



OFFICIAL REPORT  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Meeting of the Parliament (Hybrid)

Thursday 9 December 2021

Session 6



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# Scottish Parliament

Thursday 9 December 2021

*[The Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 11:40]*

## General Question Time

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

The first item of business is general questions.

### National Health Service Recovery Plan

1. **Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its national health service recovery plan. (S6O-00514)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Humza Yousaf):** As the NHS recovery plan states, we committed to reporting progress against commitments in the plan on an annual basis. The plan was published at the end of August this year. Therefore, we would aim to provide the first official annual update next summer.

**Neil Bibby:** Under the present Government, 1,300 beds have been cut over the past 10 years. That is one in six beds at the Inverclyde Royal hospital and one in five at the Royal Alexandra hospital in Paisley. Before the winter crisis struck, the Royal College of Emergency Medicine said that Scotland needed 1,000 extra beds. Is it the Government's intention to reverse the cuts to bed numbers? If so, by how much, and when?

**Humza Yousaf:** This Government has an impeccable record in ensuring that the NHS is well resourced. We will no doubt hear more about that in the budget statement from the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy this afternoon. We have record staffing under this Government and the highest-paid staff anywhere in the United Kingdom.

Regarding beds, the Government's determination, both pre-Covid and on a continuing basis, is that patients are treated close to their home, in the community, as best as they possibly can be. That means a reduction in the number of beds in our hospitals. We are desperately trying to work with local authorities, health boards and health and social care partnerships to move from our acute sites people who can be clinically and safely discharged into our community and to reduce the number of delayed discharges. If we do that, we free up hospital beds.

I spoke this morning to Jane Grant, chief executive of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde. She made the offer that, if any member—including Neil Bibby, I am sure—wishes to speak to her about any of the pressures in the board's acute sites, including the RAH, she would be happy to speak to them.

**Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP):** I ask the Scottish Government for an update on the provision of increasing support to general practice from a range of healthcare professionals, including pharmacists and physiotherapists.

**Humza Yousaf:** The member raises an incredibly important point. We know how vital the contributions of our multidisciplinary teams are. That takes me back to the point about keeping patients and the public in our communities, as opposed to their having to go into hospital and to acute sites.

In addition to the £155 million provided to health and social care partnerships to recruit multidisciplinary teams this year, our winter action plan has made additional funding available to assist with the recruitment of extra

“pharmacists to help with patients' repeat prescriptions and medicine reviews ... as well as physiotherapists to treat musculoskeletal issues in the community”,

thus further accelerating our aim

“to have Board-delivered pharmacy and nursing support in all 925 of Scotland's General Practices”.

### Councillors (Pay and Conditions)

2. **John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the resolution at the recent Scottish National Party conference reportedly calling on the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to work together “to ensure that the pay and conditions for councillors will significantly improve”.(S6O-00515)

**The Minister for Social Security and Local Government (Ben Macpherson):** The Scottish Government is committed to fair pay and conditions for our councillors. I reiterate that I am open to discussing with COSLA how we might support it to further consider the issue, including by considering making improvements that will help to increase the diversity of councillors. For context, we introduced a new mechanism in 2017 that ensures that councillors' pay is increased annually in line with the percentage increase in the median annual earnings of public sector workers in Scotland. I look forward to working with COSLA further on this important issue.

**John Mason:** I accept that the minister is relatively recently in his post, but the issue has

been dragging on for quite some time, and I would have hoped for a little more urgency than his being “open to discussing” it. Can he say that there will be a serious uplift in councillors’ pay, perhaps in April 2023?

**Ben Macpherson:** For context and fairness, it is important to state that my predecessor, Mr Stewart, looked at the issue very seriously and, of course, we have had the pressing issue of the pandemic in recent times as a factor in those considerations.

I understand that COSLA’s barriers to elected office special interest group is due to publish its findings shortly. As soon as that information is available, I will consider it carefully and arrange a meeting with our partners in COSLA to jointly review and discuss what steps we can take to address the matter.

**Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green):** In a recent Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee evidence session on the issue, the committee heard that underrepresented groups, such as women and young people, are particularly affected and are put off standing for local government because of low remuneration. How can councillor remuneration be reviewed? Will the minister meet me to discuss that process further, please?

**Ben Macpherson:** It is vital that, collectively, we encourage a wider range of people to seek election, including more women and young people, so that councils can better reflect the society that we live in. Councillors’ pay is important, of course, but it is not the only barrier to the lack of diversity among councillors in Scotland. As I have said, the issue is important and recognised. That is why I am certainly open to, and enthusiastic about, exploring it further with COSLA, which, as I said, has been reviewing the issue in its barriers to elected office special interest group. I look forward to engaging with it shortly.

#### **Argyll and Bute (Policy Development)**

3. **Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how it is ensuring that the views of Argyll and Bute’s diverse communities are taken into account in the development of its policies. (S6O-00516)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government (Shona Robison):** It is critical that we involve communities in the development of our policies, so we regularly engage with partners, including local government, community groups, third sector colleagues and young people through, for example, our young islanders network. The Scottish Government carries out all appropriate impact assessments in

developing or updating policies, strategies or services, including equality impact assessments and island communities impact assessments, which is in line with the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018.

**Jenni Minto:** Argyll and Bute is a place of beauty and isolation but also of many diverse communities that depend on local jobs and services. Infrastructure needs investment, and there has been an acceleration in the price of housing, perhaps as a result of the pandemic. Without intervention, it may become more difficult for local people to stay in their own communities. How will national planning framework 4 reverse that? What advice does the cabinet secretary have to ensure that my constituents’ voices in Argyll and Bute are heard?

**Shona Robison:** Jenni Minto has made important points. We have, of course, committed to delivering 110,000 affordable homes by 2032, 10 per cent of which will be in remote, rural and island communities. Delivering that is part of a £3.44 billion investment in this parliamentary session. Some £30 million of that investment will support the continuation of the rural and islands housing funds, which have been described in a Scottish Land Commission report as “game changers” for community-led housing development.

We are also investing £30 million of capital through the islands programme, and draft national planning framework 4 supports the repopulation of rural Scotland, including an updated approach to providing quality homes, and embeds an infrastructure-first approach in development planning. I encourage members to highlight to their constituents that the public consultation and engagement opportunities to help to inform NPF4 will run until the end of March next year.

#### **Superfast Broadband (Orkney)**

4. **Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government what progress is being made on the roll-out of superfast broadband in Orkney. (S6O-00517)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy (Kate Forbes):** Work is under way through the reaching 100 per cent north contract to bring subsea cables to Eday, Flotta, Hoy, Rousay, Sanday, Shapinsay and Stronsay, with survey work now complete and build currently scheduled to begin next summer, weather conditions permitting.

In the meantime, the reaching 100 per cent Scottish broadband voucher scheme will ensure that anyone on Orkney can access superfast broadband. We recently announced a three-month extension to the interim voucher portion of the

scheme—the closing date is now 31 March 2022—to ensure that everybody, particularly those in the north of Scotland and on our islands, can have more time to take advantage of that scheme.

**Liam McArthur:** I thank the cabinet secretary for her response and for her willingness to meet me, Orkney Islands Council and Highlands and Islands Enterprise over the summer to discuss how 100 per cent broadband coverage might be achieved in the islands that I represent. From those discussions, she will recall concerns that the proposed fibre roll-out will leave unconnected many households and settlements in Orkney and that the voucher schemes risk being too piecemeal to plug the gaps. What progress has been made in identifying ways to allow local co-ordination of the resources that are needed to ensure that every household in Orkney gets access to the superfast broadband that has been promised?

**Kate Forbes:** I thank the member for that question and for his constructive engagement in two meetings that I have had this year with him and with officials from Orkney Islands Council and Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

Presiding Officer, going into minute detail would probably take longer than you would like. However, now that we have certainty over what the R100 north contract will deliver, we are keen to work strategically with Orkney Islands Council and with suppliers—around 70 are currently registered to deliver superfast broadband services through the scheme—to ensure that we maximise the reach of the scheme as far as possible. I am happy to look in more detail at any specific issues that are raised.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** Will the cabinet secretary confirm that the number of premises that will be reached by 2026 under the lot 1 contract has fallen by more than a third? Will she further confirm, as her Government appears to be giving both dates, whether the target for delivery of lot 1 has been delayed from the end of this year to the end of the 2026 calendar year or to the end of the 2026-27 financial year?

**Kate Forbes:** This is a good opportunity to remind the member that telecoms and broadband are reserved to the United Kingdom Government, but that the Scottish Government has stepped in to deliver the reaching 100 per cent programme because of failure to date.

As of 2 December 2021, superfast coverage in the Orkney Islands stands at 66 per cent—up from 11 per cent in 2014. The £384 million R100 north contract is expected to deliver 59,276 connections in total. Build is expected to be completed by 2026-27.

## **Ethnic Minority Communities (North East Scotland)**

**5. Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update—[*Interruption.*]

**The Presiding Officer:** Sorry, Ms Chapman. Colleagues, I would like to hear Ms Chapman's question, please. I would be grateful for your co-operation.

**Maggie Chapman:** Thank you, Presiding Officer.

To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the actions under way to tackle the reported inequalities experienced by ethnic minority communities in the north-east. (S6O-00518)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government (Shona Robison):** We are determined to play our part in eradicating structural and systemic racism across Scotland, informed by the views and lived experiences of minority ethnic people. Through our immediate priorities plan for race equality, we aim to ensure an equal and anti-racist recovery from Covid-19. That is backed by our £21 million equality and human rights fund, which has enabled Grampian Regional Equality Council to carry out valuable work in gathering lived experiences alongside quantitative data, providing the evidence that is needed for the development of strong and effective anti-racist policies to improve outcomes for minority ethnic people in the north-east.

**Maggie Chapman:** GREC has recently highlighted significant racial inequalities in the region across housing, health, education, employment, justice and more. For example, ethnic minorities have suffered worse job losses during Covid; Africans have the highest percentage of degree-educated people but the highest unemployment rates; hate crime is up 14.5 per cent in Aberdeen and 23 per cent in Aberdeenshire; and asylum-seeker men who were recently accommodated in an Aberdeen hotel will have minimal support, provided by a private company, with only £8 a week to live on in the initial stage of their application process.

