factor in all our considerations. As we all know, the NHS is working under extreme pressure right now—possibly the most extreme pressure that it has faced in its entire history. Much of that pressure comes from Covid. However, the NHS is also working to catch up on the backlog of care caused by earlier restrictions.

The combination of events—before we are properly into a possible flu season—means that we are likely to see significant pressure on the NHS over the whole winter. We know that the more Covid cases there are, the greater the pressure will be. People who are not vaccinated are at greater risk of getting the virus and becoming seriously ill from it. One of the things that we all can do to try to reduce the pressure on the NHS is get vaccinated with our first and second doses if we have not done so already, and, when we are able to, with our booster dose.

If cases rise, as they are doing gradually at the moment, notwithstanding the variation in the age profile, hospitalisations will increase as well. As the pressure on the NHS is already so acute, that would be a seriously concerning development. Vaccination is one of the things that we all can do to try to ease that pressure as much as possible.

Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con): The updated Covid strategic framework emphasises the importance of testing and anticipates a significantly increased demand on testing capacity this winter. Will the Scottish Government provide assurances that sufficient testing resources are in place to meet demand over the coming months?

The First Minister: Yes. We work hard every day to show that the capacity exists. We also work with the UK Government, given the fact that much of our testing capacity—not all of it—is delivered through the four-nations Lighthouse programme. Those issues get close attention from the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, me and the Government as a whole every day.

Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): I ask the First Minister whether autism is classed as a neurodisability. If so, will young people on the spectrum who are aged between 12 and 16 be invited for a second vaccination?

The First Minister: The JCVI has already advised that children and young people aged 12 to 17 who are at an increased risk of severe Covid infection should receive a full course of vaccination. That means two doses. Eligibility covers severe neurodisabilities, including autism, and vaccination is already being offered to that cohort.

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): At present, a Covid booster vaccination record is not available to people who wish to travel to certain countries that have recently imposed a 270-day limit on post-second vaccination travel. In effect, that means that people who had received both vaccinations by the spring of 2021 will be denied entry to those countries despite having had the third vaccination.

My understanding is that, currently, NHS Scotland cannot provide evidence of a third vaccination, which is becoming increasingly important for international travel. If that is the case, will the First Minister commit to resolving the issue as a matter of urgency?

The First Minister: Unless I am wrong—in which case, I am sure that it will be pointed out—the position in Scotland is the same as it is in other parts of the UK right now. We are currently looking at how we incorporate booster vaccinations into the app and vaccination certificate. Indeed, we discussed the issue at Cabinet this morning. Steps will be taken to ensure that people are not disadvantaged, particularly for international travel, for which we are dependent on other countries' requirements, and that the benefits of booster vaccinations are properly reflected.

Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): I have been contacted by a constituent who will soon travel to Austria. To do so, they require proof of their vaccination or booster vaccination within nine months before entry. Will the First Minister expand on vaccine boosters being recorded on vaccination status records and the NHS Scotland app?

The First Minister: As I said in response to the previous question, we are committed to adding boosters to vaccination certificates and we are considering the steps that must be taken to do that. It is important to point out the additional piece of information that there is no international standard on how to display booster information on vaccination certificates, and work is under way to develop the appropriate systems to meet the requirements.

Until we have an international standard, there is no guarantee that any solution will be accepted in all other countries. It is important to do this in the proper way. In the interim, any individual who is looking to travel should check what is needed for

entry into the country that they are to visit. We will provide updates on progress to incorporate booster vaccinations regularly and as soon as possible.

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): The Scottish Government confirmed on 8 November that, as of 15 October, 40,768 ventilation inspections had taken place across learning, teaching and play spaces. The First Minister has—rightly—confirmed the importance of ventilation. How many of those spaces failed the inspection under the Government’s criteria? What does the First Minister expect to happen to spaces that failed?

The First Minister: We provided funding for local authorities to inspect and assess the quality of ventilation and to take any follow-up steps. I am happy to write to the member about the detail, to the extent that we have it—information about the outcome of assessments is held by local authorities. To ensure that the assessments were done, we provided funding for carbon dioxide monitors. I know that all local authorities have taken seriously the need to improve the quality of ventilation in schools and early learning centres.

Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): People—including some who have loved ones in hospital with Covid—have recently expressed their frustration at seeing the Prime Minister with no mask on in a hospital. What is the Scottish Government doing to ensure that people understand the importance of adhering to guidelines—regardless of their vaccination status—particularly in the winter months?

The First Minister: Yesterday, we launched the next phase of our marketing and communication programme to support compliance with the baseline measures that are still in place, including wearing face coverings, to reduce the harms that Covid causes. I say to everybody that, as we go into winter, it is important that all of us try to increase our compliance. All of us slip up from time to time on such things, and I understand how tiresome and inconvenient the measures are, particularly after so long. However, as we go into winter, wearing face coverings and reminding ourselves to do so is important. I will do that and I call on everybody to do likewise.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): The First Minister told Parliament that she would listen to businesses before introducing Covid vaccination certification, but she did not. Now she is considering extending the scheme. We learned this morning from a survey of 700 businesses conducted by the Scottish Chambers of Commerce that one in four Scottish businesses will face immediate financial peril if Covid restrictions are expanded. Will the First Minister confirm that, if businesses respond with a

resounding no to her creeping plans—the Scottish Chambers of Commerce has done that and has called such a move a giant step backwards—she will abandon any extension of the scheme?

The First Minister: We listen and will continue to listen to businesses, which are an important voice but not the only voice. I also have a duty to listen to those who work in the front line of our national health service, who say that we need to do as much as we can to reduce the risks of Covid transmission, and I need to listen to people across the country who want to go back to pubs and restaurants but want to feel safer before they do so, particularly when transmission rates are rising. I must also listen to those who are particularly clinically vulnerable, who want to feel safe when they go about their normal lives.

That is one of the difficult things, but I accept that part of the responsibility of taking decisions—as opposed to deciding on a position and sticking to it—is that we must take account of and listen to a range of views and come to a balanced, sensible and responsible decision. Businesses are an important voice, but we must take account of the wide range of considerations and factors that lead to the decisions that we take in what is an inherently difficult and complex set of circumstances.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): This morning, a concerned constituent of mine whose daughter has Covid contacted me about a potential flaw in the Scottish contact and trace system. She received a text, which said:

“You will be sent a link to a digital self-tracing form ... to list close contacts”.

When the link did not appear, my constituent chased up the matter. She was then told that she might not receive the link and that she would be contacted by a contact tracer. That, too, did not happen.

My constituent called test and protect, which admitted that there is a problem with sending text messages with links to the contact tracing forms. Does the First Minister agree that that is a dangerous shambles that must be urgently addressed?

The First Minister: No, I do not agree. In fact, I think that that is an insult to all those who are working so hard in test and protect across our country.

I am happy to look at the individual case—it certainly sounds as though something has happened that should not have happened. If that is in any way indicative of a more systemic issue, we will take that on board and seek to address it. I ask the member to send me the details.

The people across test and protect are working really hard every single day. The contribution of test and protect in helping us to keep Covid under some control at this stage is enormous. I end my answer by placing on record again my grateful appreciation for all that test and protect is doing.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes the First Minister's Covid-19 update. There will be a brief delay before the next item of business.

Scottish National Investment Bank

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-02127, in the name of Kate Forbes, on celebrating the first anniversary of the Scottish National Investment Bank.

I invite members who wish to contribute to the debate to press their request-to-speak button now or as soon as possible, or, if they are joining us online, to place an R in the chat function.

15:18

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy (Kate Forbes): Today's debate marks the first anniversary of the Scottish National Investment Bank, which formally takes place on 23 November.

Many of us have spent the past two weeks immersed in the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP26—and in climate change, which is a generational world-wide challenge. That has only reinforced the original vision of the bank and the missions that were set for it. The bank, with its ability to offer patient capital and to draw in private investment to address critical challenges such as climate change and a just transition to net zero, is more crucial than ever. If we want to achieve our goals on climate change, housing and demographic challenges, now is the time for innovative public sector finance.

Furthermore, the bank's ability to work with the private sector and our enterprise agencies is essential in supporting projects and businesses to grow across Scotland.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I have constituents with businesses operating in the net zero space who would welcome engagement with the Scottish National Investment Bank but, at present, they have difficulty understanding how to access it. Will the cabinet secretary outline how people should go about approaching the bank? Should that be through Scottish Enterprise, or is there some other route?

Kate Forbes: The member asks an important question. I will go on to explain how the bank sits alongside Scottish Enterprise.

The bank has been operational for only just under a year. It has been building its functions as well as making investments, which is quite remarkable for a start-up. Individuals should approach the bank directly; I am sure that the chief executive, Eilidh Mactaggart, would welcome that approach. The form of financing that the bank

offers will not be for every business—it may be that the grants and loans that are available from Scottish Enterprise, rather than investment from the bank, may be best for early-stage businesses.

I reflect on the point that structural change, such as the change that I have just outlined, benefits from cross-party support. At its inception, the bank enjoyed cross-party support, to the credit of everybody who was involved. I hope that that can continue—perhaps it will be made easier by the fact that the bank is, and will always be, operationally independent of ministers.

I will reflect on why we set up the bank. As Murdo Fraser alluded, we already support many small and medium-sized enterprises to access finance. However, evidence that was given at the time that the bank was set up, which is still applicable, suggested that, in order for Government investment to have an impact, it needed to be big, and the bank needed a scale and a skill set to match the private sector with which it seeks to engage.

We deliberately committed £2 billion in initial capital for the bank—a scale of ambition that was significantly greater than that for earlier initiatives, and a statement of our intent for the bank's impact over the longer term. Having made a strong start in its first year, the bank is already delivering against its missions and actively investing in new technologies for the future, creating an environment for additional private investment and leading in the creation of new markets. That should positively affect the scale and direction of private investment, alongside Scottish Government capital and commitment to the bank.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):

The cabinet secretary is quite right about scale, so I note with concern that the amount of financial transactions money coming through in the coming financial year is significantly down on previous years. Given that that money is the primary source of financing, does that call into question the ability to scale? If so, what is the Government's plan to address that?

Kate Forbes: I would dispute an element of that. We have seen that financial transactions are actually higher than was expected next year and are then falling considerably in years 2 and 3. The question of how we will provide that finance, therefore, still stands.

We are committed to £2 billion of funding. We hope to do that through financial transactions, but our commitment remains the same, and we will ensure that we deliver on it, whether through capital or financial transactions. That is not to say that it is not hard—it is extremely hard to address those long-term commitments when we see FTs and capital falling. Nonetheless, I think that we

would all reflect on the scale of the challenge ahead and on the need for public finance to work closely with private finance.

The mission element of the bank's objectives is a hugely important part of the original statement of intent. The bank's missions support the just transition to net zero, and they are focused on improving places and allowing people to flourish through innovation. Indeed, the mission focus—the SNIB is the first mission-based bank in the United Kingdom—was obviously such a good idea that the UK Government is now copying it for the UK Infrastructure Bank.

Just today, the SNIB announced a £13 million investment in the Iona wind partnership to accelerate the delivery of the Iona onshore wind pipeline, taking advantage of Scotland's natural capital to help to achieve our net zero targets. The missions are important because it is through those missions that the bank is here to deliver long-term outcomes, not outcomes that are based on electoral cycles. The bank wants not only to invest, but to do so intelligently, alongside private capital, in order to make and shape markets with public purpose at its core. In its first year, the bank has not only built up its capabilities from an investment team of two to a team of 30 and above; it has made investments, which is a remarkable achievement that is to the credit of the chief executive, Eilidh Mactaggart.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): First, I apologise for being just a few minutes late to the chamber—I had to deal with an urgent call.

I agree with what the cabinet secretary says about longer-term planning. However, should we not have a degree of timescale in place so that the outcomes to which she just referred are clear, and so that, for people who want to take advantage of the facilities that the Scottish National Investment Bank will offer, progress against them can be measured more effectively?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will give you the time back, cabinet secretary.

Kate Forbes: Liz Smith's point is well made—it is also highlighted in the Conservative amendment. There is a need to have metrics that look beyond immediate political returns, and the bank is working on that—as I said, it is still a start-up. It has an obligation, for example, to publish metrics that look at not just the financial and commercial returns but the social and environmental returns. We need to ensure that key performance indicators work, and the bank is working on that with the Scottish Government.

How we measure the success of long-term objectives is a challenge for all members. If the bank does its job well, there will be a commercial return, but there will also be other returns. My

hope is that those returns will outlive this parliamentary session at least.

On investments, when the First Minister launched the bank last year, it was with a £12.5 million investment in M Squared Lasers, which is a laser technology company. Since then, the bank has taken great strides in becoming the financial institution for Scotland that we need and expect. It has made a number of investments, including a £1 million investment in R3-IoT to scale up its pioneering satellite technology, £2 million in Forev for vehicle charge points, £3 million in Industrial Nature—IndiNature—to create a manufacturing plant in the Borders and, in one of its most exciting investments, £6 million in Sunamp to develop thermal energy storage technology, or heat batteries. Sunamp has gone on to secure a major export agreement with China during COP26. In addition, the bank invested £6.4 million in Nova Innovation to help to expand its production of innovative tidal turbines, generating zero carbon energy in remote communities.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): The cabinet secretary has described a really exciting portfolio of investments. One of the big strategic problems that Scotland has faced is that the early commercialisation of start-ups has often ended with Scottish companies being subject to foreign takeovers. Is there an opportunity for the bank, as it makes strategic investments in companies, to protect them from predatory takeovers that prevent them from becoming the big global commercial players that we could build in Scotland?

Kate Forbes: That is a really important point. I know that that is an area of discussion for the bank. One of its three missions is place; in other words, it wants to ensure that the investments that it makes have a lasting legacy in particular locations, which might be locations where there is a higher number of disadvantaged communities. If jobs leave an area, that would not deliver on the core mission of place—Paul Sweeney makes a good point.

The bank has an obligation to deliver a commercial return. However, it also has an obligation to the people of Scotland. It is not the bank of a Government or a party; it is the bank of the people of Scotland, and its obligation is to deliver, on a long-term basis, in order to change our country.

The need for the bank remains clear. It will help to drive financial innovation and to channel investment at scale into the areas of the economy that offer solutions to the biggest problems that Scotland faces. It is only one part of our set of ambitions, but I hope that all members welcome what the bank has achieved as a start-up in just under a year of operation.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the impact that the Scottish National Investment Bank, the first mission-based investment bank in the UK, has made in its first year since launch in November 2020; supports the progress made by the bank through a wide range of investments in its first year; recognises the important role that the bank has in delivering a just transition to a net-zero economy; notes the need for innovative finance to achieve Scotland's goals on climate targets, housing and demographic challenges, and notes that the bank will continue to strengthen its role through investing in Scottish business, projects and communities and delivering positive environmental and social impacts, and positive financial returns for the people of Scotland, for many years to come.

15:28

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): When it comes to national investment banks, just as is the case for other financial institutions, their purpose has to be abundantly clear, not least because they are underpinned by the public purse for which Governments are, rightly, held accountable. They must be able to demonstrate that, in terms of key economic indicators—whether on productivity, investment, job creation, innovation or growth—they can deliver better outcomes for the nation as a whole. I will consider those points in turn.

On the need for the Scottish National Investment Bank, about which the Parliament was agreed in principle last year, we, on the Conservative benches, still very much believe that a little more should be done to clarify the central purpose of the bank because, despite the missions that are referred to in the Scottish Government motion, the central purpose of the bank has never been completely clear.

I think the cabinet secretary would admit that there was some dubiety even within the ranks of the Scottish National Party between 2014 and 2016 about what that purpose should be. John Swinney talked about whether we should build on the existing bank and said that there would not be a new one. We know that there were concerns last year, which I think came out in response to a question by my colleague Dean Lockhart, about how the new investment bank would articulate with the other growth agencies and where the additional money would come from. That is an absolutely key point. I have sympathy in that regard with part of the Labour amendment, if not with its entirety. Daniel Johnson raises an important issue about some of those principles.

We also know that, in 2014, Nicola Sturgeon spoke about the main role of the new investment bank being to provide “patient capital investment”. That idea had moved on a little by 2019 to the aim of financing investment in net zero technology. That is laudable, but the goalposts have shifted

slightly and there is an issue of coherence. I am not speaking for myself; I am speaking on behalf of a lot of people in business, who feel that lack of coherence.

Kate Forbes: I am curious about Liz Smith's views. The bank is operationally independent. The temptation for Government is to micromanage investment and to be overly prescriptive about what the bank should invest in. If that happens, businesses will come to me and say, "We asked the bank for money and we didn't get it." We wanted the bank's missions to be quite broad. There is a balance to strike between breadth and prescription. Where does the member come down on that balance?

Liz Smith: There is undoubtedly a balance to strike. The key thing that businesses are asking for is a little clarity about what will be expected from them when they make an application. They particularly want to know when the Scottish National Investment Bank is going to deliver something. My concern is that the bank is a good idea in principle but we do not have the criteria for what a successful investment would be and how that would deliver within the macroeconomy. That is the point that many Scottish Conservatives were making this time last year. How does it all fit together? I agree with Daniel Johnson's point about the role of Scottish Enterprise. How does that all fit together? Businesses want answers to those questions and we must address that.

I read quite a bit about the investment strategy as I tried to drill down and find answers to the questions that I have posed. I also tried to find minutes of bank board meetings. Perhaps I was not looking in the right place, but I could not find them. There must be clarity about the bank's purpose. If it is to provide patient capital, that is important, because it is about the longer term. The cabinet secretary is right that that is not a Scottish Government thing or a political party thing, but it matters, big time, for the future growth of the economy, so we must have clarity about that.

There is a serious issue about small and medium-sized enterprises, many of which are struggling to cope with debt at the moment and to make ends meet. Those companies want to know a little more about the Scottish Government's role in supporting SMEs. They are the bedrock of the economy—no one doubts that. How does that all fit together?

The cabinet secretary knows that we support the principle of the Scottish National Investment Bank, as we said in the chamber and in committees last year. However, a year on, we feel strongly that now is not the right time to judge how successful the bank can be. What matters is its relationship with the other economic agencies, particularly with regard to growth,

entrepreneurship and innovation. We still have a lot to do before we can demonstrate how the bank will be beneficial to Scotland.

I move amendment S6M-02127.1, to insert at end:

“, and, to that end, wants to see much greater clarity from the Scottish Government over the role of the bank, how its achievements will be measured, including how it will attract private sector investment, as well as make best use of taxpayers' funds, and how it will support small and medium-sized enterprises, which are the bedrock of the economy.”

15:34

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): We are, without doubt, facing the greatest moment of economic upheaval in about 80 years. In that context, Labour welcomes a debate about industrial strategy, the role of patient capital and the role of the state in investment. The issue that we have is that, one year on, rather than just celebrating the creation of the Scottish National Investment Bank—which, indeed, we do—we really need to ask what is next. We need to ask what role the bank should play in the recovery that we must ensure happens. We need to ask ourselves what its role is in transition further to the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP26.

Instead, however, we have a Government motion that is a little complacent. I listened to the cabinet secretary's speech and I would not disagree with a word that she said about the need for the investment bank. She rehearsed the logic of its creation instead of exploring its strategic challenges and how they will change, as they need to, in the light of COP26 and the pandemic.

Even in narrower terms—I was grateful for the cabinet secretary's response to my intervention—there are serious questions about the bank's long-term financing, because, even at £2 billion, it is questionable whether the bank will achieve the scale that she correctly identifies as being critical to its success.

Kate Forbes: Will the member take an intervention?

Daniel Johnson: I will in a moment.

We need to see £200 million or thereabouts per year, but we know that the financial transactions money is reducing. That is a headache, to quote the cabinet secretary, but there is a not a word in the Government's motion about how it is going to address that. If the cabinet secretary has something to add on that, I would be grateful and I will take her intervention.

Kate Forbes: I will make two points. First, we need to distinguish the bank in terms of its

objectives. It needs to deliver a return, and, in doing so, it will hopefully become self-sustaining. It also has an objective to crowd in and leverage private investment. I do not think that anyone is suggesting that £2 billion is sufficient in and of itself to meet the challenges, but the whole point of the bank is that it can add value through being able to leverage in private investment. We know that, post COP26, substantial private investment is looking for a home, and I want that home to be in investable propositions in Scotland.

Daniel Johnson: Without doubt, that is important. The ability to draw in wider private investment is critical, but that is not really my question. My key question is how we are going to achieve that £2 billion of capitalisation. We cannot have patient capital if the bank is not sufficiently capitalised.

There are broader issues regarding enterprise support and policy in the round. Despite the creation of the bank, the Government is spending approximately 40 per cent less, in real terms, on enterprise support than it was spending 10 years ago. Nor has the focus of enterprise support improved. Five years ago, the Government spent a great deal of time discussing the need to streamline and simplify the enterprise support landscape, but, since then, we have seen the creation of two new agencies and three new boards. The truth is that enterprise policy has seen an erosion in funding, and the bodies and the system that the Government has put in place are more confusing. We need to address that, but the Government has failed to use the opportunity of this debate to do so.

The motion mentions a role for the Scottish National Investment Bank in the drive to net zero. That is important, but we need to develop more detail on precisely how it should do that and what the focus should be. I welcome the investments that have been made to date, such as that in Nova, which was name-checked by the cabinet secretary, but I met renewables firms yesterday and they were clear that much more needs to be done to encourage innovation and growth in the sector.

We are simply not learning the lessons that Denmark learned 30 years ago, when it seeded the creation of the wind turbine industry there. Nor are we seeing any proposals, as suggested by agencies such as South of Scotland Enterprise, for the investment bank to act as an aggregator so that this crucial sector—and, indeed, others—can benefit.

The Scottish National Investment Bank was created to provide finance where the market fails to do so. The past 20 months have seen the greatest disruption to business as usual that we could imagine. The impacts of Covid, which in turn

have created supply chain challenges, have left businesses in turmoil. We need to understand the role that the bank can play so that businesses can weather the current short-to-medium term instability and realise longer-term success. Once again, however, we see nothing on that in the Government's motion for this debate.

The Scottish National Investment Bank is welcome, but we must be clear: the motion and the use of parliamentary time for it are a missed opportunity. We face big challenges. We need to make big changes, and a state investment bank has a critical part to play. That is why we have raised the issues in our amendment. The Government should be using its parliamentary time to discuss those big issues and to invite big ideas. We will not always agree, but the Government might find it useful to dare to use parliamentary time in that broader and more ambitious way.

I move amendment S6M-02127.2, to leave out from the second "notes" to end and insert:

"considers that the inadequate progress made by the bank in creating green jobs for the future has hindered Scotland's wider economic recovery from the impact of the pandemic and the transition to net zero; believes that the bank will be unable to make the socio-economic impact it was intended to achieve due to insufficient funding; further believes that other enterprise agencies have also faced real-term cuts at a time that they should be focussing on Scotland's economic recovery, and calls on the Scottish Government to repurpose Scottish Enterprise as a business recovery agency to work in partnership with other regional enterprise agencies in order to grow Scotland's economy."

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. We have a little time in hand, so, if members take an intervention, they will get the time back, but that is not an invitation to extend their four minutes.

15:40

Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): I speak as someone who, for many years, has been concerned about banking in general, and I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of members' interests: I remain an ambassador for the all-party parliamentary group on fair business banking at Westminster. I am grateful that, for once, I can make a positive speech about an important aspect of banking that is helping investment and business, that is focused on the future and that is building success.

The SNIB has three bold ambitions, although some would say that they are too ambitious and will be difficult to achieve. I agree with the latter, but, for me, the former—while boldness and audacity of ambition can only ever be striven for—is exactly the point.

We can already see that, in its first year of operations, the SNIB has been pursuing its guiding missions and strategy to real effect. That is a tribute to everyone involved. *Scottish Financial News* reports that, in its first year, the bank has agreed deals that are worth an estimated £160 million across eight projects. Five of those are focused on contributing towards net-zero developments, two on harnessing innovation, and one on building communities. It would have been understandable if the first year of operations was focused solely on building institutional capacity and engagement, so such early investment in support for critical areas is to be greatly welcomed.

We all know that the model that is required for patient capital is different, as is attitude to risk. During the debate, perhaps we will be able to focus more on that when we look at the work of Scottish Enterprise in comparison to that of the SNIB. Since patient capital is about investing for the future, it is likely to be some years before we can properly measure the effect of the bank's investment strategy.

I am sure that I am not alone in being heartened by an open declaration of ethics and good governance, as they encourage institutional behaviours that rest very easily with our financial tradition in Scotland. It is important to emphasise the ethics around the SNIB. However, such progress brings its own challenges. In the light of COP26 and in considering the needs of the Scottish economy, there is so much that we need to do, particularly in relation to our net-zero ambitions and supporting innovation.

I note the comments of Willie Watt, the bank's chairman, when he spoke in Glasgow at COP26. I think that we will all have heard this, but, for the record:

"The Scottish Government has given ... a promise of £2 billion over the first ten years of the bank's life. It is insufficient to crack the missions. We need to be able to raise third-party capital and we want to earn the right to borrow on our own balance sheet."

I agree with that statement. Given the lack of real borrowing powers available to the Scottish Government, it is in some respects remarkable that it has had the foresight to make such medium-term funding commitments. However, had we a much more effective and appropriate fiscal framework in operation—or, indeed, if we were independent—we would be able to borrow to invest and to do so much more.

Briefly, I hope that, in her closing remarks, the minister will be able to reflect on the following questions. Does the Government agree with Willie Watt that, to achieve the bank's mission, we need to be able to develop its ability to raise third-party capital? She may want to reflect further on

leverage. Does the Government agree that, in renegotiating the fiscal framework, it is in Scotland's interests to ensure that the Government has significantly enhanced borrowing powers, in order to enable further Government investment in the SNIB?

I applaud the early work of the SNIB and look forward to the stage at which it will have been merely an *hors d'oeuvre* for a more substantial course in the future.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Jamie Halcro Johnston joins us remotely.

15:44

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I apologise to the Presiding Officer and others that, due to unforeseen circumstances, I am not able to be in the chamber with you today or to take interventions.

As we know, the creation of a Scottish National Investment Bank, under various guises, was a long time coming. That words have become action is a positive. The creation of the bank earned qualified support across the chamber, and I believe that members are still largely behind it. In the previous session, I was a member of the Economy, Energy and Fair Work Committee, which led on the SNIB bill. The creation of the bank also played a part in a number of other areas of the committee's work programme.

There is a lot to be said about the approach taken to the SNIB, but I will have to limit myself to a few key areas. One of those is the continuing issue—cautioned against by the committee—of a cluttered landscape for enterprise support in Scotland. There were concerns that a new institution could add to an already confusing array of bodies, funds and agencies. That was an important enough concern to see John Swinney drop proposals for a development bank in 2016, calling instead for enhancing the remit of existing bodies. Perhaps inevitably, the past two years have seen the situation balloon even further, as Covid support and post-pandemic support have played an important role in keeping businesses operating. If the SNIB is to be its own institution, it must be collaborative and work in tandem with other organisations in the enterprise space.

Another key issue is the regional element. We must not forget that Scotland is more than just one economy. Yes, we are part of a highly integrated UK single market with a flow of goods and services, but, on a local level, we see differences within Scotland. For example, we can see that the Highlands and Islands and the south of Scotland are quite different from the central belt or, at an even more granular level, how small island economies such as mine work.

One consequence of the bank's creation has been the leapfrogging of the regional focus of the existing enterprise agencies. In my region, we can look to the work of Highlands and Islands Enterprise, which carries on the tradition of the Highlands and Islands Development Board, which was a body with a specific focus on what would now be called holistic regional growth, or even levelling up. The SNIB is a new body working in those areas, and one without links that have been built up over decades.

With work, however, a national investment bank can also be a local bank. The committee pointed to the model of the Welsh Development Bank, which has offices across Wales and is better integrated with local economic development agencies. However, it became clear that that was not the direction in which the Scottish Government was travelling. If—as was posited at the time—the SNIB's solution was to work closely with enterprise agencies such as HIE to build on their local knowledge and promote similar social objectives, it is far from apparent in its current investment portfolio.

The third area that I will touch on is purpose. There were warnings that the diversification of the bank's objectives would prevent it from having a clear mission. I appreciate the stresses that such an institution will have in promoting economic growth through patient capital, promoting innovation, investing sustainably, supporting work towards net zero and investing in communities. The main concern voiced during the passage of the SNIB bill was that the bank would risk trying to do too much, but it now appears that the risk is one of inertia, at least in relation to its core objectives. If we are to make a real assessment of progress, the information emerging from the SNIB must be expanded and more detailed.

The challenge behind publicly sponsored investment in business is to find clear purpose. To go back to first principles, simply replicating the role of private finance and investment fails to add value. However, as we have seen with the SNIB, that purpose has to be clear and well understood, and it must provide more than simply an abstract vision. The worry must be that that purpose seems, if anything, less clear than it was during the early stages of the bank's inception. Combine that with a lack of clear performance indicators and we have a report card that we cannot, in all sincerity, mark properly. The SNIB is now part of our economic framework. However, although it may provide patient capital, there is a reasonable cause for impatience to see evidence that it is playing an important role in that landscape.

15:49

Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP): The Scottish National Investment Bank is a vital ingredient in our recovery from Covid and our future prosperity. In other countries across the world, we have seen Governments use their extensive borrowing powers to invest in projects that are strategically important. Here, in Scotland, we have very limited borrowing powers. The SNIB was set three missions by the Scottish Government. It was to support the transition to net zero and build communities and promote equalities, alongside harnessing innovation in a way that enables our people to flourish.

As members said, the SNIB was to be provided with funding of £2 billion over the next 10 years. Recently, in evidence to the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, Willie Watt, the SNIB's chairman, said that the Scottish Government's statutory adviser, the Climate Change Committee

"has estimated that Scotland will need to invest £5 billion a year over the next 10 to 20 years",

to meet its strict net zero targets. Willie Watt said that the SNIB needs to be able to seed-fund and leverage much of that funding opportunity, and he told the committee:

"The combination of good investments that make sense in relation to climate change and commercial returns is important. We want to foster and encourage that combination."—[*Official Report, Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee*, 21 September 2021; c 8.]

The SNIB has made an encouraging start and has made a profit of about £828,000 in the period since it opened 12 months ago. Accounts for the period reveal that growth profit for the period was about £3.8 million, with total equity from investments worth about £31 million. In total, the SNIB made eight investments across the period, which were worth £160 million. As the cabinet secretary said, that included £6 million for Sunamp in my constituency, which produces innovative heat batteries. I will visit Sunamp in the next few weeks. The company is looking to expand its team from 30 to 45.

On the ability to grow the SNIB, Willie Watt commented that he is humbled by the commitment, but

"it is not enough ... to meet our missions ... we need to be able to manage third-party capital".—[*Official Report, Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee*, 21 September 2021; c 13.]

As the cabinet secretary said, the SNIB is seeking Financial Conduct Authority approval to borrow on its own balance sheet and raise capital from the private markets. That is important.

When the SNIB was endorsed, following Benny Higgins's report, the First Minister described the plans as "truly transformative" and on a different

scale from earlier Government initiatives. Mr Higgins said:

“This is a clear message that Scotland is a country ambitious in its growth aspirations, a country that is adaptable to change and a country that supports businesses across all stages of the business growth life cycle—the bank will be crucial as we compete in a global market to attract inward investors.”

Scotland remains a top choice for investors, outside London, which is vital when we consider the investment that is required post COP26, as the cabinet secretary said. The “EY Scotland Attractiveness Survey 2021” shows that Scotland remains a prime location for international companies that are considering foreign investment. Scotland’s foreign direct investment performance is outpacing that of Europe and the rest of the UK. Scotland has reinforced its position as the most attractive location for inward investment in the UK outside London—a position that it has held since 2014—with a 5.9 per cent increase in FDI projects. Growth in FDI in Scotland outpaced that of the UK and Europe, with Scotland’s share of UK inward investment growing from 9.1 per cent to 11 per cent.