**The Presiding Officer:** Question, please.

**Maggie Chapman:** Will the cabinet secretary outline what more we can do to ensure that those vulnerable people are not further marginalised?

**Shona Robison:** Maggie Chapman has raised the important issue of asylum seekers and refugees. I am happy to write to her with more information about the work that we are doing in relation to people who have no recourse to public funds and preventing destitution.

Maggie Chapman also mentioned hate crime and, again, I am happy to write to her with more details. The rise in hate crime is concerning and we should all take that very seriously.

Finally, on support during the pandemic, we supported the development of the ethnic minority national resilience network to help individuals, families and organisations during this time, and we provided more than £312,000 to support minority ethnic communities. There was a particular focus on young people and older people who are experiencing isolation. Again, I am happy to write to Maggie Chapman with more detail.

### Stroke

**6. Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government how it plans to improve the support that is available for people who are affected by strokes. (S6O-00519)

**The Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport (Maree Todd):** The Scottish Government is committed to ensuring that people who have had a stroke receive the best care as quickly as possible. We are delivering our programme for government commitments on stroke, including the delivery of a national thrombectomy service which, to date, has received more than £9 million of investment. A national service is expected by 2023. We are developing a progressive stroke pathway document, which will set out our vision for what stroke services in Scotland should deliver across the patient pathway, including access to stroke rehabilitation and support for people who have experienced a stroke.

**Alexander Stewart:** A vision report on stroke is one thing, but delivery of real change on the ground is quite another. What additional funding will be attached to the progressive stroke service? Who will be held accountable for its delivery? Will the minister put in place a reporting framework to ensure that the necessary improvements take place?

**Maree Todd:** Alexander Stewart is absolutely correct. We have invested a great deal of money. I already mentioned the £9 million that has gone into delivering a thrombectomy service. Our stroke improvement programme's annual report describes very accurately what is happening on the ground. The key findings from the most recent report show that, despite the immense challenges that our national health service is facing, we have delivered some increases and improvements in the delivery of care to Scottish stroke care standards. We should take this opportunity in the chamber to commend all those people who are working on the ground to deliver improvements in services, despite the immense challenges that we face.

### Breast Screening (Self-referral)

**7. Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government when the self-referral breast screening programme will resume for non-symptomatic women over 70 who have had breast cancer. (S6O-00520)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Humza Yousaf):** The breast screening programme in Scotland routinely invites women aged 50 to 70 for screening, in line with the United Kingdom National Screening Committee recommendations, which are based on the best available evidence about the benefits and risks of breast screening for women at different ages.

The option for women aged 71 and over to self-refer into the breast screening programme is currently paused, so that, while Covid-19 continues to impact capacity, services can prioritise appointments for women for whom the benefits of screening are already clearly established. The pause applies to women over 71 who have previously had breast cancer and have completed their recommended period of annual surveillance. Self-referrals will resume once the time between screening rounds for eligible women is 39 months across all screening centres.

We continue to emphasise that it is important for women of all ages to be breast aware, and to report any possible symptoms of breast cancer to their general practitioner as soon as possible, so that those can be investigated.

**Mark Griffin:** I have been contacted by three different women in their 70s who have all previously had breast cancer and were advised by their clinicians that they needed regular screening. Now they have been told that the only way for anyone over the age of 70 to be screened is if they find a lump. Does the cabinet secretary understand how worried those women are about not being screened regularly? Their fears of a recurring breast cancer being missed do not go away when they turn 71. What does he plan to do to reinstate the screening programme in order to give those women the protection and reassurance that they deserve?

**Humza Yousaf:** I think that Mark Griffin has written to me with the details of one constituent, and I am due to reply to him shortly. If he wishes to write to me with further details of the constituents he referenced, I will be happy to look into those cases.

Any woman who is a breast cancer survivor has increased screenings and annual surveillance for a period of five years post-treatment and we expect that to continue whether they are under or over the age of 70.

I reiterate what I have said before. Any woman who is concerned about symptoms should speak to her general practitioner, and the clinical pathways should be available for those symptoms to be further investigated.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes general questions.

## First Minister's Question Time

12:00

### Oil and Gas Industry

1. **Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** Does the First Minister believe that it is a "hard right" policy to support Scotland's oil and gas industry?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I believe that supporting a just transition away from fossil fuels to renewable and low-carbon sources of energy is a policy that we should all support. What is essential is that we support the people who currently work in the oil and gas sector and that we do not substitute domestic production with imported production.

For the sake of our planet and that of future generations, we must accelerate the transition, which is what this Government is investing in. The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy will, in the budget later this afternoon, set out our next investments in the transition to net zero. That is what I am focused on.

I have just come from witnessing the demolition of the chimney at Longannet this morning. Not very long ago, we would not have been able to contemplate keeping the lights on in Scotland without Longannet, and we certainly would not have been able to contemplate that coal-fired power station closing without that causing significant unemployment. We can do a just transition. We also owe it to the oil and gas sector to support it in the transitional phase.

**Douglas Ross:** Last week, when we heard that oil and gas jobs in Scotland could be at risk, the First Minister's coalition partners celebrated. I repeat: they celebrated. Patrick Harvie—one of our ministers—claimed that supporting Scotland's oil and gas industry was a policy of the "hard right". Such statements are an insult to every single worker in the North Sea sector. They should be condemned by the First Minister—but, as we have just heard, they will not be. That is because, as the Greens keep boasting, they have forced the Scottish National Party into

"a massive change in direction"

over oil and gas. Can I ask the First Minister what matters more to her Government—jobs for the Scottish Greens, or jobs for north-east workers?

**The First Minister:** It is clear that references to being right wing are references that Douglas Ross seems to take very personally. I will leave people to judge why that might be the case. [*Laughter.*]

Let me also say, as an aside, that what is potentially putting North Sea oil and gas workers' jobs at risk right now is the United Kingdom Government's failure to invest, as a priority, in the Acorn carbon capture project in the north-east. Perhaps there should be a bit less political rhetoric from Douglas Ross and a bit more encouragement of his colleagues in the UK Government—if they can find time away from their other pursuits at the moment—to prioritise investments that Scotland badly needs. For my part, I will continue to ensure that the Scottish Government is investing.

We do not do anybody in the oil and gas sector any favours if we pretend that the just transition is not necessary, or if we pretend that it is not necessary for the future of the planet that we accelerate that just transition. We must ensure that no one is left behind in that transition, and we must make sure that our energy needs are met in renewable and low-carbon ways. That is what this Government is focused on, which will be reflected in the budget this afternoon.

I am proud of the progress that Scotland has made so far on the journey to net zero, but we have much still to do. As we mark, today, the definitive end of coal power in Scotland, I think that we should have great confidence in what can be done when we show leadership, plan properly and make investments. That is what this Government is going to do. I will leave the Conservatives to worry about the many other things that they have to worry about right now.

**Douglas Ross:** It is disgusting that the First Minister joked and laughed about a comment by one of her ministers that has been so hurtful to people who are employed in the North Sea sector and is so harmful for such an important industry—*[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** I am sorry, Mr Ross. Could you give me a moment? There is quite a lot of noise in the chamber. I would like to make sure that we can all hear Mr Ross's question. I will be grateful if you begin again, Mr Ross.

**Douglas Ross:** I will begin again, because SNP and Green members do not like to hear this.

I thought that it was very distasteful for the First Minister to laugh and joke about a comment that has been so hurtful to people in the North Sea oil and gas sector. Now, for the first time, we have Scottish Government ministers who want fewer jobs and less investment in Scotland. The Greens are against building any new roads. They want to stop people driving, even though those people cannot get to work without cars. They believe that economic growth is no longer possible and they have also said that Governments cannot run out of money. Now that those extreme economic views

are at the heart of her Government, is not it just a matter of time before the First Minister abandons more Scottish workers, as she has abandoned the oil and gas industry?

**The First Minister:** We have witnessed, and are continuing to witness, many “disgusting” things in politics right now, but none of them is on the part of this Scottish Government. I almost feel a little bit of sympathy for Douglas Ross today, because I know that he must be deeply mortified by the actions and behaviour of his colleagues in the UK Government, but that is no excuse—*[Interruption.]* That is no excuse for throwing around unfounded accusations and trying to cause concern among oil and gas workers.

As First Minister, I am committed to making sure that we have a just transition away from oil and gas, in the same way as we had the transition away from coal power, because the future of our planet demands it. We will make investments to ensure that that is done justly and fairly. If the UK Government wanted to work with us—around carbon capture, for example—that transition would be easier.

I am committed ensuring that we do not leave people behind and that we do not have fewer jobs, and that, instead, we have clean green jobs for the future. Just last Friday, I visited Nigg to mark a major investment there that will mean towers for offshore wind being manufactured in the Highlands. That is the kind of investment that we are supporting and the kind of work that we will do to secure a just transition in Scotland, for the sake of the future of the planet and of generations to come.

**Douglas Ross:** I am sure that the First Minister will welcome the UK Government's investment in the Nigg development, as well. However, the record is very clear. The video will show the First Minister laughing and joking—*[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer:** I am sorry Mr Ross. I am afraid that there is quite a lot of noise in the chamber. We are going to look into having your sound increased. In the meantime, colleagues, I would be very grateful if we could hear Mr Ross speaking. We do not need any other voices while he is speaking.

**Douglas Ross:** Thank you, Presiding Officer. I will repeat my comments.

I hope that the First Minister will also welcome the UK Government's investment in Nigg, and I hope, too, that she will reflect on her own actions, where the video will show that she laughed and joked about Patrick Harvie's comments regarding the north-east and the North Sea sector.

This afternoon, the Government will set out next year's budget. It should be a budget that uses the

biggest-ever block grant from the UK Government to invest in public services; that delivers record spending to restore Scotland's national health service after what will be one of the worst-ever winters; that improves local roads and rebuilds communities by giving local government a fair share; and which supports businesses to create Scottish jobs and provide more opportunities for the next generation. It should be a budget that puts the national interest first—not the narrow interests of the nationalist coalition.

Today, there is a chance to kick-start Scotland's economic recovery from Covid. Will the First Minister take that opportunity or will she give in to the Greens again?

**The First Minister:** When I had the privilege of being in Nigg on Friday, I welcomed the investment of the UK Government, alongside considerable investment by Highlands and Islands Enterprise. However, I also lamented—as did many people there, and as do many people whom I speak to across the energy sector—the lack of UK Government investment in, and commitment to, carbon capture in the Acorn project. We cannot simply pretend that that is not a real issue.

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy will set out the budget to Parliament this afternoon, and it will do all the things that Douglas Ross has just talked about. I hope that he will listen carefully to one thing that the budget will do, which I am proud that we are doing in partnership with the Scottish Greens. After seeing the disgusting—I use the word deliberately—move of the UK Government to take £20 a week away from the poorest families across Scotland and the UK, the budget will devote resources to doubling the Scottish child payment, so the Government will give £20 a week to the poorest families across Scotland. That is the difference between the Scottish Government and the UK Government. I am proud of the budget that the finance secretary will present to Parliament later today.

### Queen Elizabeth University Hospital

2. **Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab):** Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board has been in level 4 special measures for more than two years, since November 2019. The Scottish Government set up an oversight board. When did that oversight board last meet?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** The assurance group that flowed from the oversight board is due to meet on 17 November. It has been a couple months since it has met, if I am correct. More than 80 per cent of all recommendations of the oversight board have already been implemented, just as the recommendations that came from the independent review have been. That is the action that has been taken to address

concerns around the Queen Elizabeth university hospital while we await the work of the independent public inquiry, which Anas Sarwar previously called for.

**Anas Sarwar:** The answer that the First Minister is looking for is that the oversight board that the Scottish Government set up last met in March—nine months ago. The review group to which she has referred has not met for more than two months, and she says that it is due to meet in November. Despite everything that has happened in the past month, the oversight board has not met for nine months and the review group has not met for two months, but the First Minister wants families and staff to believe that the Government has a grip on the crisis.

Last week, the First Minister told us that there had been two healthcare infection incident assessment tool—HIIAT—red warnings and one amber warning in the past year. I learned from the health board yesterday that none of those warnings was about cases that I have raised in the past month—not Andrew Slorance's death with *Aspergillus*, not the case of the child with *Stenotrophomonas* in the past few months and not the case that I raised last week of a child who died with *Serratia*. All of those high-risk bacteria are linked to water in the hospital environment, and none of those cases triggered a HIIAT red warning, despite everything that has happened and despite all of those cases meeting the warning criteria. If that is not the definition of cover-up and denial, what is?

**The First Minister:** I will come to that point directly. People who listened to our—quite constructive, I thought—exchange last week will have heard me set out the exact trigger points for a notification to the Scottish Government.

On the issue of the oversight board, the point is not about meetings but about actions. To be precise, 88 per cent of the oversight board's recommendations have already been completed and the remaining actions do not relate directly to patient safety. The advice, assurance and review group will meet next week, on Friday 17 December, and the interim chief nursing officer will chair the meeting. It is about ensuring that recommendations are implemented, and that is what has happened.

As the Presiding Officer will recall, I set out at some length last week the fact that notifications to Government under the HIIAT procedure happen when two or more linked cases of infection occur, and I set out the number that had happened in the adult hospital. That point is about triggering a notification to the Scottish Government. However, when those notifications do not happen, it does not mean that no action is taken. Health boards have problem assessment groups or other types

of actions that address any issues relating to infections.

It is simply not the case that infections are not taken seriously. As I said last week—a point that Anas Sarwar conceded and agreed with—it will never be possible for any hospital anywhere to eradicate and avoid all cases of infection, despite the best efforts. However, all cases of infection are taken seriously at the Queen Elizabeth university hospital and at every other hospital, which is what I expect.

**Anas Sarwar:** The First Minister was wrong last week, and she is wrong this week, on the criteria for HIIAT red warnings. I have the HIIAT red criteria right in front of me. I would expect the First Minister, as a former health secretary, to know better. It is clear that, if any one of the major criteria is met, the case is classed as HIIAT red. That is any one of the following: risk of transmission, requiring a major clinical intervention, risk to life, rare infection, associated mortality or public interest. Only one of those criteria needs to be met, but I think that more than one—if not all of them—has been met in each of the three cases, yet there has been no HIIAT red warning for any of them. Perhaps the health secretary and the First Minister will review the HIIAT document and come to understand how the procedure works.

Despite all the revelations of the past three months and everything that has happened over the past two years; despite the demands of families and staff for openness; and despite the calls for the First Minister to get a grip of the crisis, the oversight board has not met for nine months, the review group has not met for more than two months and the health board is still not reporting deadly infections in the hospital.

I met the chair and chief executive of the health board yesterday. How can the First Minister still have confidence in them? Their complacent and belligerent attitude demonstrates everything that is wrong with the culture at the top of the health board. Why, after everything that we have learned, does the First Minister continue to take their word over the word of staff, families and patients, who surely deserve better?

**The First Minister:** That is an utter mischaracterisation of my position. I know very well how the framework operates, and what I have set out is the case. As I said a moment ago, 88 per cent of the oversight board's recommendations have already been implemented, and a process of scrutiny in the form of the independent public inquiry is already under way.

We take, and have taken, seriously any and all concerns that are raised about the Queen

Elizabeth university hospital. As I said last week, Anas Sarwar wants to suggest to people that the Queen Elizabeth is somehow less safe than other hospitals, but the evidence does not bear that out. I am unable to comment on individual cases because of patient confidentiality, but all concerns that are raised are taken extremely seriously, which I know will have been discussed with Anas Sarwar yesterday.

I have made it very clear that any member of staff who has concerns and feels that those concerns are not being taken seriously or that they are not being allowed to speak out should feel free to come to me or the health secretary with their concerns.

We will continue to ensure that all actions are taken to deliver high-quality patient care in the Queen Elizabeth university hospital, which clinicians already provide. That is important.

It is important that Anas Sarwar and other members come to the chamber to raise concerns. However, let us not undermine confidence in a hospital that is delivering high-quality care for patients every single day.

### **Covid-19 Measures (Compliance)**

**Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP):** What impact on compliance with Covid rules does the First Minister think there might be following the party scandal that is unfolding at Westminster?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I hope that there is no impact on compliance with Covid protections, because it is really important that we all comply with the protections. People can be angry with politicians—at times, with all politicians—but it is important that people comply with the protections for their own safety, the safety of their loved ones and the country as a whole.

In the omicron variant, we face a serious challenge right now. I will further brief party leaders on the nature and scale of the challenge later this afternoon. Omicron is rapidly spreading and it poses a real difficulty for us. One of the ways in which we can help to slow its transmission is by complying with all the protections. I appeal to people across the country to do so.

### **Haudagain Roundabout**

**Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** The upgrade to Aberdeen's Haudagain roundabout—one of Europe's worst—has had its completion date postponed on five separate occasions already. In September, the Scottish Government told me that it would be completed by the winter. Now we are there, yet the disruption continues and there is no sign of this vital upgrade being completed. Can the First Minister confirm whether

there will be another delay to the completion of the project? Will there be a cost overrun?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** We are at the start of winter. I will ask the Minister for Transport to write directly to Liam Kerr with a full update on the timing and costs that are associated with the Haudagain roundabout, which I know is incredibly important to commuters in Aberdeen.

#### **NHS 24 (Advice)**

**Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab):** I was contacted this week by Mr Ron Park, whose child was being cared for by his mother when they received advice from NHS 24 to go to Stobhill hospital. Clinicians at NHS 24 thought that Mr Park's son might have bacterial meningitis—a life-threatening condition. However, Stobhill hospital phoned minutes later, saying that it would not see the family and that, if they wanted medical attention, they should go to the Royal Alexandra hospital in Paisley, which was 30 minutes away by car. Mr Park's former partner lives in the north-east of Glasgow and cannot drive.

I was deeply alarmed that the family of a child who possibly had a life-threatening meningitis condition would be treated in that manner. What does the First Minister have to say to them?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I absolutely understand the concern and anxiety that would have been caused. Anybody with a sick child will feel that anxiety and will not want it to be compounded by getting wrong advice or getting advice that they believe to be wrong from the national health service.

I am always reluctant to comment too much on individual cases. I do not question what I am being told in the chamber, but I obviously want to understand the full details. If Paul Sweeney wants to write to me or to the health secretary, I undertake to look into the situation, get back to him so that he can update his constituents, and ensure that patients, particularly those with sick children, are getting the right advice and the advice that they need in what, I know, are very stressful times for them.

#### **Road Equivalent Tariff (Pentland Firth)**

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** Road equivalent tariff was introduced on the west coast ferry routes almost 14 years ago. It was promised on Pentland Firth routes four years ago, but there is still no sign of it. As we approach the end of another year, can the First Minister tell my Orkney constituents when the Government will finally deliver the cheaper ferry fares that have been repeatedly promised, year after year?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** As Liam McArthur is aware, we have taken a range of

measures to ensure that ferry fares are more affordable and that ferry travel is more accessible, convenient and easier for his constituents.

The road equivalent tariff has been debated, looked at and considered. As the member will be aware, there are complications with some of the unintended consequences of what road equivalent tariff would deliver, but I will ask the transport minister to write to him with an update on the actions that we are taking to address the affordability of ferry travel for his constituents.

#### **Waiver on Covid-19 Vaccine Property Rights**

**Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP):** What engagement has the Scottish Government had with the United Kingdom Government on the waiver on Covid-19 vaccine property rights?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I have written to the Prime Minister about the issue. I think that I said in the chamber on Tuesday that I would do so, and I made clear my support for the calls. Right now, the omicron variant is reminding us very starkly of the importance of getting vaccines not just to everybody here, in our own country, but to everybody across the world as quickly as possible. This is a really important call, and I hope that the Prime Minister will treat seriously my letter and the calls that are being made more widely. The Scottish Government stands ready to work with the UK Government and do whatever we can to make sure that vaccines get to people across the world as quickly as possible.