The EY report examines Scotland’s performance and perceptions of the UK and Europe as destinations for FDI, with reference to a survey of 2,000 international investors. The report highlights an increase in investors who rank Scotland as the most attractive part of the UK in which to establish operations.

Members should imagine an independent Scotland with borrowing powers like those of any other country, supporting investment from all over the world. Scotland almost invented the modern world—televisions, telephones and penicillin, among other things. Voltaire said:

“We look to Scotland for all our ideas of civilization.”

We can be that world leader, but we need the powers of independence to allow us to do so.

15:53

Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): I make my remarks this afternoon not because we want the Scottish National Investment Bank to fail but—quite the reverse—because we want it to succeed. We want to avoid the socialisation of risk and the privatisation of rewards. We want this new, publicly owned bank to be a pivotal part of the active, innovative developmental state that we have always needed and that we now need more than ever as we deal with the pandemic, the end of furlough, Brexit and the climate change crisis.

The Scottish National Investment Bank should be at the very centre of a Scottish Government industrial strategy. It should be at the very centre of a plan for good-quality jobs with wages that

people can live on. It should be driving the just transition to a net-zero-carbon economy, promoting economic democracy and equality, and building community wealth.

However, there is precious little sign of that from the Government. The Government’s claim to have delivered

“a wide range of investments”

is wide of the mark. Almost three quarters of the money that the bank has allocated so far has gone to just one project, which is run by a specialist asset management company, that is, an intermediary vehicle, whose advisers include the chairman of Serco plc and the global head of healthcare at the private equity group 3i Group—two multinational corporations with an active interest in the privatisation of public services.

I am not suggesting that the bank’s day-to-day operations should be run by the Government or by the Parliament, but this is a public bank. It should at all times be run in the public interest for the people, by the people—not in the interests of bankers and private equity asset strippers.

Kate Forbes: I will ask the same question as I asked Liz Smith. Does Richard Leonard think that the Government should be more prescriptive, thereby ensuring that the bank is not operationally independent? That is a genuine question. Does his vision for the bank involve the Government being more prescriptive, rather than leaving such matters to the independence of the bank?

Richard Leonard: I am just about to come on to that.

This afternoon, we are again saying that a wider range of economic voices, including from trade unions, should be on the bank’s main board in order to bring wider experience, accountability and engagement. Back in January 2020, on the day that Parliament voted through the bill to create the bank, I warned the cabinet secretary’s predecessor that the investment bank, as established, lacked “courage and ambition”, that it bore the hallmarks of too much “tame mediocrity” and that it remained woefully “undercapitalised”. So, I was intrigued to read, just a few days ago, the honest assessment of the chair of what the Government describes as this mission-based investment bank, Willie Watt. He said:

“The Scottish government has given us a promise of £2 billion over the first ten years of the bank’s life. It is insufficient to crack the missions.”

Let me make this final point to the cabinet secretary. Her predecessor would not listen to those of us who were making constructive criticisms in the lead-up to the creation of this public bank. I hope that the Government will listen, will hear and will act on those who are making

constructive criticisms now, including the chair of the bank, whom not Parliament but the Government itself appointed. That would not be a sign of weakness; it would be a sign of strength. It would demonstrate scrutiny, accountability and democracy at work. I hope that that positive, long-lasting outcome will result from today's short parliamentary debate.

15:57

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): We, in the Parliament, are great at identifying problems. Sometimes, though, we are less good at identifying solutions to those problems. The Scottish National Investment Bank offers a great opportunity and a good example of one such solution.

We might ask what the problem is and why it has not been solved by other approaches. The problem here is, of course, the inability of the market to appropriately analyse risk and allocate resources to address the serious risks and challenges that we face. All too often, finance is made available for recognised investment opportunities rather than for things that we need to create a better future.

Banks were investing in coal mines long, long after the risk of investing in coal should have made such investments inappropriate. Those same banks refused to invest in wind energy or other renewables early enough or at scale. The costs of those decisions are not just felt in return—or, rather, lack of return—on investment; they will also be felt through accelerated climate change. However, backing climate destruction rather than clean energy is not the only market failure. We know that investor conservatism stifles innovation and has prevented Scotland's wonderfully creative citizens from turning their ideas into action.

The failure of the market to allocate resources effectively is not just a question for investors; it is a question for all of us. We need to address that failure. The Scottish National Investment Bank must do that in two ways: first, by being open to investment in innovation, and, secondly, by linking that investment to socially useful missions.

In its first year, the bank has done a reasonably good job on the first of those approaches. It is more open to innovation, and that has underpinned the success that we have seen in just less than 12 months. The fact that the bank is mission based is very welcome, but it is in the design of the missions that there are real opportunities. There are opportunities for us to achieve the change that we need: the change that will renew our society and build a new clean economy, and the change that will deliver the support systems that future generations deserve.

Let us look at the ways in which we can develop those missions. There are three things that we need to do: to clearly identify the problems that we have, to bring the possible solutions to those problems to bear and to make those solutions work. The SNIB plays a vital role in making those solutions work by financing them. However, we need to develop our thinking about how problems are defined in the first place, how we can bring to bear the maximum social contribution to those solutions, and, in all of that, how we can better include our citizens.

It will be democratic renewal alongside the systemic changes enabled by the SNIB and others that will allow us to transform our society. That means that we need to root those missions in social processes. We recently had a Scottish climate assembly. We now need a clear process for the implementation of the recommendations of that assembly. We need to connect the social processes of democracy, policy making and implementation, and then we need to develop ongoing approaches that allow our learning and mission definition to be refined and constantly renewed.

The outcomes of the climate assembly need to feed into the design of missions for the SNIB. We need to build participation into the design of missions, based on a deep understanding of both the problems and the possible solutions. We know that the perceived wisdom of the market fails us and will continue to do so. That means that we must build new, data-rich, well-informed understanding that can lead us to connect problems and solutions, with widely supported social action to allow us to meet the climate challenge, make more liveable places and support our physical and social infrastructure.

I welcome the Scottish Government's recognition that we cannot leave our future up to the market. I welcome the work of the SNIB over the past year. However, we have so much more to do. I hope that we can find new ways to properly understand the problems that we face and the opportunities that we have. Only by defining the missions appropriately can we invest in the right things for a better future.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Clare Adamson now joins us remotely.

16:02

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): This debate marks a tremendous milestone: one year since the launch of the UK's first mission-led investment bank. It has hit the ground running, amidst the most testing conditions for businesses in recent history. Since the bank's launch, we have seen investment of approximately

£160 million into a portfolio of eight projects spanning net zero, innovation and place-based solutions.

In preparing for today's debate, I looked back on the debates on the bill that established the bank. At that time, colleagues pointed out a historical investment gap in Scotland, much of which was down to an institutional obsession with short-term returns and quick wins.

This is a globally pertinent problem. Economic decisions remain too closely aligned to private interests rather than public good. That is why the establishment of the Scottish National Investment Bank is a tremendous achievement in the history of the Scottish Parliament.

We have just finished COP26 in Glasgow. It is clear that we need long-term investment focused on sustainable development and innovation to meet the climate emergency.

I note the calls for increased capitalisation, in line with the high ambition of the bank's aims. However, we must also remember that, although the bank is mission led, it is not philanthropic—it will see returns on those investments. It is commercially minded but publicly accountable.

The central point is the need for structural reform in the way in which we think about investment. The bank's returns will be recycled across its investment portfolio. The initial investment does not account for investment from other sources driven by the availability of patient capital—through its aims, the bank will lever capital from elsewhere. The bank will make risk-tolerant investments, which eschew the traditional fixation on short-term profitability. The importance of patient capital to our recovery cannot be overstated.

In relation to the Opposition amendments, I advocate reciprocal patience and longer-term thinking. The initiative is in its first year and has already made a series of exciting and worthwhile investments, and it will naturally take time for the bank to reach its full potential.

We want to see the bank achieve its missions of supporting Scotland's transition to net zero, building communities, promoting equality and harnessing innovation. The missions are aligned with our social interests, which is why investment should be in the name of the public good. Opposition parties must also consider how they would reconcile their demands that capitalisation meets ambition, especially when we do not have the full gamut of economic powers.

I will finish with a point about fair work. Fair work principles will underpin and enhance the work of the bank as an employer and a lender. I understand that the Cabinet Secretary for Finance

and the Economy issued a fair work direction to the bank and I urge reporting on the arrangements of that direction to be made a priority. Fair work is central to the Scottish Government's economic strategy and we will lead by example by promoting fair work principles to employers across the country. Fundamentally, if we are serious about a just recovery from the pandemic, a mission-led investment that is founded on fair work principles is key.

16:06

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland)

(Con): It seems strange that we are debating the celebration of the anniversary of an institution that by all accounts is yet unproven, because we do not know whether it will play a key part in investing in Scotland's future or if it will be a drain on public finances.

A number of things are unclear in relation to the Scottish National Investment Bank, the first of which is the set-up and administration costs. The Government seems to have spent £18.5 million up to the end of 2020-21, but, with the head count rising rapidly to 32 and set to rise further, we need to be careful that we do not create a bloated agency and that we instead maintain a lean efficient investment bank that delivers for the people of Scotland.

A concern that I and many others in the debate have is the duplication of investment and work that other Scottish Government agencies do. Expensive duplication cannot be a good use of resources for the Scottish taxpayer. For example, the M Squared Lasers deal that was mentioned earlier involved the provision of development capital that has been provided for years through Scottish Enterprise. In addition, £40 million was given to a fund that will be used by Places for People to invest in the provision of affordable housing. However, the Scottish Government also provided £40 million of loan support when it was launched in 2018, so both awards have involved Scottish Government funding being used to support things that the Scottish Government was already supporting. If the bank is going to do more, there will be an impact on agencies such as Scottish Enterprise.

I read the Scottish National Investment Bank's annual report with interest and noted that the bank seemed to make a profit on the value of its investments in 2020-21, which was mentioned by Paul McLennan. That is all unrealised fair value gains, but, with those investments having no quoted price anywhere, it will take time to see whether those profits come to fruition. That is key, because we have to be cautious when it comes to estimating the value of the new bank's investments, and ensure that we are prudent and

realistic in relation to reporting on profits, which brings me to my next point, on regulation.

The Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee heard in September that the bank remains unregulated. I welcomed the assurance from the chair of the bank at the net zero committee that that issue is being looked at, but perhaps that should be a higher priority for the bank and the Scottish Government in order to ensure that the people of Scotland have confidence in the bank's operating practices.

I welcome the ethical investment policy of the bank and support the policy to transition to net zero. During the net zero committee's evidence session, the chief executive of the bank mentioned the Net Zero Technology Centre in Aberdeen, its expertise and the positive impact that it will have for future energy development. I hope that the bank will work closely with the centre and tap into the excellent projects that it is nurturing. Providing the capital that it requires will benefit the renewable energy sector and protect the jobs of thousands of workers in the north-east.

One thing that I have learned as a council leader over the past four years is that government at all levels cannot do everything and fund everything. We need to attract private finance, and I am not clear how the Scottish National Investment Bank will do that. I know that the cabinet secretary has touched on that, and I hope that we will hear, in her summing up, what the plan is and what progress there has been on bringing in the private sector finance that is required.

I hope that, in 10 years' time, we can look back at the Scottish National Investment Bank and see realised profits, new technologies being helped and developed here in Scotland, and our net zero ambitions being realised by the investments that we are making. I hope that we can look back and see real jobs created by its investments. That will be the true time for celebration.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): We move to the closing speeches.

16:10

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): In many ways, today's debate has been a missed opportunity. Instead of just looking back on a year of the Scottish National Investment Bank, we should have been more forward looking.

Labour has long supported the establishment of a national investment bank, but as a key part of the wider—but sadly missing—industrial strategy that we need to tackle the structural problems in the Scottish economy, including what is too often a short-term approach to investment. As Richard Leonard said, the Scottish National Investment

Bank should be at the very centre of a Scottish Government industrial strategy—the very centre of a plan for good-quality jobs that people can live on. It should be driving the just transition to a net zero carbon economy, promoting economic democracy and equality, and building community wealth.

It is clear that the scale of the Government's ambition—the funding available to the bank—is not at a level to deliver that transformational change.

Kate Forbes: We all want to be as ambitious as possible. Two billion pounds is a significant amount of money, which Willie Watt alluded to. The member will know that, in a fixed budget, investing more requires us to take it from elsewhere. That is a challenge, which is precisely why we are trying to use the bank to leverage private finance.

Colin Smyth: The cabinet secretary is absolutely aware that the Government has borrowing powers. The problem is that the Government has cut investment in our economic agencies over the past few years, and that shows a lack of priority from the Government. The concerns over the lack of investment were echoed by the chairman of the bank himself last week, when he said that the funding that is available

“is insufficient to crack the missions”.

As Daniel Johnson highlighted, even with the limited commitment from the Government, there is uncertainty over where funding will come from. We know that financial transactions are a substantial element of the budget for not just the investment bank but our enterprise agencies—Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and South of Scotland Enterprise. The UK spending review meant that we will have a substantial reduction in the Scottish Government's financial transaction allocation in the future. Although the finance secretary said again today that the commitment to capitalise the investment bank remains undiminished, she failed to say exactly where that funding will come from. If it is to come from the existing capital budget, there has been no commitment from the cabinet secretary that it will not simply be taken from the already stretched capital funding budget for economic development.

There is also the Scottish Government's expectation that the bank would cover its costs itself by 2023-24. We know that the Government's funding will not be adequate for the bank to become self-sufficient within the next three years. It was noted that the cabinet secretary said only today that she hopes that it will become self-sufficient.

With many businesses struggling to survive, never mind flourish, following the impact of the

pandemic, it is more critical than ever that there is significant investment in Scotland's business sector to deliver recovery in our economy. The Scottish National Investment Bank should play a major role in the recovery by financing Scotland's economic development and providing the support that is needed for businesses to grow ethically and sustainably, but it needs the right finance in place in order to deliver.

That is also the case for our enterprise agencies. Despite enterprise support being more important than ever before, as Daniel Johnson rightly highlighted, Government spending is 40 per cent less in real terms than was spent in the final year of the last Labour Administration. We have to properly fund Scottish Enterprise but also repurpose it as a genuine business recovery agency, working in partnership with other agencies and Business Gateway to support our small businesses to recover and thrive.

In what is becoming, as Daniel Johnson and Jamie Halcro Johnston described, an increasingly "cluttered landscape", we have to ensure that our agencies are better co-ordinated to deliver the one-stop shop approach to economic development that our businesses are crying out for. Murdo Fraser and Liz Smith highlighted that businesses are often unsure about who to contact for support and how the agencies co-ordinate and work together.

With COP26 leaving Glasgow, we have heard a lot from the Scottish Government about its commitment to a green transition, with claims that Scotland will be a world leader in tackling climate change. However, as Daniel Johnson highlighted, too often, the Scottish National Party's record on green jobs is spin over substance. It has failed to meet its own target, and delivered just 21,000 of the 130,000 jobs that were promised by 2020.

We need a Scottish National Investment Bank that is worthy of its name. It must be properly funded, work in partnership with all our agencies, deliver a one-stop shop for business and focus on economic recovery. That means restructuring and growing the bank so that it can provide seed funding for new ideas, offer investment for capital-for-good projects and support businesses to transition towards greener and more digital futures, all while creating jobs and supporting good work practices.

From what we have heard today, it is clear that the Scottish National Investment Bank is a positive initiative, but it still lacks ambition from the Government to deliver. Scottish Labour has long said that the SNP's proposals for the bank do not go nearly far enough in establishing a financial institution that will drive Scotland's economic recovery and a just transition. One year on, and that has not changed.

16:16

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): It has been a short but useful debate that has teased out some of the issues around the Scottish National Investment Bank.