#### **Cervical Screening (NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde)**

**Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con):** Cervical cancer screening rates in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde are among the lowest in the country. I have been contacted by many women in my region who are concerned because they are not able to get a local general practitioner appointment for this vital checkup for up to six months. Given that it takes just one missed test to miss a diagnosis and the potential to save someone's life, how can we ensure that, in our earnest efforts to tackle the coronavirus, we are not inadvertently creating a legacy of people dying of undiagnosed cancers, knowing that, for some, it might already be too late?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** That is one of the most serious questions that is being posed to us all right now, and the unavoidable and inescapable implications of dealing with Covid—what it might mean for health and, indeed, the much wider impacts across the population—weigh very heavily on me. I assure the member and the chamber that those considerations are always

very high up in my mind, as they are in the mind of the Government.

Specifically on cervical screening, cancer screening generally is really important. We had to pause the screening programmes for a period during the early part of the pandemic, but they are now operational again. It is important that people can get appointments for cervical and other cancer screening. It is also important that we encourage uptake of screening programmes, and that is particularly true for cervical and breast screening in women. There is a great deal that we need to do, and I repeat my assurance that it is a high priority for us.

### **Just Transition (Longannet)**

**Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** As the Longannet chimney was demolished this morning, I am sure that the First Minister felt that it was an historic moment in our journey towards net zero. It was, however, also a moment to reflect on our gratitude to the workers who kept our lights on for so many decades. Are there lessons for a wider just transition that we can learn from the way in which Longannet was shut back in 2016?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** Yes, there are lessons that we can learn. It was very special to be there today as the chimney came down. I spoke to people who had worked in Longannet themselves, but also to people who had worked there whose parents and grandparents had worked there. It generated power in Scotland for most of my lifetime, until a few years ago. It has been there for more than 50 years, so there were mixed emotions. It is clearly a symbolic moment, because it marks the end of coal power, but people are sad to see the chimney go, not least because it has been a feature of our landscape for these 50 years.

There are lessons to learn; I talked about some of them earlier. Not long ago, it would have been unthinkable that we could have kept the lights on or found employment for people who worked at Longannet. That has been done, so it should inspire us to know that a just transition is possible. However, what has happened at Longannet tells us that we need to manage the process, to plan for it and to make the right investments.

Amid the mixed emotions, there are positive lessons that we must now take the opportunity to learn.

### **David MacBrayne Group (Board Appointments)**

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** The First Minister will be aware of the recent appointments to the board of David MacBrayne group, which include the appointment of a

chairman who is famed for presiding over the ferry fiasco at Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd, and of three non-executive directors, none of whom has island links. Many islanders have seafaring experience, yet the Scottish Government seemed unable to find one to appoint to the board. Why are islanders being overlooked by her Government?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** Although I can understand the concerns that Rhoda Grant has expressed, I do not think that it is the case that islanders are being overlooked. There are rigorous processes that must be gone through before appointments to boards can be made, which we comply with.

I encourage Rhoda Grant—I am sure that she will do this, because I know that she takes her duties extremely seriously—to meet the new chair and the new board members. I hope that they will be able to allay her concerns from the point of view of the attention that they will pay to the needs of island communities as they go about their jobs. I am sure that the Minister for Transport would be willing to have a conversation with her about that, too.

**The Presiding Officer:** Before we go on to question 3, I let members know that, if we have any time remaining after question 7, I will take more supplementary questions from those members who have already requested to ask a question, so there is no need for them to press their request-to-speak buttons again.

### **Heart Valve Disease**

**3. Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** To ask the First Minister what action the Scottish Government is taking to treat people with heart valve disease. (S6F-00551)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** Our heart disease action plan sets out the aim that everyone with suspected heart disease, including people with heart valve disease, should have timely and equitable access to diagnosis, treatment and care. An initial investment of £2.2 million has supported progress on the actions in the plan. We are undertaking work to improve access to cardiac diagnostics and are developing nationally agreed pathways of care for all cardiac conditions.

We have committed more than £1.5 million over five years to support a change in access to and use of data to support improvements in diagnosis, treatment and care for people with all heart conditions. In April 2021, we commissioned Public Health Scotland to deliver the Scottish cardiac audit programme. Significant clinical and patient engagement is currently under way to support its development.

**Rachael Hamilton:** Patients in Scotland with serious heart defects have been told that hospital appointments cannot go ahead in 2022. According to an investigation by the charity Heart Valve Voice, people at risk of heart failure face waits of up to seven months. Despite the challenges of the pandemic and staff working flat out, this is a treatable condition, which can be fatal.

We know that, under the Scottish National Party Government, accident and emergency waiting times have reached their worst level since the SNP came into power. Will the First Minister commit to looking further at the accessibility, diagnosis, treatment and care of patients with serious heart defects, before they end up waiting for hours in A and E?

**The First Minister:** We are doing all of that—I covered some of it in my initial answer.

We know that the number of people who are waiting for more than 12 weeks for cardiology outpatient appointments has increased throughout the pandemic, but there is no current indication that patients with heart valve disease have been told that they cannot have appointments in 2022. Our recovery plan sets out the key actions that we will take to address the backlog in care and meet the on-going healthcare needs of people across Scotland. That is backed by more than £1 billion of targeted investment in total.

I thank Heart Valve Voice for its work and the report that it has produced. We will consider that fully, and I am sure that it will have an important contribution to make to the on-going work that I set out in my initial answer.

### Energy Bills

**4. Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP):** To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's response is to the Citizens Advice Scotland poll, which found that one third of respondents could not afford their energy bills. (S6F-00562)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I am deeply concerned by the impact on households of recent energy price rises. Given that powers relating to the energy market are reserved, I am disappointed not to have seen action from the United Kingdom Government to support low-income households in particular.

The Scottish Government has already taken a number of actions to build on the support that we provided last winter. Our £10 million fuel insecurity fund will ensure that direct financial support is available to those who are at risk of self-disconnecting or self-rationing. We have allocated more than £1 billion since 2009 to tackling fuel poverty and improving energy efficiency. We also continue to fund Home Energy Scotland, which

can provide advice on how to make homes warmer and cheaper to heat.

**Stephanie Callaghan:** The UK Government's cruel and unnecessary £20 cut to universal credit means that many more families are likely to struggle with rising energy bills. Does the First Minister agree that families in that predicament should not suffer in silence but should seek urgent expert counsel from organisations such as Citizens Advice Scotland and the Wise Group?

**The First Minister:** I agree. The UK Government's decision to remove £20 a week from the poorest households, to which I have already referred today, was the biggest overnight cut to welfare in 70 years. It would have been a callous act at any time and was particularly so at a time of rising prices and rising energy bills. It is important that we do not quickly forget that; we should remember that needlessly callous act, which has been carried out on the poorest in our society.

I urge anyone who is concerned about their energy costs to seek support from advice services such as Citizens Advice. We have also launched a campaign to raise awareness of the services that are available to people with financial worries. Home Energy Scotland can refer families for benefit checks and to support from the fuel insecurity fund.

**Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** Rising energy costs hit pensioners in particular, many of whom are housebound. Despite that, according to Age Scotland, at least 123,000 pensioners in Scotland have not claimed pension credit. It is reckoned that 40 per cent of eligible pensioners across the UK do not claim that benefit, which is a gateway to additional benefits.

Does the First Minister agree that the UK Government should be ashamed and that, instead of removing the triple lock on pensions, it should fund a decent basic state pension in the first place?

**The First Minister:** The UK has one of the lowest levels of state pension found anywhere in Europe. It is disgraceful and shameful that the triple lock has been removed.

Christine Grahame makes a good point. Where benefits are available, there are awareness campaigns to encourage people to take them up. We are rightly called on to do that regarding devolved benefits. We have repeatedly called on the UK Government to take a more strategic approach to promoting its benefits. We made that call recently, in partnership with the Northern Irish and Welsh Governments.

Those issues would be less acute if, as Christine Grahame said, the UK had better state pension provision. I do not hold out much hope of a UK Government delivering that in the near future, but perhaps we can do that in a future independent Scotland.

### Small Businesses (Support)

**5. Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister what plans the Scottish Government has to provide support to small businesses in light of reports that 20,000 small businesses ceased trading during the pandemic. (S6F-00555)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** Since the start of the pandemic, businesses have benefited from more than £4.4 billion in Scottish Government support, including an extension of non-domestic rates relief for all retail, leisure, aviation and hospitality premises in 2021-22. The small business bonus scheme is the most generous of its kind in the United Kingdom, offering up to 100 per cent relief to qualifying properties and saving small businesses around £2.5 billion since 2008.

The Scottish Government also provides a range of financial support and advice to small businesses through enterprise agencies and the Business Gateway network. The finance secretary regularly meets business organisations to discuss issues such as economic recovery and will set out what further support will be available in the budget that she will deliver this afternoon.

**Pauline McNeill:** Many of those small businesses are in Glasgow, which suffered the longest and harshest Covid restrictions in Scotland. A recent report suggests that only one in 12 office workers has returned to Glasgow city centre. We have already lost 3,000 jobs from Glasgow airport, adding to concerns about the city's long-term recovery. As a city region, Glasgow is a key driver of the Scottish economy and is crucially important to west central Scotland.

Given that, will the First Minister say whether she agrees that Glasgow, as a key driver for the economy, urgently needs to have a fully resourced recovery plan, with something like a specialist team to co-ordinate recovery and investment, in order to ensure that the city's recovery from the pandemic actually happens?

**The First Minister:** I absolutely agree with the sentiments behind Pauline McNeill's question. I know that the leader of the council, and indeed the council administration, are very focused on supporting recovery in general across Glasgow, and economic and business recovery in particular. Obviously, the support that I referred to earlier supports businesses across Glasgow, and the

rates relief continuation throughout this financial year for retail and aviation will have been particularly important, given the nature of the Glasgow economy. I hope that there will be much in the budget for businesses to welcome in that regard this afternoon.

The Scottish Government needs to and will work closely with Glasgow City Council, and indeed other local authorities, as we come out of Covid. As I mentioned earlier, we still have a challenging period ahead, which is why we are asking people right now to work from home where possible, but as we come out of the pandemic, the focus on recovery and supporting businesses will be one that continues to have high priority.

**Siobhian Brown (Ayr) (SNP):** When will the next phase of Scottish Government funding for the Scotland Loves Local fund occur?

**The First Minister:** The Scotland Loves Local campaign is really important in supporting local businesses and encouraging people to shop locally. The finance secretary will set out all aspects of our funding commitments later this afternoon when she sets out the budget, but supporting local businesses and encouraging people to shop locally will continue to be a key part of what we do.