Kate Forbes's motion invites us to celebrate the bank's first anniversary. What we have heard in the debate makes it clear that it is probably too early to be celebrating the success of the bank—in a few years, we will know whether the bank has been a success. At that point, we will know what level of return has been seen on investments, and we will judge the bank's success. At the moment, we are looking at a work in progress.

At the start of the debate, Liz Smith set out that the Scottish Conservatives supported the formation of the Scottish National Investment Bank, but not without concerns about how it might function in practice. It is apparent that there is a need for clarity on the bank's role. If there is one thing that has come out of the debate from all sides, it is that the exact purpose of the bank is not well understood.

From around the chamber, we have heard different political perspectives, including from Richard Leonard, Maggie Chapman and Douglas Lumsden, and different views about what the SNIB should be doing. As Colin Smyth referenced, we also know that, in the business community, people are not clear about what exactly the SNIB is there to do, and when it is able to support them; nor are we clear about the bank's relationship with the enterprise agency network.

Colin Smyth mentioned the dramatic reductions in the Scottish Enterprise budget over the past decade. Many people in the business community whom I speak to are not clear what role Scottish Enterprise is now expected to fulfil compared with where it was perhaps a decade ago. The relationship between Scottish Enterprise and the SNIB is also unclear. Therefore, the need for clarity, both internally and externally for those in business who might seek support from the bank, is apparent.

A number of members, including Daniel Johnson, mentioned the issue of the availability of funds. The £2 billion sounds like a chunky number, but it is over 10 years, so that is £200 million a year. Willie Watt, the bank's chairman, said that the sums are insufficient. The hope is that additional sums will be levered in externally from the private sector.

There is a key issue around the question of risk. The Scottish National Investment Bank has a role only if it is there to address market failure and support enterprises that cannot get finance from the private sector. Inevitably, that means that a higher level of risk might be attached. As the

cabinet secretary has said, some failures with investments will be inevitable. Of course, we hope that there will not be too many, when we are dealing with public funds.

Michelle Thomson: On the issue of risk, we know that, habitually, there is often a problem with the attitude of main high street banks to risk. We should reflect carefully on where the SNIB can contribute, and I would welcome Murdo Fraser's comment on that point.

Murdo Fraser: Michelle Thomson makes a fair point. I was going to reference the comments that she made about the relationship between the SNIB and Scottish Enterprise and how those two bodies' approaches to risk might differ. We would welcome more clarity on exactly what investment Scottish Enterprise might deem appropriate to support, what SNIB might deem appropriate to support and how those might differ.

I will address the issue of operational independence, which Kate Forbes raised at the start. We need to be clear that the bank cannot be directed by ministers. It will not be a success if that is the case. Over the past year and longer, I have heard calls in the chamber from different members about why the National Investment Bank must step in and support a particular enterprise that is failing. That is not what the body is for. If that is the vision that people have for it, it will not be a success. We need to be clear about that. Ministers have the right to set a strategic direction for the bank but not to seek to micromanage and direct particular investments.

We wish the Scottish National Investment Bank well. Time will tell how successful it will be. It is early days to be celebrating its success, but we might be able to do so in time. It is clear from members from all parties who have spoken in the debate that greater clarity about the bank's purpose would be welcome, not least to people in the business community so that they understand exactly what the bank is for and how it might be able to help them. That point is well made in the amendment in Liz Smith's name, which I am pleased to support.

16:21

Kate Forbes: I will endeavour to reply to many of the comments that have been made. I will go through members in order, because a number of good points were made.

Liz Smith started by talking about the need for performance metrics that Parliament and ministers alike can analyse and scrutinise. That is an important point. The bank's audited accounts set out the balanced scorecard. The unique point about the bank is that it has to deliver returns—we are open and honest about the fact that we expect

it to do that on a commercial basis—but it also has a commitment to deliver on social and environmental outcomes. The accounts were laid in Parliament in September and they lay out the balanced scorecard already.

There could be a requirement to develop more KPIs, but Murdo Fraser made an important point in that regard. As much as I am keen to celebrate the efforts of the independent bank—it is not about ministers claiming credit but about recognising the work and labour of the bank's team—the returns will be seen over the next few years. We expect returns to be delivered over the long term, and perhaps over a longer term than any of our careers in the Parliament. That is all part of the bank's ambition. We need to be careful about KPIs. We need to ensure that the bank delivers on its objectives but analysing its performance too quickly is also a problem, if politicians are looking to claim credit.

Daniel Johnson made a number of points. I respectfully suggest that Labour's amendment and comments are significantly at odds with what I hear from external stakeholders and what the bank hears as well. From those comments, I am not sure that Labour fully understands the bank's purpose or operational independence. However, Daniel Johnson is free to criticise the Scottish Government for the wider context. It is right that the bank sits within a wider policy framework. The bank is not about helping businesses to weather the storms; it is about making strategic investments in businesses that deliver a commercial return.

Daniel Johnson: I would be grateful if the cabinet secretary would explain that a little. In the amendment, I explicitly address the wider context. Forgive me, but I fail to understand what bit I do not understand. I was not commenting on the detail of the investments.

Kate Forbes: That might be precisely the point—the bank is adding value to the landscape.

Michelle Thomson talked about the need to be ambitious, and I agree. I heard Willie Watt's comments—he was sitting next to me when he made them—so I know that they have been misquoted a number of times today. On the figure of £2 billion, he specifically said that he was "humbled" by the amount of public funding that was going into the bank. It is a significant amount of money. He also said that ambition requires us to leverage in as much private finance as possible.

Over the past two weeks, we have heard extensively about the amount of private finance. Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero—GFANZ—has secured \$130 trillion of private finance that needs to find a home in investments that can not only deliver commercial returns but

ensure that we meet the global net zero requirements. I want to ensure that we secure as much of that funding in Scotland as possible. The bank can help to do that, and it is already working with the private sector.

Jamie Halcro Johnston made quite a good point about taking a decentralised approach. Just yesterday, I opened one of the 12 centres that are associated with the National Manufacturing Institute Scotland. One of those centres is in Fort William and is part of a £170 million investment. That decentralised approach is to support businesses to innovate and to ensure that they have access to support on a local basis.

Richard Leonard made one comment with which I agree: that we cannot end up with a result in which risk is socialised and reward is privatised. That is absolutely spot on. The bank has a duty to ensure that it is not just making investments, but making investments that deliver returns that can be reinvested, so that it becomes operationally self-sufficient. I will leave Richard Leonard's other comments for now, but I am pleased to say that there was one comment with which I agreed.

Douglas Lumsden talked about the need to be prudent and realistic about our finances, which is true. However, there must be an element of risk associated with the approach. The whole point is that the bank should not replace private sector investment; the bank should add value and perhaps de-risk investment. If an organisation or business can secure private sector investment, the bank should be looking for ways in which it can add value elsewhere.

The bank is making progress on becoming FCA accredited. This debate is about reflecting the fact that, in its first year the bank, as a start-up, has grown its operational capacity; it has made £120 million-worth of fantastic investments, to meet the objectives; and it is progressing with things such as FCA accreditation, so that it is able to expand, crowd in investors and perhaps borrow on the basis of its balance sheet.

I am out of time. Members have made a number of comments that are worthy of further discussion. I hope that we can have that discussion on a cross-party basis. Like Murdo Fraser, I end by saying that this is not about Government stepping in to micromanage the bank. The bank is operationally independent. We, in the Parliament, need to have a mature discussion about what value the bank is adding. We also need to have a more mature discussion about risk, because that is integral to what the bank is seeking to do.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before I move on to the next item of business, 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.

COP26 Outcomes

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a statement by Nicola Sturgeon on the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP26—outcomes. The First Minister will take questions at the end of her statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

16:28

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): On Saturday, COP26 concluded with 197 countries adopting the Glasgow climate pact. Today, I will report briefly on the Scottish Government's activities during COP and offer our preliminary view on the agreement.

First, I want to record my gratitude to all those who helped to ensure that the hosting of the summit was a success. COP26 was one of the most important events ever held in Scotland; it was also one of the largest.

More than 40,000 people registered to attend, which is a higher number than for any of the previous 25 COPs. In addition, tens of thousands of activists visited the city. Some inconvenience was inevitable from an event of that scale, and I know that the city experienced disruption. However, the warmth and enthusiasm of Glasgow's welcome were praised by every international visitor I met.

My first and very heartfelt thank you today is therefore to the people of Glasgow. *[Applause.]* I also thank the Scottish Event Campus, Glasgow City Council, all the volunteers and the partners across the public and private sectors whose hard work made the event possible.

My thanks go to the United Nations and in particular to the UN climate change executive secretary, Patricia Espinosa. The UK COP president, Alok Sharma, deserves huge credit. He and his team worked tirelessly to secure the best possible outcome. I am grateful to them for keeping me well briefed throughout the negotiations.

Peaceful protest is vital at any COP. It keeps pressure on negotiators and reminds those who are inside the blue zone of the vital job that they are there to do. Over the two weeks of the event, more than 400 protests were staged across Glasgow. That there were fewer than 100 arrests in total is a credit to protestors and to Police Scotland. The policing operation at COP26 was the biggest ever to be undertaken in the United Kingdom, and I pay tribute to the chief constable of Police Scotland and to all officers from forces across the UK who worked under his command for

the highly professional manner in which the operation was conducted.

Over the past two weeks, the eyes of the world have been firmly on Scotland, and we have shown the best of our country to the world. Among the almost 500 meetings, events and other engagements that ministers undertook—including almost 100 that I undertook personally—many were with businesses and potential investors in green innovation. We also took the opportunity to strengthen our bilateral relationships with a number of countries and regions around the world.

As well as showcasing the country, the Scottish Government set clear objectives for our participation in COP. First, we aimed to amplify voices that are too rarely heard in such discussions—for example, those of young people, women and people from the global south—and we sought to be a bridge between those groups and the decision makers who were around the negotiating table.

To that end, we funded the conference of youth when the UK Government opted not to and we supported the Glasgow climate dialogues to give a platform to voices from developing and vulnerable countries. In partnership with UN Women, we launched the Glasgow women's leadership statement on gender equality and climate change. I was joined for the launch of that statement by the leaders of Bangladesh, Tanzania and Estonia, and the statement has already been signed by more than 20 countries. We also endorsed the UNICEF declaration on children, youth and climate action.

Secondly, we worked hard to ensure that cities, states, regions and devolved Governments played our full part in securing progress. Scotland is currently the European co-chair of the Under2 Coalition, which held its general assembly during COP. More than 200 state, regional and devolved Governments are members of that coalition. Collectively, and significantly, we represent almost 2 billion people and account for half of global gross domestic product.

In the run-up to COP, the coalition sought to maximise its influence by launching a new memorandum of understanding that committed its members to reaching net zero by 2050 at the latest and to doing that as individual members earlier if that was possible. That has been signed up to by 28 Governments, and we are encouraging others to sign up.

More than 200 cities and states have signed up to the Edinburgh declaration on biodiversity. That represents welcome progress as we look ahead to the biodiversity COP next year.

Our third objective was to use COP to challenge ourselves to go further and faster in our journey to net zero. That is why I chose as my first

engagement at COP to meet the climate activists Vanessa Nakate and Greta Thunberg. It is also why we moved away from our previous commitment to maximum economic recovery of oil and gas and embarked on discussions with the new Beyond Oil & Gas Alliance.

We published additional detail on our policy ambitions for onshore and offshore wind and launched a new hydrogen strategy and a £55 million nature restoration fund. We published a new planning framework with climate action at its heart, and we promoted our green investment portfolio to a range of businesses and investors.

We launched the blue carbon international policy challenge; supported international agreements on low-carbon transportation and reducing agricultural emissions; and signed new memorandums of understanding on heat with Denmark and on peatlands with Chile. A full list of such initiatives and of the 10 international agreements that we signed will be placed in the Scottish Parliament information centre later this week.

Of course, our most important objective was to use our engagement, influence and interaction to push for an international agreement that would live up to the urgency of the climate emergency. We wanted to see action to limit global warming to 1.5°C and, as a minimum, a tangible mechanism to keep 1.5 alive; we wanted the \$100 billion of finance that was promised by the global north to developing nations 12 years ago to be delivered; and we wanted to see the developed world recognise its obligation to help developing countries to pay for the loss and damage that they are already suffering as a result of the climate change that they have done so little to cause.

The Glasgow climate pact represents progress on many of those issues, but it must be built on quickly if climate catastrophe is to be avoided. It is important that the necessity of capping temperature increases at 1.5°C is no longer questioned. However, the world is still on a path to temperature increases of well over 2°C, which is a death sentence for many parts of the world. To keep 1.5°C in reach, global emissions must be almost halved by the end of the decade. The requirement for countries to come back next year with substantially increased nationally determined contributions is therefore vital.

Finance is crucial to faster progress. I welcome the aim of doubling finance for adaptation by 2025, and the commitment to a longer-term finance goal. However, it is utterly shameful that the developed world could not deliver the \$100 billion of funding that was promised in 2009 by the 2020 deadline, or even by 2021.

This COP also delivered significant commitments on methane and deforestation. In addition, a COP cover text has agreed, for the first time—albeit in language that was watered down in the final moments—the need to move away from fossil fuels.

In the run-up to COP, and as a result of what we heard during the Glasgow climate dialogues, the Scottish Government decided to champion the issue of loss and damage. Two weeks ago, we became the first developed country in the world to make a commitment to support countries that are experiencing loss and damage. I am delighted that our commitment has since been supplemented by Wallonia, and by a contribution from the Children's Investment Fund Foundation.

The final position that was agreed at Glasgow represents progress in recognising the loss and damage that the climate crisis, which was created by developed nations, is already causing in developing nations, but it does not go nearly far enough. I regret in particular the decision by some developed nations to block the establishment of a Glasgow financial facility on loss and damage. Over the weekend, I met Dr Saleemul Huq, who is one of the leading campaigners on that issue, and pledged that the Scottish Government will continue to work with him and others to build the case on loss and damage ahead of COP27 in Egypt. Loss and damage was an example of Scotland's leadership during this COP, but ultimately Scotland can lead and speak with credibility only if we deliver on our own net zero targets.

As I reflect on the past two weeks, I feel pride in the leadership that Scotland has shown, for which we have been widely recognised. However, I also feel a renewed sense of responsibility to go further and faster; to face up to tough challenges as well as the relatively easy options; and to help raise the bar of world leadership more generally. Our focus in the months and years ahead will, therefore, be firmly on delivery.

This decade will be the most important in human history. The actions that we take between now and 2030 will determine whether or not we bequeath a sustainable and habitable planet to those who come after us. The stakes could not be higher, and I absolutely understand why many are angry and frustrated that more progress was not made in Glasgow. However the Glasgow climate pact provides a basis for further action, and the key test will be whether it is implemented fully, and with the required urgency. We must all focus our efforts on that between now and COP27, and then beyond. Scotland will, I am sure, continue to play our full part. While we can be proud of the part that we played at COP26, our responsibility now is to ensure that future generations will look back and

be proud of the actions that we take in the months and years ahead.

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

The Glasgow pact is a momentous achievement that will keep the 1.5°C goal within our grasp. What was agreed in Glasgow can protect the future of our children and the generations to come. COP26 can be remembered as the first step towards the end of coal use and deforestation, and for its historic deal to cut methane emissions.

COP26 was the biggest conference ever hosted in the United Kingdom. As the First Minister said, the people of Glasgow deserve our thanks for coping with the disruption. I acknowledge the efforts of Police Scotland and police officers from around the UK, who deserve our thanks and appreciation for keeping disruption to a minimum. Alok Sharma and the UK Government deserve huge credit for delivering such a momentous conference in Scotland and for working tirelessly to get a deal over the line.

The First Minister said that we

“can lead and speak with credibility only if we deliver on our own net zero targets.”

That is the same First Minister who claimed that almost 100 per cent of all the electricity that we use is from renewables when, in fact, just over half of the electricity consumption in Scotland last year was from renewables. Her Government’s renewable heat target was missed and progress has stalled. The Scottish National Party Government has missed its own legal emissions targets for the past three years. Setting ambitious targets is great, but the planet needs action.

Will the First Minister explain how her Government will deliver a lasting legacy for COP26 by finally meeting its own targets?

The First Minister: I agree that the 1.5°C goal is still within our grasp as a result of the Glasgow climate pact. However, that will remain the case only if actions are quickly taken to realise that the world is still on a devastating path of global temperature rises that are way above 1.5°C and, in fact, 2°C. I will be pretty frank about our targets: Scotland is a world leader, but the bar of world leadership is too low.

Ninety-seven per cent of our net electricity consumption is from renewable sources; we now need to replicate that in heat, transport and agriculture. We have legally binding annual targets, which most other countries do not have. They are designed to ensure that, in years when we fall short of targets, we are legally obliged to catch up so that we remain on track for the 2030 75 per cent emissions reduction target and the 2045 net zero target. We have marginally missed

the past three years’ annual targets, which is why we have published a catch-up plan.

Let us put that into context. Scotland has decarbonised faster than any G20 country—that is an independent assessment—and we are already halfway to net zero. If we had met our emissions reduction targets, we would have cut them by 55 per cent. We have cut them by 51.5 per cent, which is still way ahead of most other countries in the world.

However, we need to raise our ambitions even further. I say to Douglas Ross that I am under no illusions about that; I know that it will take tough decisions. We have probably done the relatively easy things already. I reflect on the fact that every time we come forward with a tough decision, whether on workplace parking to reduce the number of cars on our roads, or on facing up to the need to accelerate the transition away from fossil fuels to renewable energy, the one thing that is absolutely consistent is opposition from the Scottish Conservatives. If we are to meet our targets, lead the world and play our full part in saving the planet, perhaps it will be necessary to have a bit less opportunism and opposition from the Scottish Conservatives.

Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): The eyes of the world have been on Glasgow. I thank everyone who helped to deliver a successful COP26.

We have had two weeks of words and we now need action. I welcome the Glasgow climate pact, but we must recognise that it does not go far enough or fast enough.

We all have a duty to hold Governments to account, including our Governments in Scotland and across the UK. The rhetoric does not meet the reality, because the reality is that there is not enough of a pledge in the Glasgow climate pact to keep warming to below 1.5°C. That is not just a global failing; here in Scotland, there have been missed targets on emissions, renewable heat and biodiversity. There is no meaningful plan for a jobs-first transition, and public transport routes are being cut.

In the spirit of living up to the demands of the crisis, I ask the First Minister to take action on something right now. An estimated 613,000 households in Scotland live in fuel poverty, and more than 1.3 million homes need insulation or heating upgrades. However, between 2013 and 2019, the First Minister’s Government helped only 150,000 households. With serious action, we can make progress on the jobs crisis, the cost of living crisis and the climate crisis, but that will require real political will. Will the First Minister agree to meet me, trade unions and the housing sector to draw up a plan to jump-start that vital work and to

begin the process of making the lofty climate rhetoric a reality for people in Scotland?

The First Minister: The commitment to keeping warming below 1.5°C is now unquestionable and is reflected clearly in the Glasgow climate pact. That is a big step forward, but the actions are not yet in place to give us confidence that we will start to see global emissions falling in order to meet that target.

I have already been candid about our obligations not only to set targets but to meet them. Scotland's targets are consistent and exceed the obligations on 1.5°C in the Paris agreement. We are again leading by example, but we must raise our ambition even further.

I or the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport will meet anyone to discuss how we can take forward our ambitions further and faster. We must all raise our game. As I said in my statement, I came out of COP26 proud of the leadership that Scotland is showing—which is strongly recognised around the world, if not always in this chamber. However, we must go even further.

Before I meet Anas Sarwar to discuss fuel poverty, I say to him that he should come prepared to engage with the fact that the power to act on fuel poverty does not lie in the hands of this Government. Financing, too, does not always lie in the hands of this Government. I am not sure that we will get very far if the suggestion is another example of Labour willing the ends but not being prepared to take the means into our hands. In the spirit of all of us raising our game, that is my challenge to Anas Sarwar.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I extend the thanks of Scottish Liberal Democrats to everyone who kept COP26 safe and made it possible.

Keeping the 1.5°C goal alive will require concerted action both at home and abroad, which means we cannot wait for COP27 or COP28. As we have heard a number of times today, Scotland has repeatedly missed its own targets in that vital area.

The First Minister says that she wants to be challenged to go further and faster. I invite her to consider some of the proposals that my party has laid out to give new hope in the climate emergency. One is an end to the reliance on fossil fuels for all new-build houses. We seek a new rail-card entitlement that would allow all passengers to benefit from rail-card fares, and we seek the removal of this Government's commitment to a third runway at Heathrow.

The First Minister: I will consider all those proposals in good faith. The Government must

ensure that it has the funding to implement policies, but I am aware that we must look across a range of responsibilities and that we must challenge ourselves to go further.

I put the challenge back to Alex Cole-Hamilton. When it comes to some of the tougher issues, we need cross-party support. The criticism that I made of Douglas Ross could also be levelled at the Scottish Liberal Democrats. Workplace parking is an example. A proposal was made to try to reduce use of cars, particularly in our urban centres, but political opportunism got in the way of what the planet needs.

I accept my responsibilities. When the really tough issues present themselves, we also need the Opposition to rise above ordinary politics.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: A number of members are keen to question the First Minister. I want to take as many as possible, but we need succinct questions and answers.

Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP): Support, both financial and technical, will be crucial for many countries as they adapt and mitigate to deal with loss and damage. The UN's secretary general praised Scotland's leadership in launching a £2 million loss and damage fund. Will the First Minister outline how we will continue to work internationally to maximise the impact of such initiatives?

The First Minister: That is an important issue and one in which I am committed to continuing to build momentum. It is important to focus on why loss and damage matter. It is important to fund climate change mitigation and to fund developing countries to adapt to the future impacts of climate change, but many developing and vulnerable countries are suffering loss and damage now. The developed world, which has done most to cause climate change, has an obligation to help those countries to finance mitigation of those impacts now—not as an act of charity, but as a fundamental and basic act of reparation.

I will not name them at this stage, but I have had a number of discussions in the past two weeks with other Governments that are interested in following up and stepping up on loss and damage. There was some progress on that in Glasgow, with the inclusion in the agreement of text on loss and damage. Unfortunately, a proposal for a financial facility was knocked out in the final stages. One key objective of COP27 will be to establish that facility.

We will work with others over the next 12 months to build a head of steam on that, because it is an obligation that we owe to the countries that are right now dealing with the worst impacts of climate change.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): The north-east and our oil and gas workers were alarmed to hear of the First Minister's discussions with the Beyond Oil & Gas Alliance, which is committed to a rapid and dramatic shift away from UK oil and gas. Will she reassure them that her discussions have finished and that Scotland will not join? Will she guarantee that her Government will ensure that every possible job will transition and that the industry's drive to decarbonise will be harnessed before her Government takes any decisions that could throw nearly 100,000 oil and gas jobs off a cliff edge?

The First Minister: To be perfectly frank, I think that many people in the oil and gas sector are more worried about the UK Government's failure to support the Scottish carbon capture and storage cluster and the Acorn project. Perhaps, if we want to talk about a just and sensible transition, Liam Kerr should be having some conversations with his colleagues as well.

Here we have it, Presiding Officer. Liam Kerr illustrates helpfully for me—I thank him for that—the point that I have been making. We all talk, rightly, in general terms about the need to do more. Everybody across the world is talking about the need to accelerate our progress away from fossil fuels, but, as soon as we start engaging with the detail of that, what we have from the Scottish Conservatives is opposition.

We have to make sure that the transition is just, and it is this Government that has already established a £500 million just transition fund for the north-east and Moray to help with that. We must build up the renewable alternatives and the low-carbon alternatives, which is why the failure to support carbon capture is inexplicable. We must do all of that, but we cannot escape the moral obligation to accelerate that progress, and that is what the Government will continue to do. If we can learn from others in alliances about how to do that, and if we can offer our expertise and experience in how to do it, I think that that is what any responsible Government, in the current situation that the world is facing, would do.

Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): Whether COP26 will succeed now depends entirely on whether countries deliver on the commitments that they have made. Will the First Minister outline what positive contributions Scotland and the other devolved nations and states of the world made to COP26? Does she agree that leadership begins at home and that the UK Government should match Scotland's action and investments?

The First Minister: I agree very strongly that leadership starts at home, and, for us, that is here, in Scotland, in this Parliament and in this Government. I accept unreservedly the obligation

that that puts on my shoulders and the shoulders of my Government. However, I would like the UK Government—which did many very good things in the run-up to and during COP26 and will, I hope, take them forward—to change its position and do more on certain things. I have mentioned carbon capture and storage as an example of that. We have a situation in which the powers span devolved and reserved responsibilities. We need to see action, and that is a point that the Climate Change Committee has recognised in the past.

We also need to recognise—we have worked hard to do this—and maximise the influence of state Governments, regional Governments, city Governments and devolved Governments such as ours. As I said earlier, the Under2 Coalition accounts for almost half the global economy, representing almost 2 billion people across the world. It is often with those Governments, such as ours, that the levers lie, so we must all play our part in this. We must all lead properly and encourage others along the way to go faster as well.

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): If we are serious about averting climate catastrophe and accelerating towards a just transition for a green economy, Cambo cannot go ahead. There is no rigorous climate change test that Cambo could possibly pass, so the First Minister must do more than simply ask the UK Government to reassess the proposed oilfields. Time is running out. Will the First Minister oppose Cambo in the strongest possible terms and provide the political leadership that has been lacking?

The First Minister: I have made my position very clear. I do not think that we can go on extracting new oil and gas for ever—that is why we have moved away from the policy of maximum economic recovery—and I do not think that we can continue to give the go-ahead to new oilfields, so I do not think that Cambo should get the green light. I am not the one taking that decision, so I have set out a proposal for a climate assessment, and I think that the presumption would be that Cambo could not and should not pass any rigorous climate assessment.

Monica Lennon might want to join me in calling for the powers to be transferred to Scotland so that we can take the decisions. However, given that it is somebody else who has the power, I have set out a process by which a different decision could be arrived at. [*Interruption.*] As soon as Monica Lennon wants to argue that the powers should be in our hands, she will find a willing ally in me. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Can we have less chuntering from sedentary positions across the chamber?

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): A great deal has taken place since COP began, but I was particularly pleased to see the launch of the Glasgow women's leadership statement. Will the First Minister tell us how important she believes that statement to be—as well as every signatory—and how it will help in the fight for climate justice?

The First Minister: As I said earlier, we will publish the details of the international agreements that we signed, as well as the other initiatives and the signatories to them. We will put that information in SPICe.

The Glasgow women's leadership statement is hugely important. We know that women are disproportionately impacted, across the world, by climate change. When it comes to population displacement that is caused by climate change, around 80 per cent of all those who are displaced will be women and children. The impact is disproportionate, but women's voices are not heard sufficiently loudly at any level. Often, it is women who are responsible for looking after children and for providing food for their families. If it is largely men who are designing the solutions, those often do not reflect the lives of women. From the grass roots, therefore, right up to leadership level, we need to hear the voice of women more loudly. The statement that we launched in Glasgow in partnership with UN Women—a significant initiative—is an important part of trying to drive that forward, and we will be encouraging other signatories in the months ahead.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): The launch of the Beyond Oil & Gas Alliance was a seminal moment in Glasgow because, for the first time, it sent a message to coal-dependent states such as India that richer states such as our own are prepared to phase out oil and gas production with a just transition. The Danish minister who launched the alliance said:

“How can you be on a path to carbon neutrality but still aim to produce oil and gas to sell to others?”

Does the First Minister agree with that perspective, and when will Scotland join the alliance?

The First Minister: I absolutely agree that we need to move beyond oil and gas as quickly as we can; however, we need to do that justly—and I think that Mark Ruskell agrees with that. People who pay any attention to what I say on the issue will see that I have changed my position, and that of my party and of the Government, because I do not think that we can be credible on such things unless we accept the responsibility of moving away from fossil fuel. However, I am not going to abandon the 100,000 people who work in that

sector, so the need to do that fairly and justly is really important.

We are assessing the membership of the Beyond Oil & Gas Alliance. There are three categories of membership, and we are assessing which of them, in the initial stages, would be most likely. If we decide to join, that is likely, initially, to be as a “friend”, which would allow us to share our experience. However, underpinning all of that, for all the countries that are signed up—some of which do not really have much of an oil and gas sector; there are different considerations for different Governments—is the commitment to a just transition.

The oil and gas sector is, and has been for some time, important in Scotland when it comes to jobs, infrastructure, expertise and supply chain benefit, and we have to make that transition properly and carefully. However, there is no doubt in my mind that we need to do that as quickly as possible.

Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): The predominantly working-class communities of Anderston, Finnieston and Yorkhill, in my constituency of Glasgow Kelvin, were fantastic hosts to COP26. Will the First Minister acknowledge their hospitality and elaborate on what community resources are available to support such communities in transitioning to a greener and more climate-efficient future?

The First Minister: There is already a range of resources and help for communities across Scotland. I point, for example, to the climate challenge fund, which provides funding to a range of local projects. We are also building a new model to support community climate action via a network of regional climate action hubs and climate action towns. Those will be important vehicles for local communities and local people to contribute fully to that effort.

I agree with Kaukab Stewart about the contribution of local communities across Glasgow to making COP a success. It was not an easy two weeks, and the period leading into it was not easy for the city, but I was inundated—that is not an exaggeration—with people coming up to me to tell me what a wonderful city Glasgow is and how fantastic the people of Glasgow are. Right across the globe, I think, people will know about Glasgow who might not have known about it before. The same is true of Scotland. There will be massive opportunities for us in the medium to long term if we play our cards right—which we intend to do.

Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): During COP26, Mark Carney, the former governor of the Bank of England, announced the Glasgow financial alliance network, with £100 trillion of private finance available for the transition to net

zero across the world. Will the First Minister confirm what discussions she has had with Mark Carney in relation to the Glasgow financial alliance network and what share of that funding might be available for Scotland in its transition to net zero?

The First Minister: I have had discussions with Mark Carney and the Scottish Government has had discussions with Mark Carney. The high-level champions of the UN were also involved in that initiative, which is important. I welcome it and I am enthusiastic about it. However, it is really important to not mischaracterise that £100 trillion, which is not a funding pot but the combined assets of all the financial institutions that were part of the agreement. Although it is really important to celebrate such initiatives, we do not do anybody any favours if we try to suggest that it is something different from what it is.

There is a massive appetite in the capital market to find good investable projects around green innovation. That is why we have put the green investment portfolio into the market, to try to harness as much of that funding for Scotland as possible. That is a big priority for us. Over the course of the two weeks, I spoke to many different investors in the fields of wind and hydrogen who are looking very positively at Scotland as a location for investment. One of our priorities, coming out of COP, will be to ensure that we catch as much of that investment as possible.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): What will be the impact of the COP26 agreement on remote and rural communities? What support will be available to enable those involved in the agricultural industries to reduce carbon emissions—particularly those in the dairy sector, which is an important industry for the south-west of Scotland?

The First Minister: We have a really positive vision for agriculture. However, there is no doubt that agriculture is one of the sectors in which considerable adaptation is needed to reduce emissions. One of the investments that I was able to welcome over the course of COP was from a company that has decided to locate in Ayrshire its facility for manufacturing additive for cattle and sheep feed, which will have a big global impact in reducing emissions from agriculture. We need to work with agriculture to support the innovation that is already in the sector in order to ensure that it and the rural communities that it supports fully play their part—just as with oil and gas, in a fair and just way.

Urgent Question

17:03

NHS Lanarkshire (Support)

Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what support is being provided to NHS Lanarkshire in light of reports that Wishaw hospital accident and emergency department was at full capacity at the weekend with patients being transferred to Monklands hospital.