### International Anti-corruption Day

**6. Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green):** To ask the First Minister how the Scottish Government is marking international anti-corruption day. (S6F-00558)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** The Scottish Government strongly supports the principles underlying international anti-corruption day, as enshrined in the United Nations Convention Against Corruption. It is incumbent on all of us in leadership positions to set high standards, and the Scottish Government will endeavour to operate on the basis of openness, candour and transparency in all that we do.

**Gillian Mackay:** Throughout the public health crisis, the Prime Minister has repeatedly been mired in sleaze and corruption. Covid contracts were handed to Conservative Party donors; public sector roles and peerages were handed to political cronies; and an ethics adviser was shown the door rather than having his verdict of ministerial bullying accepted.

Even more galling than that has been the behaviour amid revelations that the United Kingdom Government does not respect the rules that it has laid down for others. At a time of national crisis, not only did those—[*Interruption.*]

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** Come on. This is nothing to do with—

**The Presiding Officer:** Sorry, Ms Mackay. I ask you to pause for a moment while colleagues remember that we all want to hear your question. If you could begin again. Thank you.

**Gillian Mackay:** Thank you, Presiding Officer.

Even more galling than all of that has been the behaviour amid revelations that the UK Government does not respect the rules that it has laid down for others. At a time of national crisis, not only did those in his inner circle deliberately breach the very rules that they had set down for the public, they have continually tried to cover it up. Now, footage shows them laughing about it while planning their excuses. This is no laughing matter for those of us who have lost a loved one during the pandemic.

Boris Johnson has jeopardised public compliance with Covid measures—[*Interruption.*]

**The Presiding Officer:** Ms Mackay, sorry. First of all, I do not want to have to ask again in this question session for quiet so that we can hear members. However, Ms Mackay, will you please ask a question? Thank you.

**Gillian Mackay:** Boris Johnson has jeopardised public compliance with Covid measures. Does the First Minister agree that it is time for this corrupt Prime Minister to go?

**The First Minister:** Yes, I do. While Gillian Mackay was asking her question, I had members of the Tory group shouting at me from a sedentary position that these issues have nothing to do with us here in the Scottish Parliament. I beg to differ. I think that the principles and values of openness, integrity and transparency matter to all of us who care about democracy in this country.

Boris Johnson has many questions to answer. There are more questions surfacing today around the whole Downing Street wallpaper issue, but I will leave them to one side. I do not think that it is simply a corrupt incumbent of number 10 that has to go; I think that it is time for Scotland to get rid of the whole broken, corrupt Westminster system that is holding us back, and we can do that only by becoming an independent country.

## Health and Wellbeing Census 2021

**7. Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con):** To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Government will withdraw the health and wellbeing census 2021, given reported concerns over school pupils being asked questions relating to sex and relationships. (S6F-00556)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** First, no we will not. Secondly, I make it clear that the questions that have been the focus of much of the commentary on the survey are being asked of 14, 15 and 16-year-olds. The census is not mandatory

for local authorities to use in school or for children, given that parents may or may not consent to their child taking part. Pupils themselves can, if they wish, opt out of the survey.

All Governments have a responsibility—and I think that it is a serious responsibility—to ensure that public service delivery is informed by lived experience. We have two choices: either we can bury our heads in the sand and pretend that young people are not exposed to the issues or pressures that we know that they are exposed to, or we can seek to properly understand the reality that young people face and then provide them with the guidance, advice and services that they need to make safe, healthy and positive decisions. I choose the latter.

The latest information that we have is that 24 local authorities have confirmed that they are taking part in the census, which of course also features extremely important questions about people's experiences of the pressures of schoolwork, bullying and mental health.

**Meghan Gallacher:** Students have contacted me and my colleagues because they are concerned about the explicit nature of the questions. One of the questions asks:

"People have varying degrees of sexual experience. How much, if any, sexual experience have you had?"

- None
- Small amount (e.g. kissing, some intimate touching on top of clothes)
- Some experiences but no sexual intercourse (e.g. touching intimately underneath clothes or without clothes on)
- More experiences, including oral sex
- Vaginal or anal sex"

There have been reports that the supposedly anonymous questionnaire can be traced back to individual pupils, as they must twice enter their student candidate number, which is directly linked to their name. Would the First Minister feel comfortable answering those questions? Can she reassure Parliament that, should a young person complete the forms, they will not be able to be identified?

**The First Minister:** On confidentiality, the questionnaires have been specially designed so that the information that is provided by children and young people is used for statistical and research purposes only. That ensures that any results of the research or resulting statistics will not be made available in a form that identifies individual children and young people.

Let me repeat what I said earlier. The survey is voluntary and is only for secondary year 4 and upwards. Any parent can refuse to give consent

and, of course, any young person can opt not to take part in the survey or opt to skip particular questions in it. It is not mandatory.

I come back to the fundamental point. We can choose to pretend that young people of this age group do not have the experiences that the member has narrated or are not exposed to them online, in the digital world in which we live. We can choose to pretend that young people—sometimes girls in particular—are not subjected to harassment and pressure around sexual matters. We can refuse to ask the questions so that we do not know the answers, or we can get the answers that allow us to better support young people and provide them with the advice, information and guidance that will support and enable them to make positive, healthy choices for the future. I choose the latter.

I ask this seriously of the Conservatives and others: yes, engage in any legitimate concerns around these matters, but do not whip up concern on the part of parents for completely unnecessary reasons. Let us all focus on what matters, which is supporting our young people to make healthy choices in their lives.

### Cycle Helmets

**Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):** Does the First Minister think that it is appropriate for the Scottish Government's active travel minister to turn up to a bikeability event for kids and not join them in wearing a cycle helmet?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I do not know the circumstances of that. There are differences of opinion about the wearing of cycle helmets. I would always expect my ministers to set a good example, but I am happy to look into the particular circumstances and respond in more detail when I have had the opportunity to do so.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes First Minister's question time. We will move on to members' business.

I remind members that this meeting of Parliament is not currently suspended. I ask you to behave, at all times, in a manner befitting parliamentarians.

## Human Rights Day 2021

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** 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 next item of business is a member's business debate on motion S6M-02301, in the name of Fulton MacGregor, on human rights day 2021. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament acknowledges that 10 December 2021 marks Human Rights Day; notes that the theme this year relates to Equality and Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights"; understands that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is the most widely ratified human rights treaty in the world, and recognises that it sets out the specific rights that all children have to help fulfil their potential; welcomes what it sees as the Scottish Government's commitment to the incorporation into law of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child to the maximum extent possible as soon as practicable; believes that a rights-based approach to key social policies is crucial to a future that is based on tolerance, equality, shared values, and respect for the worth and human dignity of all people in Coatbridge and Chryston, Scotland and beyond; notes the work of the First Minister's Advisory Group on Human Rights Leadership and the recommendations of the National Taskforce for Human Rights Leadership, and welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to introduce a new Human Rights Bill in this parliamentary session.

12:47

**Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP):** It is a real privilege to bring this members' business debate to the chamber, and I thank those members across the chamber who supported the motion.

Tomorrow, 10 December, marks human rights day, which is the day in 1948 that the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As members will no doubt know, the declaration was, and still is, a milestone document that proclaims the unchallengeable rights that everyone is entitled to as a human being, regardless of race, religion, sex, gender, sexual orientation, language, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or any other status.

The theme this year relates to equality and to article 1 of the UDHR, which says:

"All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights."

The principles of equality and non-discrimination are at the heart of human rights. Now, more than

ever, we need to show that human rights are at the centre of everything that we do. The pandemic has shown that, as we make a recovery, people and their rights have to be front and centre, to ensure that nobody is left behind.

Just the other day, for example, in the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee, during an evidence session on women's unfair responsibility for unpaid care and domestic work, we heard quite clearly what I think that we already knew, which is that almost every aspect of the pandemic has affected women more than men, from the virus itself to the restrictions imposed. Examples of that include working from home, balancing childcare and home schooling; our front-line workforce being mainly women; and even very simple things, such as women taking their one hour per day of exercise less often than men did. I encourage members to read the Tuesday 7 December evidence session, as I have given just a snippet of it.

Whether it is based in the scientific advice or political decisions, it is clear that the structural bias is there—we cannot get away from that. The fact that restrictions were similar around the world shows that the issue goes beyond individual advisers and Governments.

As we consider more restrictions, we must not make the same mistake. When—or, I hope, if—more restrictions are put in place, we must ensure that they do not unequally harm women and that lessons are learned from the past two years.

More generally, we need to build back and through the pandemic with a human rights grounding. As we remobilise our health services, improve our justice system, move to net zero and take the opportunity to reshape our education system for our children and young people—as we all know, they have sacrificed so much—children must be first and foremost in our considerations. I was glad that reopening schools safely was prioritised above all else earlier this year. On young people and human rights, the Government has shown its approach through its commitment to the incorporation into law of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to the maximum extent that is possible, as soon as is practicable.

I was a member of the committee that considered the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill in the previous parliamentary session. The Parliament agreed unanimously to pass the bill, which sought to remedy any human rights violations that children and young people experience from Government and/or public bodies, to provide for other reporting mechanisms for children's rights violations and to address how Scotland can best protect its young people and their rights. Members do not need me to remind

them that the United Kingdom Government went to court to stop the bill. Perhaps that tells us all that we need to know about the values and priorities of the United Kingdom Government and of the Scottish Government.

The First Minister's advisory group on human rights leadership was established in 2017 to make recommendations on how Scotland can continue to lead by example in human rights. It took a multidisciplinary approach and discussed human rights through economic, social, cultural and environmental factors. In December 2018, the group published its full report, which made seven key recommendations. In response, the First Minister welcomed the proposal of a new statutory human rights framework for Scotland, which would be delivered by an act of the Scottish Parliament. As we know, the Scottish Government also made a commitment in its 2018-19 programme for government to prioritise actions that could be taken to address the human rights and equality impacts of Brexit. The cabinet secretary might speak a bit more about that.

As the motion says, we have seen action through the establishment in 2019 of the national task force for human rights leadership, which took forward the advisory group's recommendations. The task force's remit was to design and deliver detailed proposals for the new statutory human rights framework for Scotland, together with the associated requirements for a public participatory process and for capacity-building initiatives.