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Humza Yousaf): First, it has always been part of boards' operational practice to work as a clinical network to manage demand by diverting patients between their hospitals when it is clinically safe to do so, minimising delays for patients.

As Meghan Gallacher—and every member—knows, the health and care system is under extreme pressure due to the pandemic. NHS Lanarkshire, like all health boards, is experiencing significant issues, including workforce challenges and high levels of delayed discharge. We recognise that some people are not getting the service or care that they—or, indeed, we—would expect. I regret that and I apologise to anybody who has suffered as a result of it.

As members will know, we have invested in an additional £300 million winter package of measures to support health and care services. Over and above that, in order to maximise capacity, we have also invested £10 million in specialist programmes that aim to provide alternatives to admission and ensure that our processes are right, to ensure timely discharge.

On top of that, the member is probably aware that NHS Lanarkshire has been assigned 64 military medics to support the three acute sites; the period of their task has recently been extended from 11 November until 17 December—something that I and the board welcomed.

My senior officials and I have been meeting the executive team at NHS Lanarkshire regularly to agree immediate actions that will support improvements and minimise delays for patients. I spoke to the chief executive of NHS Lanarkshire yesterday.

Meghan Gallacher: Some patients who presented at Wishaw general hospital at the weekend were diverted to Monklands hospital's A and E department to receive treatment, as there was a shortage of beds and there was high demand. The journey time between the two hospitals is 24 minutes.

The cabinet secretary was aware of concerns about Wishaw general hospital and other NHS Lanarkshire hospitals, given that code black was recently announced. Why was no immediate intervention made to prevent patients from having to be diverted to another hospital nearly 10 miles away?

Humza Yousaf: I disagree with the characterisation that no action was taken. I will come to that in a second but, first, I should say that when any patient is diverted to another hospital that happens on the basis of a clinician deciding that it is safe to do that.

The idea that we have not taken action is incorrect. I can write to the member with a lot of detail about the action that we have taken. On code black status, of course we do not want to see NHS Lanarkshire at the highest level of escalation. That is why we have invested £300 million in a winter funding package.

I have met NHS Lanarkshire regularly. The key is to ensure that we can discharge, where it is clinically safe to do so, as many people as possible out of the acute sites—the three hospitals that the member knows—and into care, as best and as quickly as we can do. I am more than happy to write to Meghan Gallacher with a great amount of detail about the additional investment that has gone into NHS Lanarkshire, and I express my thanks to all the national health service and social care staff who are working so hard under extreme pressure.

Meghan Gallacher: The Scottish Government set a target of 95 per cent of patients being seen within four hours in A and E departments in all NHS localities, but recent figures from NHS Lanarkshire show that only 61.8 per cent of patients are being seen within that timeframe. The Scottish Government has failed to get a grip on the crisis and NHS Lanarkshire patients are paying the price.

Will the cabinet secretary apologise to staff and patients across NHS Lanarkshire and will he commit to getting a grip on the crisis?

Humza Yousaf: What I will do is thank our NHS staff—something that Meghan Gallacher has not been able to do thus far—for their incredible work in the midst of this global pandemic.

Meghan Gallacher talks about the 95 per cent target. Of course I acknowledge that we have not met that target—*[Interruption.]* If Megan Gallacher stops shouting from a sedentary position and listens, she might get the answer as to why that is the case. We are in the midst of a global pandemic. Of course we are not where we want to be—*[Interruption.]* I can hear someone else shouting from a sedentary position. Mr Kerr and

other Conservatives would do well to listen to my answer, because this is incredibly important.

We have had two weeks of improvement. *[Interruption.]* Of course NHS performance is not where I would want it to be, but I say to Ms Gallacher and the Conservatives who are still shouting that we have the best-performing A and E departments in the entire UK—*[Interruption.]* Again, the Conservatives would do well to listen. I do not say that because we are abdicating our responsibility for the Scottish NHS but because it surely demonstrates to members that this is a problem that health services right across the UK are facing.

My job is to ensure that NHS boards, including NHS Lanarkshire, and our staff get the funding that is necessary to make improvements. We have seen improvements over the past two weeks, which Ms Gallacher did not acknowledge.

We must also take care of staff wellbeing, which is why I reiterate my thanks to NHS and social care staff, who are working incredibly hard in the midst of the pandemic.

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): Does the cabinet secretary agree that the unprecedented pressure on our NHS is attributable to the Covid-19 pandemic, and that that emphasises the importance of using every tool at our disposal to increase vaccination uptake and reduce case numbers? Does he therefore agree that the Conservatives' opposition to ongoing public health measures, and Ms Gallacher's previous calls for us to align with England in that regard, sit at odds with their concern for the health service?

Humza Yousaf: Yes, I agree. *[Interruption.]* I can still hear Conservative members shouting from sedentary positions.

Clare Adamson is entirely correct that Covid is one of the pressures that we face. Not all of the pressures can be attributed to Covid, but anyone who lives in the real world will understand that the pandemic has caused the biggest shock to our NHS in its 73-year existence. The fact that we have well over 750 patients with Covid in our hospitals, taking up beds, adds to that pressure. Controlling transmission of Covid infection will clearly help to alleviate some of that pressure as we go into the depths of winter.

Following the First Minister's statement this afternoon, we heard that the Conservatives' only contribution to the debate is to oppose every sensible measure that the Government looks to introduce to control Covid, which will help to alleviate the pressure on NHS boards, including NHS Lanarkshire.

Paul O’Kane (West Scotland) (Lab): This is an extremely serious situation, and I, too, thank our NHS staff.

NHS Lanarkshire moved to code black on 22 October, which resulted in some cancer operations being cancelled for patients who were already experiencing unacceptably long delays. Some three weeks on since that code black was declared, the reports from the A and E department of University hospital Wishaw clearly demonstrate that the Scottish Government has not dealt with the situation. When does the cabinet secretary expect all elective surgeries, especially cancer procedures, to recommence?

Humza Yousaf: I remind Paul O’Kane that we are still in the midst of a global pandemic. *[Interruption.]* I can hear him shouting from a sedentary position, but we are still in the midst of a global pandemic. I suspect that it is impossible for any Government across the United Kingdom to set a target date for when all elective surgeries will be back on track. We published the NHS recovery plan to increase capacity by 10 per cent, and that plan is backed by £1 billion of investment over this parliamentary session.

It is, of course, not my decision to pause elective care. Such decisions are, quite rightly, taken by clinicians in the local NHS health board. I know from speaking to NHS Lanarkshire—as I do every week and as my officials do on, in effect, a daily basis—that such decisions are not taken lightly.

Once NHS Lanarkshire went to the highest level of escalation—code black—I announced a number of additional measures and proposals, with increased funding. I am happy to write to Paul O’Kane with details of the funding that went directly to NHS Lanarkshire.

Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): I have been contacted by a constituent whose twin babies were born prematurely on 21 October at University hospital Wishaw. I send them our congratulations. They were then transferred to the Victoria hospital in Kirkcaldy, as the special care baby unit at Wishaw was closed due to staff shortages and a lack of available cots. It has now been three weeks, and my constituent and his partner are both living out of suitcases and sleeping in the neonatal unit on a fold-down bed. Will the cabinet secretary look into the matter and ascertain whether alternative arrangements can be made to get them closer to home, if not back in Wishaw?

Humza Yousaf: Yes. If Gillian Mackay can furnish me with the details, I will, of course, look into the matter. The constituent’s story that she has rightly articulated is symptomatic of the pressures that we are facing. The pressures that

NHS Lanarkshire is facing are even more acute than those faced by other health boards across the country. We will continue to invest, and I will leave no stone unturned. That is why we were happy to facilitate the MACA—military aid to the civilian authorities—request for further assistance for NHS Lanarkshire.

If Ms Mackay furnishes me with the details, I will raise the case with the board and see what more can be done for the family involved.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): The cabinet secretary has been incredibly patronising towards my colleague Meghan Gallacher. She asked very reasonable questions, and she got back snippets from a ministerial briefing and soundbites about investment. She asked what he and his Government had done to pre-empt the crisis that was declared in NHS Lanarkshire. What he has given us back is politics. Can he give us a sample of the extensive and exhaustive list of things that he has done, given that he could not tell us one thing a few minutes ago?

Humza Yousaf: That was barely worth listening to, I have to say. This is a serious issue that deserves far more than Stephen Kerr’s bluff and bluster. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): I remind all members—who are well versed in the code of conduct—that we have a duty to treat one another with courtesy and respect at all times.

Humza Yousaf: On the action that we have taken, we have invested £20 million additional funding in the Scottish Ambulance Service—that is £20 million before the announcement that I made in September—taking the additional resource for the Scottish Ambulance Service to £40 million. I am happy to give Mr Kerr details about the £300 million winter funding package. Recently, the First Minister announced £482 million to help with Covid pressures. In July, I announced an additional £12 million, last week I announced an additional £10 million, and the week before that I announced an additional £10 million. If the member wants me to keep going, I can list a number of actions.

Stephen Kerr: What about practical things?

Humza Yousaf: The member does not think that money or investment is practical. However, that investment is helping our NHS boards, including NHS Lanarkshire.

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): Constituents in Lanarkshire have told me that they are willing to travel to other health boards. When I asked NHS Lanarkshire about that on Friday, I was told that there is no capacity in other health boards, apart from at the Golden Jubilee national hospital for a small number of cases. Since then I

have been told that other health boards have approached NHS Lanarkshire, which is in code black, asking for help.

Are any other health boards close to being in code black and when can we expect mutual aid to become available? Is there any spare capacity at all in our health system?

Humza Yousaf: At the moment, no other health board intends to raise its escalation level to the highest level, which is black—the level that NHS Lanarkshire is in. However, that situation is reviewed daily; given the extreme pressures that health boards are under, I suspect that it is reviewed hourly.

It is not uncommon for health boards to reach out to other health boards for mutual aid. I know that several health boards have done that for different services. I was talking to NHS Tayside yesterday and I understand that it is speaking to other health boards about potential mutual aid for some of its breast cancer services.

For elective surgery, if there is any theatre capacity at all, and teams can be brought together from different health boards, we are looking closely to see how we can maximise that opportunity. The Golden Jubilee national hospital is helping health boards across the country, including NHS Lanarkshire, with some elective surgeries.

Committee Announcement (COVID-19 Recovery Committee)

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is a committee announcement by Siobhian Brown, convener of the COVID-19 Recovery Committee, on the committee's upcoming debate on Covid-19—preparing for winter and priorities for recovery.

17:17

Siobhian Brown (Ayr) (SNP): I wish to inform the chamber that the COVID-19 Recovery Committee will be initiating a debate on Covid-19—preparing for winter and priorities for recovery. The debate will be held on Thursday 2 December. We are keen that as many committees as possible take part.

We feel that the timing is right to hold the debate. The committee has been following the Scottish Government's response to Covid closely and we are aware that case numbers remain stubbornly high. Scottish ministers and others warn that we face a very challenging winter. Although we are all keen for it to be over, we feel that we cannot take our eyes off the ball.

For that reason, the committee has decided to examine the on-going use of baseline measures to respond to Covid-19. The Scottish Government's strategic framework, which was updated today, states that the aim of the measures is

"to suppress the virus to a level consistent with alleviating its harms while we recover and rebuild for a better future."

The committee is keen to highlight the evidence that we have heard on the use of the measures, as we know that Scotland's on-going response to Covid-19 is an issue that concerns all members. The committee is also keen to hear what work other committees have been doing in relation to Covid-19. We want them to use the debate to highlight the issues that they feel that Parliament should be prioritising for recovery.

The COVID-19 Recovery Committee hopes to turn its focus to recovery in the new year and to add value to the important work that is being led by other committees. I hope that many committees will take part in the debate, and I encourage as many members as possible to get involved.

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

17:18

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motion S6M-02150, on the suspension and variation of the standing orders.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that, for the purposes of Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body Questions on 18 November 2021, the words “of up to 15 minutes” in Rule 13.9.3 are suspended.—[*George Adam*]

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

Decision Time

17:19

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): There are four questions to be put as a result of today’s business.

The first question is, that amendment S6M-02127.1 in the name of Liz Smith, which seeks to amend motion S6M-02127, in the name of Kate Forbes, on celebrating the first anniversary of the Scottish National Investment Bank, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-02127.2, in the name of Daniel Johnson, which seeks to amend S6M-02127, in the name of Kate Forbes, on celebrating the first anniversary of the Scottish National Investment Bank, 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.

17:20

Meeting suspended.

17:25

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We come to the division on amendment S6M-02127.2, in the name of Daniel Johnson. Members should cast their votes now.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (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)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 O’Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 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)
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)
Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
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)
Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
Dowey, 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)
Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
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)
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)
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)
Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
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)
Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (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)
Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-02127.2, in the name of Daniel Johnson, is: For 25, Against 93, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-02127, in the name of Kate Forbes, on celebrating the first anniversary of the Scottish National Investment Bank, as amended, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament notes the impact that the Scottish National Investment Bank, the first mission-based investment bank in the UK, has made in its first year since launch in November 2020; supports the progress made by the bank through a wide range of investments in its first year; recognises the important role that the bank has in delivering a just transition to a net-zero economy; notes the need for innovative finance to achieve Scotland's goals on climate targets, housing and demographic challenges; notes that the bank will continue to strengthen its role through investing in Scottish business, projects and communities and delivering positive environmental and social impacts, and positive financial returns for the people of Scotland, for many years to come, and, to that end, wants to see much greater clarity from the Scottish Government over the role of the bank, how its achievements will be measured, including how it will attract private sector investment, as well as make best use of taxpayers' funds, and how it will support small and medium-sized enterprises, which are the bedrock of the economy.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S6M-02150, in the name of George Adam, on the suspension and variation of the standing orders, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that, for the purposes of Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body Questions on 18 November 2021, the words “of up to 15 minutes” in Rule 13.9.3 are suspended.

World COPD Day 2021

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The final item of business is a members’ business debate on motion S6M-01827, in the name of Emma Harper, on world COPD day 2021. The debate will be concluded without any question being put. I invite members who want to participate to press their request-to-speak buttons now or as soon as possible or to place an R in the chat function if they are joining us online.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament welcomes World COPD Day, which takes place on 17 November 2021 and has a theme of Healthy Lungs — Never More Important; understands that Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) is a serious lung condition affecting 140,000 people across Scotland, and that an estimated 200,000 people across the country are said to be living with undiagnosed COPD; further understands that increased prevalence of COPD means that it is estimated that it will be the third most frequent cause of mortality worldwide by 2030; notes the publication of a new report by Asthma UK and the British Lung Foundation Scotland, which surveyed over 8,000 people from across all four nations in the UK who have a diagnosis of COPD; understands that the majority of respondents to the survey reportedly conveyed that they are not receiving the five fundamentals of COPD care, which are offering smoking cessation, offering pneumococcal and flu vaccine, pulmonary rehabilitation, personalised self-management plan, and optimising treatment for comorbidities, and welcomes the steps that are being taken by the Scottish Government, in the devolved healthcare system, to improve the outcomes of those living with COPD, including through the publication of the Respiratory Care Action Plan in March 2021, which aims to improve the care and support for people with lung conditions, including COPD, through prevention, early diagnosis and addressing health inequalities that impact on COPD, such as smoking, air pollution and poor quality housing.

17:30

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I welcome the opportunity to lead this debate to raise awareness of world COPD day tomorrow, 18 November. This year, the theme is “Healthy Lungs—Never More Important”. As the founder, and now the co-convener, of the cross-party group on lung health, I, along with my co-convener, Alexander Stewart, and the deputy convener, Mark Ruskell, who apologises for not being able to speak in the chamber this evening, thank members on all sides of the chamber who have supported my motion.

I also thank the Asthma UK and British Lung Foundation Partnership and Chest, Heart & Stroke Scotland for providing briefings and for the important work that they do every day. In addition, I highlight that my colleague Patricia Gibson MP will represent the Scottish National Party in a world COPD day debate in Westminster Hall tomorrow.

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease is a progressive and long-term lung condition without a cure. It is an umbrella term that is used to describe several lung conditions, including emphysema and chronic bronchitis. One of the best descriptions of how COPD feels is that it is like trying to breathe through a wee straw repeatedly—that is awfie difficult to do. COPD constricts the flow of oxygen into the lungs and its circulation, and it causes breathlessness, tiredness and coughing. The condition often causes poor mental health and depression, and it can lead to a person feeling lonely and isolated.

At every stage and at every age, there is an opportunity to prevent or treat COPD. Improvements in treatment are vital, as there are 300 million cases of COPD around the world and the disease is the third biggest cause of death globally. Exposure to tobacco smoke and other inhaled toxic particles and gases are the main COPD risk factors. Treatments for COPD include inhalers, tablets and—for a small number of people—surgery or a lung transplant.

Pulmonary rehabilitation is also effective and can prevent an exacerbation of COPD. That typically leads to a hospital stay of between four and eight days, which can cost the Scottish national health service an estimated £3,000 per person per stay.

The Asthma UK and British Lung Foundation Partnership has just published a report entitled “Failing on the fundamentals—Insights from those living with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) around the UK”. The organisation surveyed 8,000 people from all four nations of the United Kingdom who have a diagnosis of COPD and asked them whether they felt that they were receiving care based on the five principles of COPD care. Those principles include offering assistance with smoking cessation, offering pneumococcal and flu vaccination, offering access to pulmonary rehabilitation, providing a personalised self-management plan and optimising treatment for comorbidities. The majority of the respondents to the survey conveyed that they were not receiving those five fundamentals of COPD care.

It is worth highlighting that, of the respondents, only 652—8.1 per cent of the total—were resident in Scotland. That number seems low, so it might be an interesting opportunity for the Scottish Government to pursue a wider survey or audit of Scottish residents with COPD.

The survey has highlighted that improvements in COPD prevention and care are required, especially given that many people with poor lung health shielded during the first lockdown and the fact that winter, when those with COPD are at higher risk of infection, is fast approaching.

In Scotland, a wide range of action is being taken to better support those who are living with COPD. The “Respiratory Care Action Plan: 2021-2026”, which is being led by Dr Tom Fardon from NHS Tayside, sets out the Scottish Government’s vision for driving improvement in the prevention, diagnosis, care, treatment and support of people living with respiratory conditions. In summer 2021, an implementation programme was initiated to roll out, in partnership with the respiratory community, the commitments that are outlined in the plan.

The conditions that are covered in the plan—asthma, COPD, idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis, bronchiectasis and obstructive sleep apnoea syndrome—make up the majority of the workload of respiratory physicians in Scotland. Although each condition presents its own challenges, there are common problems. The plan encourages new and innovative approaches and is intended to share best practice to promote a whole-system approach to respiratory care. That work is welcome, and I look forward to seeing it continue to progress.

Dumfries and Galloway, in my South Scotland region, has a higher prevalence of COPD than any other part of Scotland. Across Dumfries and Galloway, 4,600 people are living with COPD—that is three in every 100 people, in comparison with the Scottish average of 1.8 in every 100. In addition, Stranraer is an unexplained hotspot for COPD, and researchers from the border and regions airways training hub—BREATH—project, which was funded by €7.7 million of Interreg funding, are examining possible factors including air quality, ozone levels, genetic links, social deprivation and the agriculture and industry in the area.

Prior to the debate, I received an update from Professor John Lockhart on the work of the BREATH project. I am pleased that it has recommenced school visits, most recently visiting Girvan academy. The project recently awarded a BREATH challenge certificate to Moffat academy and to Belmont primary school in Stranraer. The award is provided to young people for the education that they receive on the importance of maintaining good respiratory health. I am joining the team for a visit to Douglas Ewart high school in Newton Stewart in the new year, and I thank Dr John Lockhart and the team for their research.

There have been calls for the creation of a COPD centre of excellence in Stranraer. Although I understand the reasons for that, it would require co-operation and collaboration with NHS Dumfries and Galloway, and leadership, clinicians and a multidisciplinary team would all need to be in place. Consideration might be given to a wider approach that would cover other conditions that require the input of a respiratory team—perhaps a

Scotland-wide digital centre for lung health excellence, or a lung health hub. That would allow for learning from, and engagement with, Scottish NHS experts more widely.

In raising awareness of world COPD day, I want to highlight that COPD is often a hidden disability. Yesterday, at a meeting of the cross-party group on lung health, we heard from Julie McLeod of the Breathe Easy Clackmannanshire Community Group. Julie has COPD and is quite breathless sometimes, but she was told by someone that she did not look disabled. COPD is quite disabling for many people who are diagnosed with it.

Much work is already under way. I again welcome the work of the respiratory care action plan team, and I look forward to seeing their progress. I look forward to hearing contributions from other members ahead of tomorrow's world COPD day, and I thank the Presiding Officer for allowing me to speak this evening.

17:37

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife)
(Con): I congratulate my fellow co-convenor of the cross-party group on lung health, Emma Harper, on bringing the debate to the chamber.

World COPD day is organised by the Global Initiative for Chronic Obstructive Lung Disease. It is a collaboration between healthcare professionals and COPD patient groups throughout the world, and its aim is to raise awareness, share knowledge and discuss ways to reduce the burden on individuals who have the condition. This year's theme is "Healthy Lungs—Never More Important", which is very poignant.

The aim is to raise awareness that COPD is an on-going issue and to ensure that individuals around the world can be supported. Notwithstanding the threat of Covid, COPD remains a leading cause of death worldwide, which is a reminder of the need to focus on lung health. To that end, we need to ensure that there is support. Avoiding extensive air pollution and occupational exposure is also crucial, and it is essential to ensure that regular physical activity is undertaken at whatever level possible.

As we have heard, COPD covers a group of conditions, including bronchitis and emphysema. Those conditions create real difficulties for people, because they involve trying to take in air and empty it out from the lungs through airways that have become extremely narrow. The condition is, unfortunately, progressive and long term, and it is without a cure. We know that approximately 141,000 people across Scotland have the disease. However, the figure could be even worse, as it is believed that two thirds of people with COPD do

not know that they have it because they are undiagnosed.

Last year, I was honoured to be nominated as the British Lung Foundation's smoking cessation champion for the Parliament. I am equally honoured that the role has been reinstated for me during this session.

Although it is not always the case, we widely accept that there is a connection between smoking and COPD, with the damage that it does. It is vital to ensure that campaigns happen across the country to indicate the dangers of smoking to young people.

In my role as co-convenor of the cross-party group on lung health, I am privileged to have met many individuals who have come to the group and have given us real inspiration, none more so than Linda McLeod BEM. Working with like-minded individuals across my region, Linda chairs the support group Breathe Easy Clackmannanshire. The organisation recently received the Queen's award for voluntary service, showing the high esteem in which it is held.

I spoke with Linda about what was happening at NHS Forth Valley. There are real issues around what is happening in the wee county. We know that individuals who require support can have it, but they need pulmonary rehabilitation services across the county. Tragically, shortly after we had that discussion, the pulmonary rehab unit was relocated to Larbert. There was then an issue with a pulmonary rehabilitation service delivered by videoconferencing. That has now been removed altogether, however.

The current situation across the wee county is that many individuals are being affected by the absence of that pulmonary rehab service. They now have to travel a considerable distance, many on a number of buses. For some of them, that is virtually impossible. Estimates suggest that more than 3,000 people in the Forth Valley area could benefit from pulmonary rehabilitation. I hope that the minister will consider that in her summing up. We know that the average cost for pulmonary rehab is about £130 per patient, but that rises to £3,000 for a patient in hospital. Those issues are vitally important.

Some 6 per cent of all deaths in Scotland are attributed to lung disease, so ensuring access to pulmonary care is vital. It is crucial that the pulmonary rehabilitation service is maintained and retained locally, which ensures that more people with COPD can access the healthcare that they require.

17:42

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank Emma Harper for bringing this important debate to the chamber—as she often does with so many conditions. On behalf of Scottish Labour, I welcome world COPD day, which takes place tomorrow, and I recognise this year’s theme of “Healthy Lungs—Never More Important”.

The prevalence of COPD in Scotland and, indeed, globally should cause all of us concern. As Emma Harper has mentioned in her motion and in her speech, the increasing prevalence of COPD means that it is estimated to become the third most frequent cause of mortality worldwide by 2023.

I consider it important, in order to stop that worrying trend, that the causes are understood and highlighted. It is well known that smoking is the most common cause of COPD, being the leading factor for nine out of 10 cases, according to NHS Scotland. That means that around 90 per cent of COPD cases can be tracked back to a single cause, which highlights for the Parliament where action must be taken to address the trends that we are currently seeing.

In 2018, the Scottish Government set out plans to create a smoke-free generation by 2034, protecting those born from 2013 onwards from the adverse impacts of smoking. I and Scottish Labour support that move. I hope that, in the longer term, it will address what will be an even more challenging condition.

However, we need more action now to protect those living with COPD. The condition is another of those that disproportionately impacts the poorest in our society. Sadly, it is another example of where the Scottish Government is falling short when it comes to addressing health inequalities. “The Scottish Burden of Disease Study, 2016: Deprivation report” highlighted that COPD was one of the “leading causes” of ill health or early death in Scotland’s poorest communities.

Indeed, in 2019, Action on Smoking & Health (Scotland) reported that more than five times the number of people in the most deprived groups smoke compared to those in the least deprived groups. That highlights a clear link again in Scotland, where poorer people in Scotland’s most deprived areas are more likely to suffer from health conditions such as COPD and are therefore more likely to have their quality of life reduced further.

However, the inequalities are not limited to smoking. The Health and Safety Executive suggests that working in construction, textiles, factories and welding are also linked to increased chances of getting COPD. In each of those places, there are low-paid workers, often from more

deprived areas, and if they are already smokers they could be at further risk of facing significant health difficulties in the form of COPD.

Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland reports that people who are living with long-term health conditions such as COPD are at greater risk of readmission to hospital if they are not supported to manage their conditions and they have high levels of loneliness, isolation, and poor mental health. It is therefore right that Emma Harper highlights the need for greater focus on COPD care, and I believe that such focus should include taking the advice of organisations such as Chest, Heart & Stroke Scotland, as well as considering programmes such as their hospital to home support service, which offers direct post-diagnosis support.

COPD is another condition that highlights and exacerbates the already significant health inequalities that Scotland faces. I welcome the fact that the motion refers to health inequalities underpinned by smoking, air pollution and poor quality of housing, but we cannot accept that our ability to debate health inequalities in this Parliament should be limited to members’ business debates.

Where I live in Ayrshire, the rates of COPD are among the highest in Scotland. In 2018, NHS Ayrshire and Arran had the highest proportion of people living with COPD in Scotland. This debilitating condition causes ill health at home as well as long stays in hospital with repeated readmissions. In representing the south of Scotland, I have to ask the Scottish Government to take health inequality seriously. It is incumbent on the Scottish Government to lead a debate on the health inequalities in our country and to be held to account for its record on addressing them. In doing so, we might take some purposeful steps towards helping the tens of thousands of people who are being disproportionately affected by conditions such as COPD as a result of deprivation. We can and must do more to help those communities.

17:47

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): I am pleased to be speaking in the debate, and I thank my colleague Emma Harper for bringing it to the chamber. She has been a champion of lung health and COPD since being elected, and was instrumental in the publication of the “Respiratory Care Action Plan”, as well as starting the lung health cross-party group.

COPD is an umbrella term that is used to describe several lung conditions, including emphysema and chronic bronchitis. As we have heard, world COPD day is tomorrow and its theme

is “Healthy Lungs—Never More Important”. The condition affects 140,000 people across Scotland, and an estimated 200,000 people—that is a lot of people—are said to be living with undiagnosed COPD.

Exposure to tobacco smoke and other inhaled toxic particles and gases is the main COPD risk factor. The condition causes the lungs to narrow and harden, making breathing difficult, and sometimes impossible, without oxygen. It affects middle-aged and older people, and it usually gets worse over time. However, like all health conditions, the outlook varies from person to person. The condition cannot be cured or reversed but, for many people, treatment can help to keep it under control so that it does not severely limit their daily activities or affect their quality of life too adversely.

Treatments for COPD include inhalers, tablets and, for a small number of people, surgery or even a lung transplant. As we have heard, the British Lung Foundation and Asthma UK recently published “Failing on the fundamentals”, a report of a survey of more than 8,000 people from across the four nations of the UK who have a diagnosis of COPD. One of the questions that the survey asked those who are living with COPD was whether they felt that they were receiving the five principles of care, which are the offer of smoking cessation support, pneumococcal and flu vaccines, pulmonary rehabilitation, a personalised self-management plan, and optimised treatment for co-morbidities. Worryingly, the majority of respondents conveyed that they were not receiving the five principles.

That is why I welcome the steps that the Scottish Government is taking to improve the outcomes of those living with COPD, including the publication of the “Respiratory Care Action Plan” in March, which sets out the Government’s vision for driving improvements in the care and support received by people living with this lung condition.

As Carol Mochan very well articulated, poverty and poor housing conditions play a large part in the prevalence of COPD, with smoking, damp housing and pollution adding to the likelihood of a person contracting COPD. Housing, of course, is down to Government policies and priorities, which is why the Scottish Government is implementing an ambitious plan to provide 110,000 warm affordable homes by 2032.

Of course, if a person is to avoid the fast deterioration of their lungs and give them a chance to heal, stopping smoking is a must. So, too, is the avoidance of polluted areas where possible, and again our new climate change and carbon emissions reduction targets will help future generations in that regard.

Scotland’s industrial past always features in the causes of COPD. Asbestosis was another form of lung disease that was rife among workers of my parents’ generation in the shipyards or construction. Thankfully, we know much more about health and safety in the workplace and those risks have been minimised, but many generations paid a heavy price just to put food on the table for their families.

I thank Emma Harper again for bringing this important debate to the chamber, and I look forward to progress being made on this vital issue.

17:51

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): It is a privilege to speak in this important debate to mark COPD awareness day, which falls tomorrow. It is also a pleasure to follow Rona Mackay, and I heartily congratulate Emma Harper on bringing the debate to the chamber.

COPD is a very personal issue for me, as my dad had the condition for many years. We have already heard about the 140,000 Scots who live with the condition today; he lived with it, too, and he did it with the support of his family and those around him. Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease affects everyday life, and it leads to shortness of breath, wheezing, tightness in the chest, constant coughing, a feeling of tiredness and more of a propensity to succumb to colds and flu.

That said, the condition can be lived with and, if caught early and if lifestyle changes are made, can be slowed significantly. Indeed, I witnessed that in my dad’s case. He did everything in his power to control his COPD; he was determined to take control of his condition instead of letting the condition take control of him. He took mild exercise daily—I can tell the chamber that he walked a fair few steps every day—and, in his 80s, he took up yoga. He was part of a brilliant group in Forfar called Forfar Airways, a peer support group for people living in the Forfar area with COPD that is supported by Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland. That group meant a great deal to my dad, and its members became great friends who were there for one another through the good times and the bad. I cannot speak too highly of Forfar Airways and other peer support groups like it.

COPD most commonly affects, but is by no means limited to, smokers. My dad had smoked when he was younger, but he had long since given it up. The condition can also be the result of prolonged exposure to workplace dusts, chemicals and fumes. Indeed, dad might have been a case in point, because he was a butcher by trade.

Those facts bear repeating, but we must be careful. Too often, we can be censorious of those

who have unhealthy lifestyles, who drink too much, who have smoked, who are overweight or who suffer from stigmatised diseases that we think of as being their own fault. When we talk like that, we can cause feelings of guilt, discomfort or even stupidity in those suffering from such conditions. I am reminded of the lines

“O Lord, Thou kens what zeal I bear,
When drinkers drink, an’ swearers swear”,

and it is that attitude of Holy Willie that we should seek to avoid when it comes to health matters. Stigma is a killer in this and so many other conditions. There is a stigma attached to asking for help that we must address, and we must be careful that we do not make people feel stupid or guilty and, by doing so, put them off asking for help.