The final report of the NTFHRL—if the Presiding Officer does not mind me calling it that—was published on 12 March 2021 and made 30 recommendations, which the Scottish Government has unanimously accepted. When the report was published, Professor Miller noted how remarkable Scotland's increasing confidence in its internationalist approach to human rights leadership is and noted the progress that has been made since devolution. He talked about his experience throughout the process of developing human rights in Scotland from pre-devolution to the present, and he noted that the UK's exit from the European Union, and the Covid pandemic, have put human rights into sharp focus at the forefront.

The establishment of such a new statutory human rights framework is an urgent and essential part of Scotland's values-based and sustainable post-Covid recovery. The UN's view is that the experience of Covid has taught all countries that the societies that coped better were those that had already embedded economic and social rights, which meant that they had increased economic and social resilience. Societies that have already made efforts to reduce structural inequalities are faring better in response to the pandemic.

Out of that work comes the Scottish Government's commitment to introduce a new human rights bill in this parliamentary session. That shows how serious we are about our promise of ensuring fairness for all. So far as is possible within devolved competence, the bill will incorporate into Scots law the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, alongside three further UN human rights treaties, which will strengthen protections for women, disabled people and ethnic minority people. It will include a right to a healthy environment, ensure that older people have access to their human rights so that they can live a life of dignity and independence and include provision to ensure equal access for everyone to the rights that are contained in the bill.

I thank the cabinet secretary and Christina McKelvie for their work in leading on the bill so far. I also wish Christina McKelvie a speedy recovery and return to Parliament to continue leading that work with the cabinet secretary. I am excited about the prospect of the introduction of another transformational bill soon.

12:55

**Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP):** In 1946, two years before the United Nations declaration of human rights was adopted, Eleanor Roosevelt became chairperson of the UN Commission on Human Rights and went on to become the author of the UN declaration. It is remarkable but singularly appropriate that a woman led one of the most important international declarations ever made. In her speech of 1948 in Paris, she said that

"Basic human rights are simple and easily understood: freedom of speech and a free press; freedom of religion and worship; freedom of assembly and the right of petition"

and freedom

"from arbitrary arrest and punishment."

The words are simple and clear but, regrettably, they remain unfulfilled in many and perhaps most corners of our world, 73 years later. Why, for example, is there still arbitrary imprisonment of the likes of Aung San Suu Kyi, Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe and Zhang Zhan? Why do we still have to struggle to enshrine the most basic of rights? I think that the answer lies in the words of Elie Wiesel, who is a Holocaust survivor of Auschwitz and Buchenwald concentration camps. It is a problem of profound indifference. Back in 1999, he said:

"The political prisoner in his cell, the hungry children, the homeless refugees—not to respond to their plight, not to relieve their solitude by offering them a spark of hope is to exile them from human memory. And in denying their humanity, we betray our own."

As members may know, I am concerned about the indifference that is shown by some towards the hard-won rights of women. Rights that have always merited some attention but do not compromise the rights of others are coming under increasing threat. Too often, we are all guilty of that; we pursue the rights of those with whom we sympathise but in such a way that we deny or compromise the equally important rights of others. That is not the path to universal human rights. Freedom that is gained by denying freedom to others is no freedom at all and the antithesis of human rights.

Nelson Mandela was one of the most remarkable men to understand the tyranny of seeking to gain power in order to deny the rights of others. His words at his trial in 1964 are as relevant today as they were then:

"I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities."

It is not enough to celebrate human rights day—we need to stop our indifference to the suffering of others, and we need to aspire to be remembered as Eleanor Roosevelt was remembered by Adlai Stevenson:

"She would rather light candles than curse the darkness."

12:59

**Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con):** I am honoured to represent the Scottish Conservatives in the debate. I support the motion and welcome the Parliament's acknowledgment of human rights day. We must reflect on our progress on human rights and inequalities in our society, but let me be clear: we have vast room for improvement in our goal to become a world leader in human rights.

Throughout this parliamentary session, we have heard from various MSPs, advocacy groups and charities, for example, about the impact that the pandemic has had on many people in Scotland. All of them have been impacted by the pandemic in one way or another. Some stories have been hard to listen to. There are people who have been especially hard hit by the pandemic—young people, women, black and minority ethnic groups, low earners, people with disabilities and lone parents. It must be a priority of the Parliament to ensure that we place a rights-based approach at the heart of our recovery from the pandemic.

Like Fulton MacGregor, I am proud to serve on the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee, and to see the hard work conducted by all the organisations and individuals involved. Their dedication and commitment deserve nothing but our praise and thanks.

The pandemic has further exposed the structural inequalities that exist in Scotland. We now have a unique opportunity to learn from that. It goes without saying that I recognise the work conducted by the First Minister's advisory group on human rights leadership and its recommendation on a national task force for human rights leadership. I support the Scottish Government's commitment to introduce a human rights bill that is based on the recommendations and I eagerly await further details.

However, we must not forget those children who have been needlessly affected by the pandemic and who continue to be affected, even today. I think that I speak for everyone across the chamber when I say that children's rights are of the utmost importance. Distressing evidence suggests that, during the pandemic, there have been increases in child abuse, neglect, exposure to domestic abuse, educational inequalities and digital exclusion. The evidence reminds us of the importance of the incorporation into domestic law of the UNCRC to the maximum extent possible to maximise children's rights across Scotland.

The Scottish Conservatives supported the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill at all stages and worked constructively to amend and improve it throughout its passage through Parliament. Fulton MacGregor mentioned that the Parliament unanimously voted to pass that bill. It was his party that ignored the advice that it was exceeding its legislative competences, and it is his party that is responsible for delaying the incorporation of children's rights into domestic law and delaying the passing of that bill, as we have yet to hear when the bill will return to the Parliament. *[Interruption.]* I am on my last sentences. I am sorry.

The longer we await a revised bill, the longer those rights will be unprotected by domestic law. I call on the Scottish Government to act with urgency and bring the bill back to the Parliament. With my Conservative colleagues, I await further news of when that will be.

I fully support the motion, and I welcome the Scottish Government's commitment and the cross-party commitment to advancing human rights in Scotland. Everyone here has a responsibility, and we must continue to work together across the chamber to advance human rights in Scotland.

13:03

**Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab):** I welcome the commitment to incorporate into law the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. That is a measurable and moral step that we must take together as a country, and I

thank Fulton MacGregor for bringing the debate to the chamber. However, no one will be surprised to hear me say that we can always do a lot more. I would like to focus on some tangible rights that we should be pursuing at home, but first I must briefly reflect on a broader concern.

I would love to see human rights become a universal standard with which we can build a better world—however, in reality, that is far from happening. We need only cast our memories back to a fortnight ago, when 27 people drowned in the English Channel trying to reach our shores. Far too many people have already forgotten about that news story—it has been pushed aside by the daily churn of the 24-hour news cycle.

What happened to the rights of those 27 people? Did they disappear when they left home for a better life? The situation is truly shameful, and we must keep their story in the spotlight. Their fate does not surprise me, however, given that a Tory Government at Westminster thinks that it is funny to ignore its own rules and to laugh at Covid restrictions while people die. We can only imagine its lack of concern for people beyond our borders. Their story must remain in the spotlight.

To return to matters at home, I do not need to tell my fellow MSPs that children in schools are too hungry to concentrate, and that parents are not eating meals so that their children can be fed. In 2019, 31 per cent of single-parent households in Scotland reported being food insecure. One in 10 people living in the UK is, or is at risk of being, malnourished.

Labour-led councils in North Lanarkshire and North Ayrshire have taken positive steps towards addressing hunger during school holidays, with the club 365 and summer voucher schemes. I am sure that all members welcome those steps, but the Scottish Government has to do more and to be more radical in ensuring that they are rolled out across Scotland.

The fact that we need those schemes confirms the desperate need for a right to food, which is not currently enshrined in Scots law. Fortunately, thanks to my colleagues Rhoda Grant and, previously, Elaine Smith, we will soon have the opportunity, here at home, to secure that right. I ask that all members—particularly Government backbenchers—support that at the first opportunity.

Linked to that, as part of a wider concern about health, the UNCRC states that children should have the right to leisure, play and culture, and that Governments must play an active role in ensuring that that happens. How are we doing in Scotland? A report commissioned by the Observatory for Sport in Scotland highlighted that

“there is evidence of decreasing participation rates in sport outside school lessons and high levels of drop-out by girls as they move into their teenage years.”

We also know that, between 2014 and 2018, the average charges per hour increased for five-a-side football, badminton, squash, table tennis, golf, and swimming for kids. Furthermore, participation in physical activity and sport among those living in the most deprived areas is considerably lower than in the least deprived areas. That division will last past childhood, and it accounts in part for increased mortality at all stages of life. The Scottish Government must do more if it seeks to claim that it is taking an active part in realising children’s right to leisure, play and culture.

It is positive that the Scottish Government appears keen to adopt the UNCRC into Scots law, but it is equally concerning that hunger is on the rise and that the cost of sport in Scotland is unaffordable and getting worse. If we recognise the importance of securing formal rights that will push us forward as a country and give the next generation a platform from which it can flourish, we can begin to change that trajectory. The UNCRC is a welcome start but, as I often say in the chamber, we have plenty more to do.

I again thank Fulton MacGregor for bringing the debate to the chamber.

13:08

**Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP):** I thank my colleague Fulton MacGregor for bringing the debate to the chamber. As has been said, tomorrow we celebrate human rights, in commemoration of the day in 1948 on which the UN General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. That declaration forms the backbone of the human rights architecture of our societies. Each of us, without discrimination, has the right to live and thrive in peace and safety.

Since the adoption of the declaration, laws and policies embracing human rights have made us freer. Children can assert their needs. Women can make their own choices. Persons with disabilities can live more independently. We all now enjoy safeguards against tyranny and abuse. However, those privileges are not to be taken for granted; worse, they are under threat.

Human rights are far more than legal concepts; they are the very essence of humanity. To deny them is to deny a person’s humanity. They are inalienable. Yet, too often, people try to divide us. We are told that those on the margins of society are like aliens from another planet. Too often, we hear the word “them” instead of “us”.

Such narratives, propped up by the right-wing media and reinforced by the policies of some so-

called democracies—including that at Westminster—must be challenged. Human rights must be put at the centre of economic policy, housing, healthcare and education. By doing that, we can create a human rights-based economy that supports better, fairer and more sustainable societies for present and future generations.

In order to embed a culture of human rights that puts those who are most marginalised at the centre of policies, we must incorporate rights into law. In Scotland, we will incorporate four international human rights treaties into law through the proposed human rights bill, which will make those rights enforceable and real.

As we recover from the pandemic, we have the chance to reset—and yet, at this most pivotal juncture, as Scotland looks to close the gaps in rights provision, the UK Government is moving in the opposite direction, showing time and again a willingness to abandon human rights.

Earlier this year, the Scottish Government unanimously backed the enshrining of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in Scots law, to ensure that there is accountability when things go wrong, but that was challenged by the UK Government. Last night, the Nationality and Borders Bill passed its third reading in the UK Parliament. The bill judges a person’s right to claim asylum according to how they arrive in the UK, not on the basis of need or the level of danger that they face. It proposes that millions of dual nationals could be stripped of their citizenship by the Home Office without warning, thereby creating a second-tier category of citizenship in the UK. Discrimination is at the heart of such proposals.

With that bill, coupled with the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, which will seriously restrict the right to peaceful protest, the UK Government is heading in a dangerous direction, and we must push back. In Scotland, we have an entirely different vision, in which we treat all those who find themselves living among us with dignity and respect. We remember the events in Kenmure Street, where ordinary people stood up for their neighbours who had been detained in a Home Office raid. That was a heartening show of solidarity, and local communities must continue to unite against cruel and divisive immigration policy.

The way in which we treat those who are on the margins determines how we progress as a society. Our actions reflect who we are and who we want to become. That is why I campaign for an independent Scotland that is grounded in civic nationalism: a Scotland that embraces an open and outward society; that is empowered to tackle the root causes of injustice; and which incorporates a human rights approach to governance that leaves no one behind.

13:12

**Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green):** Like other members, I thank Fulton MacGregor for lodging his motion and bringing the debate to the chamber today. Tomorrow is human rights day, and also marks the end of the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence. I take this opportunity to thank colleagues from all sides of the chamber for their contributions in recent debates on women's rights during those 16 days.

This year's human rights day theme relates to equality and article 1 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states:

"All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights."

The principles of equality and non-discrimination are at the heart of human rights, but we know only too well that, in Scotland and around the world, people are not all born equal. A baby who is born in Somalia faces an infant mortality rate that is nearly 25 times higher than that for a baby who is born in the United Kingdom. Women are more likely to bear the brunt of global health crises in every aspect of their lives, from employment to access to healthcare. People who are fleeing war and famine are drowning in the English Channel, as we have heard, because of inhumane and uncompassionate approaches to foreign policy. Black people in Scotland are more likely to face discrimination in the workplace and in access to housing. Trans people face exclusion from, and barriers to accessing, vital, life-saving health services.

Inequality is everywhere we look, but none of that is inevitable. The structural inequalities that exist are a product of political and economic choices, and we can make different choices. Putting equalities and human rights at the centre of what we do can help us to identify the different, and better, choices that we can and must make.

The experiences of individuals and communities around the globe, never mind the history of the past century, show us the importance of the centrality of human rights in all that we do. We know that we want a Scotland in which people understand their rights and those of their neighbours; where they feel valued and included; and where they are empowered to claim their own rights and to stand in solidarity, compassion and justice to help others to achieve theirs too. We want Scotland to play a role in ensuring that that vision does not stop at our borders—we must play our role in fighting for equality around the world.

During the coming year, we will see the beginning of the consultation on how to embed those principles in the important work that we will be doing. The human rights bill that we want to bring in will, as far as possible within our devolved

competence, incorporate key human rights treaties into Scots law. We have already heard about many of them this afternoon, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, but there is also the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. I mention them by name because they are important, and that legislation will be world-breaking when we deliver it.

Beyond those international treaties, we must also ensure that we follow international best practice in including a right to a healthy environment, as Fulton MacGregor mentioned. Equal access to the rights in the bill for all—especially for older people and for LGBTQI+ people—must also be in the bill.

Then we must act. Putting human rights into law is only the start of the work that we must do. We will need decisive, bold action to design and implement the policies, services and institutions that will make those rights a reality—not only for us in Scotland, but further afield too. Our vision, and our imperative for action, is a Scotland that is fairer, more inclusive, more progressive and more equal. It is a Scotland that can also play its part in making the world fairer, more inclusive, more progressive and more equal. That is our work.

13:16

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** I thank Fulton MacGregor for securing this important debate to acknowledge human rights day, which will be marked around the world tomorrow. I also draw members' attention to my declaration of interest as a trustee of the Freedom Declared Foundation, a charity that supports the right of everyone to freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief. I also draw the chamber's attention to my membership of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Given the history and origins of my church and its earliest adherents, members will understand that freedom to live in peace, according to one's beliefs and conscience, devoid of offence toward others, is a matter of deeply felt importance to me. The first president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Joseph Smith, declared the human right to exercise

"that free independence of mind which heaven has so graciously bestowed upon the human family as one of its choicest gifts".

There are 30 articles in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. All are worthy of

reflection and consideration but, due to time constraints in the debate, my focus will be on article 18, which reads:

“Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”

I want to talk about an important aspect of freedom of religion or belief, and that is the way in which the Scottish Government has treated public religious worship during the pandemic. Since my election to Parliament, I have asked ministers many questions about places of worship, including about the differentiated set of restrictions that are still applied to places of worship compared with other indoor settings, specifically in relation to the wearing of face coverings. I cannot see any evidence to justify those differences, and I am afraid that answers come there none.

There was also widespread alarm at the Scottish Government’s order to close places of worship, and what it implied about how ministers perceive the human right of freedom of religion or belief. The Court of Session subsequently ruled against the Scottish Government’s ban on public worship. Referring in his ruling to the European convention on human rights, Lord Braid said:

“it is not clear that the respondents have fully appreciated the importance of article 9 rights. They have admittedly paid lip service to article 9 by referring to it, but there is no evidence that they have accorded it the importance which such a fundamental right deserves.”

What lessons has the Scottish Government learned from that, and what steps have been taken or are being taken to increase the levels of appreciable religious literacy among ministers and their officials?

In the western world, the growth of aggressive secularism is, in my view, an undisguised attempt to marginalise religion in the public sphere. Only last week, we heard about the memo sent by the European Union to member states asking them, in the name of inclusivity, to stop using the word “Christmas”. That is an absurd statement. Removing the word “Christmas” excludes Christians who want to talk openly about their faith. We should not regulate what members of the public can and cannot say, and we must allow the expression of faith in the public sphere to flourish.

I agree with Bishop John Keenan, who recently said that although freedom of religion or belief is enshrined in law in the UK, it is not always respected by society. Last week, a group of young British Jews were celebrating Hanukkah on Oxford Street in London. During the celebrations, a group of young men started spitting at them and making Nazi salutes—an appalling antisemitic attack.

Earlier this year, vandals damaged the Lourdes cave at the Carfin grotto in Motherwell.

I listened with interest to the speech in the House of Commons last month by the new member of Parliament for Airdrie and Shotts, Anum Qaisar. It was a deeply personal speech about Islamophobia and she listed many shocking incidents including the petrol bombing of her mosque.

We do not need to agree with someone to respect them for who they are and what they believe—respect is a fundamental human right. The United Kingdom is rightly seen as a global leader in promoting and defending freedom of religion and belief, but we must see that freedom of religion or belief is not only protected in law, but respected, appreciated and embraced as fundamental to our values as a people.

13:21

**Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab):** It is a privilege to follow Stephen Kerr, who has for many years talked about the protection of religion and non-religion. He raises the interesting point that we hear so much talk about human rights and the intention of human rights, but we also need to look at the results and how we are empowering people to enforce their human rights.

I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate, because I fear that we are living at a time in which there is an erosion of human rights when, instead, we need to strengthen and advance them. The way to do that is by reducing inequalities and by pursuing equality, as this year’s theme reminds us. At the heart of equality, as we have heard, is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; from that declaration, people with disability, our carers, our young, our old, and all individuals feel that they have the ability and are supported to contribute to their full ability—and because of that, human rights must also be at the heart of our fight against inequality.

The motion talks of the Scottish Government’s commitment to incorporate the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into Scottish law to the maximum extent possible, as soon as practicable. Where is that commitment in action? It is just in words at the moment, so let us focus on what we can do in Parliament to implement the UNCRC in Scotland in real ways. Most importantly, the focus should be on the lives of the children that it impacts and having their rights incorporated into Scottish law and protected.

I mention that, because there is a need to respond to the Supreme Court ruling. Why has that not been done? It is turning into a debate about anger with Westminster rather than one about how we can best protect our children and

pursue a better, more equal future for them. I think that members can agree that the issue of human rights is not a constitutional battleground, but is about what we can give our young people, here in Scotland. It is of the utmost importance that the Scottish Government follows through on its commitment, because it is our young people who are of the utmost importance. It should still be a priority; it should not become a tick-box exercise because something was completed and then lost in the Supreme Court.

We are reminded today that having human rights at the centre of our policy and action is the best way to fight inequality. It is of particular significance to the children and young people of this generation—the Covid generation—who are at greater risk of being left with extreme disparity, poverty and inequality. That is why the UNCRC is so important for building a better and more equal Scotland for the future.

What is the Scottish Government doing tomorrow on human rights day to ensure that our children's rights are championed and protected? Surely, as Michelle Thomson says, the Government cannot just show profound indifference. I hope to hear an announcement on when the bill will return to Parliament, where I fervently believe it will have cross-party support to become law, so that children can start to be empowered not only to demand and hear talk about their rights, but to have a vehicle to enforce them.

13:24

**The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government (Shona Robison):** I thank my colleague Fulton MacGregor for bringing the debate to the chamber. I am delighted to conclude a debate that has been mainly constructive, with some very good speeches from members on all sides of the chamber.

When the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, it set out the fundamental human rights that form

“a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations”.