Indeed, help is on offer, but so many people who suffer from COPD do not know what help is available, what support they can get and how they can manage their own conditions.

I have some questions for the Government. What is it doing, and what more can it do, to ensure that people suffering from COPD are aware of the support that they can get? What are we doing to ensure earlier diagnosis of COPD, as we know that an earlier diagnosis is key to people managing their conditions? Finally, I would like to know whether the Government acknowledges the issues relating to stigma that I have raised and what steps it is taking to remove stigma.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Clare Adamson, who joins us remotely.

17:55

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I congratulate my colleague Emma Harper on securing the debate and commend her for her on-going commitment to COPD and lung health through her work on the cross-party groups in this session and the previous session. I thank my colleagues across the chamber who have raised many issues that I feel very strongly about. As a member for a constituency in industrial Lanarkshire, I know all too well some of the issues around our industrial heritage that have been mentioned.

I thank Stephen Kerr for a very personal reflection on his own experience with COPD.

I will give a little sliver of hope to those who may be suffering from COPD, because I want to talk about COPD choirs. I think that the first such choir that I saw was at an event that was hosted by Ms Harper a number of years ago. Members of the Borders Cheyne Gang choir performed and shared their experience with me.

As the convener of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee, I am very aware of the role that culture can and should play in wellbeing. The Government has put building a wellbeing nation at the heart of its policy making across portfolios.

A COPD choir is an incredible way to improve the lives of COPD patients. In 2014, Tayside Healthcare Arts Trust had a nine-week programme, including—*[Inaudible.]*—to a choir—*[Inaudible.]* I highlight that project because members can see on YouTube how brilliant it was and hear first hand about the wonderful experiences of those who participated in it. I urge colleagues to look at that and at the Cheyne Gang.

The British Lung Foundation has noted:

“Music and other creative activities can make you feel healthier and more positive. There’s increasing evidence that singing regularly as part of a group is good for your general health and wellbeing. It seems to be especially good at improving your quality of life if you’re living with a lung condition.”

Singing as a group is good for people with no experience of singing as well as those who have loved music their whole life. In assessing the effects, sufferers were asked to explain what the choir had meant to them. Many people with a lung condition say that singing helps them to feel less short of breath and in more control of their breathing. It helps by teaching people to breathe more slowly and deeply, improves their sense of control of their breathing, reduces anxiety and potential feelings of panic, and improves their posture to help them breathe more efficiently. It also simply helps people to feel more positive.

People say that singing is uplifting and joyful. They feel positive during the singing session and a positive mood continues afterwards, and it helps them feel less depressed, less stressed, less anxious and, I hope—I say this to Mr Kerr—less stigmatised.

Whether a person’s choice is “Yes Sir, I Can Boogie” or Gaelic waulking songs, music permeates our culture. Wellbeing needs the arts. COPD choirs can bring community, friendship, fun, enjoyment, resilience and happiness, and improve health. I ask the minister, “What’s not to like?” Can we please have COPD choirs in every health board area in Scotland?

I have a final message in the spirit of another activity: “Keep singing!”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am sure that Monica Lennon will bear that in mind.

17:59

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): [*Inaudible.*]—burst into song, Presiding Officer.

I, too, thank Emma Harper for securing a really important debate ahead of world COPD day, which is tomorrow. I declare an interest as a lung champion. I know that there are many of us in the chamber, and that is a positive.

I thank Asthma UK, the British Lung Foundation Scotland and Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland not only for their briefings, but for all the work that they do every day of the year.

I had a speech written, but in members' business debates it is necessary to go with the flow and to respond to colleagues. Stephen Kerr's speech was really powerful. They say that the personal is political, and he has left us with a lot to reflect on. I look forward to hearing what the minister says about the issue of stigma. My dad also had COPD. He was a heavy smoker and a heavy drinker, and although we could look at all the lifestyle issues that were going on there, I know that COPD can be a horrible condition that has a serious impact on quality of life.

However, we know that, with the correct diagnosis and the correct treatment and self-management, we can help people to live as well as possible. Therefore, it was good to hear from Clare Adamson about the Cheyne Gang choir, which sounds like a lot of fun. Last week, during the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP26—some young people sang to me at an event that Asthma UK and the British Lung Foundation hosted in Òran Mór, outside the official COP venue. I will not sing it, but the children sang to me:

"Pollution, pollution.
It damages our lungs.
Save the environment,
Plant more trees.
Stop idling and turn engines off."

It sounds better when you hear the children singing it. I tweeted it at the time.

At that panel event, I was struck by something said by a wee boy, who I think was 12 years old. He said that there are more inhalers in the school cupboard than there were when he started primary school. That is not so much about COPD, but it tells us that, although we have known about industrial injury and we know about things that are badged as lifestyle issues, such as smoking and drinking, when it comes to what we need to do to tackle environmental pollution, we cannot ignore the science. It is road safety week, too. Perhaps the minister will take back to her ministerial colleagues the message that we need to be joined up in making sure that we give our children the

best start in life so that they do not grow up to develop conditions such as COPD.

Some great work is being done. I was pleased to hear Stephen Kerr and others talk about the important role of Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland in providing advocacy and practical support. I hope that the minister will join me in recognising the brilliant model of service that we have in the hospital to home service. I would like to hear what more the Government can do to support that important work.

Given my role on lung health as a pulmonary rehab champion, it would be remiss of me not to ask what action is under way to get pulmonary rehab services restarted urgently and to support those services with additional investment. I promise that I will not sing, but it sounds as though we are all on the same hymn sheet when it comes to the action that needs to be taken. I agree with Clare Adamson that there is a lot to be hopeful about, but, as Carol Mochan said, the issue is one of poverty, class and health inequality, and we need to know what targeted action will be taken to address it.

18:03

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): I thank Emma Harper for bringing the debate to the chamber. COPD was already a hugely important topic and, with the Covid pandemic, it will be something of a long player because of the severity of the problem that we face today and in the future.

Asthma UK and the British Lung Foundation have published the results of the first ever survey to be undertaken to discover the impacts of COPD. The study, which is the largest to have been conducted in the UK, reveals the real picture as regards the levels of fundamental care that are required and highlights what support people who suffer from what is a harrowing disease receive in dealing with this common, debilitating lung condition.

The results make for grim reading. It is estimated that, across our country, some 140,000 people are currently living with this long-term chronic lung condition and, worryingly, that figure could be far higher. The findings reveal that more than four in five people are missing out on the basics of care as defined by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, and they highlight the fact that the five fundamentals of COPD care are simply not being met. That is unacceptable, given that COPD has a massive impact on a person's quality of life and can often be fatal.

The report also highlights that, despite the growing numbers diagnosed, COPD is often misunderstood among the wider public, with nearly

half of sufferers believing that people thought badly of them because they had the condition.

Sadly, many people are misdiagnosed the first time, with some being dismissed as merely having a chest infection or cough. That is largely down to spirometry not being available to them at the appropriate time.

The report also reveals that more than 58 per cent of Scots admitted that their mental health had worsened since their diagnosis, with more than a third having had to leave their employment permanently, while others stopped any volunteering activities.

It is clear that we cannot carry on like this—the poor levels of COPD diagnosis and care must be urgently addressed by the Scottish Government and health boards. Asthma UK and the British Lung Foundation have outlined a strong case for tackling this worrying situation, and they are rightly repeating their calls for a national lung health screening programme to be undertaken in Scotland.

One of the reasons why I am so passionate about the topic is the current high prevalence of the condition in my constituency, particularly in Stranraer and across the south-west corner of Scotland. Why that is the case, no one can be certain. However, as we have heard, a 50-strong team of scientists and researchers, led by Professor John Lockhart from the school of health and life sciences at the University of the West of Scotland, is working to unlock the mystery of why rural south-west Scotland has become such a hotspot. Emma Harper touched on the school visits that the team carries out, and I was delighted to attend Kirkiner school with John to raise the profile of his work. He believes that the cause could be genetic, environmental or even agriculture related.

The outbreak of Covid-19 further highlights the dangers of this respiratory disease, especially among the vulnerable, who were asked to shield and were rightly prioritised for vaccination and subsequent booster jags. Alarming, the high death rate from Covid in Stranraer, which is nearly four times higher than elsewhere, could point to the town's poor and unexplained lung health. That is why I have been campaigning for several years now.

Back in 2018, I first called a meeting with Dumfries and Galloway NHS Board, Professor Lockhart and, if I remember correctly, Emma Harper's sister Dr Phyllis Murphie, who is a leading light in respiratory conditions. I know that from personal experience, due to her support and assistance with my obstructive sleep apnoea, for which I will be forever grateful. We looked at the

possibility of creating a centre of excellence for lung health in Stranraer.

Emma Harper: Will the member take an intervention?

Finlay Carson: Certainly, if the Presiding Officer will give us time for it.

Emma Harper: Would Mr Carson like me to pass his message on to my sister?

Finlay Carson: Absolutely. I am sure that my wife would also like to pass on her thanks, because I sleep a lot better than I used to, and she certainly does as well.

I am pleased that Emma Harper recognised that there is the chance of a centre of excellence. Indeed, I have asked the First Minister and successive health ministers to look at the establishment of such a facility.

A physical presence in Stranraer would help to build on the creation of a dedicated COPD-focused training hub, established under the BREATH project to increase research, public awareness and enterprise focus on lung-related life-threatening diseases. The centre would be able to gather important data from not only Dumfries and Galloway but Ayrshire and Arran and Northern Ireland, where a similarly high number of cases is reported.

It is estimated that a centre of excellence would cost in the region of £4 million to set up, which, in the wider picture of health funding, is a small price to pay. There could also be a number of commercial possibilities to ensure sustainability, such as using the lab facilities to generate income through local agriculture businesses and the like.

I am not alone in the desire to see such a centre. Professor Lockhart has stated:

"The creation of a COPD Centre of Excellence ... would be welcome news."

He has also said:

"Such a facility could cater for long needs by realising local potential, including stimulating innovation across the region by facilitating patient care and increasing research, public awareness and enterprise ... The BREATH project is already collaborating on research, educating young people and harnessing complementary resources and expertise, with a mission to alleviate the impact of what is an incurable lung condition."

Those are wise words, and I sincerely hope that they will lead to wise actions in the future.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Maree Todd to respond to the debate. I will let her choose whether to do so through the medium of song.

18:09

The Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport (Maree Todd): I will definitely not respond through the medium of song, Presiding Officer. Members would all be most troubled if I did. I did love Clare Adamson's contribution to the debate, however. She brought a very different view, and it was delightful to hear. I hope that COPD choirs spread throughout the country.

I am delighted to respond to the debate, and I thank Emma Harper for lodging the motion. It is very important that we raise awareness of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and I join those who are in the chamber in acknowledging world COPD day, which takes place tomorrow.

Many issues have been raised during the debate, and I will try to respond to all of them. I am more than happy to discuss them with members after the debate, should I run short of time in responding to the issues.

This year's theme of "Healthy Lungs: Never More Important" highlights the impact that Covid-19 has had on the nation's lung health. The challenges that are faced by those living with respiratory conditions such as COPD during the pandemic have been incredibly difficult to deal with. More than 80,000 people in Scotland with a respiratory condition were asked to shield—the largest group of people within the shielding list. Covid-19 has undoubtedly impacted access to treatment and care, with some people facing stark choices: travel to hospital sites for treatment or stay home and miss out on potentially crucial interventions. In addition, we know that shielding can have significant impacts on physical and mental health. The impact of Covid-19 on the delivery of care and treatment for people with COPD continues to be significant. However, respiratory services have continued throughout the pandemic at urgent suspected cancer clinics and out-patient services for urgent respiratory concerns, with hospital and community respiratory teams playing a key role in the Covid-19 response.

As has been highlighted by several members, third sector organisations have continued to provide invaluable support to our NHS through this difficult time and to those living with respiratory conditions. I commend, for example, Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland's hospital to home service.

In Scotland, we tackle the fundamentals through our priorities and commitments, as set out in our first "Respiratory Care Action Plan", which was published in March this year. My thanks go to everyone who offered invaluable contributions on the development of the plan. The plan sets out key priority areas for prevention, diagnosis, treatment

and care for people living with respiratory conditions.

I thank Asthma UK, the British Lung Foundation, Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland, the Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland and others for the important work that they do to support people with respiratory conditions and their families and friends. We are particularly grateful for their work with us to ensure that people with lived experience of respiratory conditions are closely involved as we make progress against the commitments that are set out in the "Respiratory Care Action Plan". A key part of the plan is ensuring early and accurate diagnosis of COPD. We know that that can enable treatment and support to begin before the disease has progressed. When people are given information about their condition early, they have much more opportunity to explore self-management techniques and possibly to avoid more intensive treatments. On diagnosis, people should then enter an appropriate treatment pathway, supported by safe, effective prescribing.

Of course, management and diagnosis have been disrupted by the Covid pandemic, as spirometry is an aerosol-generating procedure. There is not a single area of this pathway that has not been impacted. We face significant challenges in providing appropriate treatment and care as we recover from the pandemic. As we are all aware, we are not quite through and out of it, so there is likely to be pent-up demand, and there are still complexities with infection control. There is likely to be a rate of deconditioning within the respiratory community, and the preventative programmes such as pulmonary rehab have been impacted. The third sector and virtual programmes will play a vital role in preventing and stabilising that deconditioning.

On pulmonary rehabilitation, the respiratory care pathway offers a structured exercise and education programme that is designed for people living with a respiratory condition. Throughout the programme, participants are offered advice about specific medications and how to use them, with information on diet, weight management and mental health support.

Pulmonary rehab is one of the most effective forms of management for people living with respiratory conditions and COPD, in particular: 90 per cent of people completing the programme experience improved exercise capacity and increased quality of life. On the issue of availability, our priority is to ensure that people get the right care, at the right time, as close to home as possible.

We know that most cases of COPD are caused by inhaling pollutants. Fumes, chemicals and dust found in many work environments are contributing factors for many individuals who develop COPD.

Genetics may also play a role in an individual's susceptibility, even if the person has never smoked or been exposed to strong lung irritants in the workplace.

To reduce exposure to known risk factors such as tobacco, air pollution, and respiratory infections, we must also collaborate across multiple sectors. As others have said, the majority of COPD cases—90 per cent—are caused by the toxins in tobacco smoke. It would be remiss of me not to highlight that point. From the moment that the toxins in tobacco smoke enter the mouth, they damage tissue and cells all the way to the lungs. As a result, smoking causes lung diseases, including the majority of COPD cases.

Smoking makes chronic lung diseases more severe and increases the risk of respiratory infections. Every year in Scotland, tobacco use is associated with 108,000 smoking attributable hospital admissions and 9,332 smoking-attributable deaths—that is a fifth of all deaths.

This year's programme for government committed to a refreshed tobacco action plan, built on the pillars of prevention, protection and cessation, to achieve our target of lowering Scotland's smoking rate to 5 per cent or less by 2034 and putting tobacco out of sight and out of mind for our future generations. My colleague Carol Mochan is absolutely right to raise the issue of health inequality in that context. I share her passion for tackling that problem. Tackling health inequalities needs to be a golden thread through all that we do.

Stephen Kerr spoke very powerfully about the issue of stigma. Stigma can deter people from taking up smoking, which can be a helpful thing, but he is right to say that it can also make it more difficult for smokers to stop. There needs to be a balance, as in all issues. Monica Lennon spoke about the fact that smoking is a generational issue.

I am running short of time—as I predicted—so I will not talk much about flu vaccinations. We have heard plenty about the flu vaccination programme in Parliament today. It is the biggest-ever flu vaccination programme carried out in Scotland. It is very important that people with lung conditions get the flu vaccine, and we are well on our way to ensuring that that happens.

I again thank Emma Harper for lodging the motion for this important debate and for providing an opportunity for us to talk about the challenges that those living with COPD face.

Meeting closed at 18:18.

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