As we have heard today, it also proclaimed a principle that is central to the purpose and practice of the Scottish Parliament: the universal truth that

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.”

Human rights day is, therefore, a reminder of our duty to respect, protect and fulfil human rights. As Michelle Thomson said, the need to end indifference to the plight of others is crucially

important. Carol Mochan reminded us of the plight of asylum seekers and refugees, and the recent tragedies that we have all witnessed. Stephanie Callaghan was right to highlight concerns about the UK Nationality and Borders Bill. Ensuring that internationally recognised human rights are given practical, everyday effect is a core function of the Scottish Government and, as we heard from members today, the Covid-19 crisis has brought that duty into sharp focus. Pam Gosal gave some powerful examples in that regard.

We are determined that human rights should be at the forefront of our on-going work, and in the coming year we will begin consulting on a strategy to embed equality, inclusion, and human rights across the whole public sector. That will be critical in helping Scotland to recover from the impact of Covid and to build back better in a way that delivers for every member of society, including those who have been worst affected and who have suffered the greatest disadvantage. Fulton MacGregor outlined the disproportionate negative impact of the pandemic on women, as did Maggie Chapman.

As members have mentioned, we are currently developing a new human rights bill for Scotland as part of our implementation of the bold and ambitious recommendations that the national task force for human rights leadership presented in March. The new bill will enhance economic, social, and cultural rights, and rights for women, disabled people, minority ethnic people, older people and LGBTI people. We recognise that the bill is an opportunity for all of Scotland to lead on human rights, and we have therefore established internal and external governance and engagement forums as part of its progression. That includes an executive board comprising senior decision makers from across the public sector, and an advisory board comprising a range of key stakeholder groups with expertise in the rights that will be included in the bill.

We are also continuing to give priority to ensuring that the voices of people with lived experience of facing barriers to accessing their rights are at the heart of the bill, are heard and—importantly—inform its development and delivery. The Scottish Government has committed to consulting on the human rights bill in the coming year, and we will ensure that the consultation is developed with the assistance of stakeholders to enable us to listen and learn from their feedback and make the consultation process as accessible as we can.

Carol Mochan referred to food. The Scottish Government's view is that a right to food is best considered and taken forward in the context of the new human rights bill rather than in a separate bill,

as that would risk creating a fragmented approach to the incorporation of human rights.

Many members have mentioned the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill. We remain committed to the incorporation of the UNCRC in Scots law to the maximum extent possible, as that will—as Fulton MacGregor described—deliver a revolution in children’s rights in Scotland. We are therefore urgently, but carefully, considering the most effective way forward for that important legislation following the UK Supreme Court judgment. The Deputy First Minister will come back to Parliament with our proposals on that as soon as is practical.

**Martin Whitfield:** I am extremely grateful to the cabinet secretary for giving way. Will the UNCRC be incorporated through other legislation?

**Shona Robison:** As I said, there are complex legal issues that many of us have been involved in looking at. What is important is that the issues are considered carefully, and that proposals are brought to Parliament as soon as possible. I am sure that the member and others will be informed of the timetable for that as soon as possible. I gently point out to Pam Gosal that we would not be in this position had the UK Government not gone to the Supreme Court in the first place. However, the debate has been mainly consensual, and I want to keep it that way.

This year, 2021, also marked the 70th anniversary of the UK’s ratification of the European convention on human rights, which was incorporated into UK law by the Human Rights Act 1998. It is no exaggeration to say that that act—in combination with the Scotland Act 1998—has transformed human rights in Scotland and is a central pillar of Scotland’s constitutional settlement, albeit that there is further work to be done. I therefore urge the UK Government, which is currently considering its response to the independent review of the Human Rights Act 1998, to step back from any attempt to undermine or erode existing human rights protections.

The Scottish Government will of course robustly oppose any attack on the Human Rights Act 1998.

**Stephen Kerr:** Will the cabinet secretary give way?

**Shona Robison:** I invite members to reaffirm the long-standing view of the Parliament that there must be no changes to that act without our explicit consent. I am sure that Stephen Kerr will agree with that.

**Stephen Kerr:** Given that the cabinet secretary is running short on time, I ask her to reflect on the questions that I asked about freedom of religion or belief in relation to the Court of Session judgment,

and the general appreciation of that freedom by ministers and how that will be enhanced.

**Shona Robison:** I heard what Stephen Kerr said. Difficult decisions have been and are still being made during the pandemic. Such decisions are not made to single out a particular community or to do things that are deliberately difficult. The public inquiry will be an important forum in which to consider any lessons that can be learned across the board. Stephen Kerr might wish to pursue the points that he raises through that route. We should learn the important lessons going forward.

In marking human rights day, it is important that we look at rights across the board. So much is achieved for human rights around the world by brave individuals who are prepared to stand up for the principles that are set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. For our part, the Scottish Government will continue to do everything that it can to uphold those values, to make rights real for people in Scotland and to stand up for human rights wherever they are under threat.

13:32

*Meeting suspended.*

14:30

*On resuming—*

## Portfolio Question Time

### Rural Affairs and Islands

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** Good afternoon. I remind members that Covid-related measures are in place. Face masks should be worn when moving around the chamber and the Holyrood campus.

The next item of business is portfolio questions on rural affairs and islands. If a member wishes to ask a supplementary question, they should press their request-to-speak button or place an R in the chat function during the relevant question.

#### Connectivity (Islands)

**1. Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the rural affairs secretary has had with ministerial colleagues regarding cross-Government action to improve connectivity for Scotland's island communities. (S6O-00506)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands (Mairi Gougeon):** As Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands, it is my responsibility to ensure cross-Government co-ordination on islands, which involves regularly meeting ministerial colleagues across all portfolios, including the Minister for Transport. Work continues across both the rural affairs and islands and transport portfolios, at ministerial and official level, to ensure a co-ordinated response to the challenges that arise for our island communities.

**Sharon Dowey:** Services, tourism and cultural events are essential to islanders, but failing ferries put their local economy at risk. The message from ferry bodies in the Scottish Government is now that islanders' expertise should not even be represented on the boards of CalMac Ferries and Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd—CMAL. Why is the central belt-focused Scottish National Party Government ignoring islanders, and what action will it take to ensure that the voices of islanders are heard?

**Mairi Gougeon:** I refute that claim straight off. This is not a central belt Government. I represent a rural constituency, as do many of my colleagues, and that fact is at the heart of the work that I do as Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands.

In relation to the point that the member has raised, we are committed to ensuring that the views of island residents and communities are represented appropriately, and we have asked the new chair to consider how that objective might be achieved as a priority.

Residents of island communities are free to apply to become members of the David MacBrayne Ltd—DML—board if they wish. We advertised the recent chair position and three non-executive director positions widely, including on the vessels that travel to our island communities, and board members were appointed on the basis of their abilities. An understanding of the role of transport, including ferries, and of the maintenance of the economic and social integrity of the Highlands and Islands is a requirement for all board members.

**Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP):** Transport links are integral to rural, disparate communities. The island of Jura, in my constituency, has had a 40 per cent population increase in the past 10 years, but their transport links need some improvement. What plans does the Scottish Government have to engage with island residents regarding their connectivity needs as it progresses its commitment to deliver the islands connectivity plan, to ensure that our island communities flourish?

**Mairi Gougeon:** Responsibility for ferries actually lies with Graeme Dey, the Minister for Transport. However, as Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands, I understand the interdependency of transport and the wider challenges of island community sustainability. I was happy to convey that message in my recent engagement with the ferries community board.

I remain committed to ensuring that the Scottish Government continues to engage on population challenges, including island connectivity needs, through the development of positive policies that we have talked about previously in the chamber, such as the islands bond, carbon neutral islands and the islands connectivity plan. The latter will replace the current ferries plan from January 2023 and will include a long-term investment programme for new ferries and development at ports to improve resilience, reliability, capacity and accessibility, in order to meet the needs of our island communities.

#### Fisheries Negotiations

**2. Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the implications for the fishing sector in Scotland of the outcomes of the sea fisheries negotiations. (S6O-00507)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands (Mairi Gougeon):** Our aim across all negotiations is to find a balanced and sustainable outcome for the Scottish fishing industry, supporting the sector today as well as ensuring its future.

I am pleased to say that the coastal states consultations have successfully concluded. We have reached agreement on 2022 catch limits for mackerel, blue whiting and Atlanto-Scandian herring, and we have a work plan to continue sharing discussions in early 2022. We estimate the value of that deal to be around £186 million for Scotland through to 2022.

Our bilateral talks are on-going. Although we do not have the final outcomes, I assure members that we are engaging constructively with our international fishing partners to get the best possible outcome for Scotland. I will notify the Parliament of the outcome of all the negotiations when they are complete.

**Bill Kidd:** Will the cabinet secretary confirm the change to tonnage in fish exports from Scotland and whether, perchance, it reflects the improvements that were promised by proponents of Brexit?

**Mairi Gougeon:** We have data that was obtained from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. It shows that, for the first two quarters of this year, the tonnage of fish that was exported to the European Union from Scotland was just over 68,000 tonnes, which is a 13.5 per cent decrease from the amount exported over the same period in 2019. That is clear evidence of the disastrous impact of Brexit on the Scottish seafood sector, which relied heavily on the EU for trade.

In 2019, more than 70 per cent of Scottish seafood exports went to the EU and were worth more than £770 million. The Scottish Salmon Producers Organisation reported losses of at least £11 million in January alone as a direct result of the changes that were brought about by Brexit. Additionally, Scottish Salmon now estimates that businesses are spending around £200,000 a month in dealing with extra paperwork. The loss in trade to the seafood sector since early January 2021 offers the clearest evidence that we have seen so far of the additional costs and associated impacts of becoming an EU third country and of the trade frictions that that has introduced.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** The cabinet secretary will want to ensure that new offshore wind developments do not interrupt established fishing operations. Earlier this week, the Shetland Fishermen's Association highlighted a number of concerns around data use, noting a lack of reflection on movements of non-Scottish vessels and a lack of consideration of issues caused to fishing activity outwith bottom trawling. Will the cabinet secretary look into those concerns and, if required, take action to support the industry when developments are being considered?

**Mairi Gougeon:** I assure Jamie Halcro Johnston that my officials and I have regular engagement with the industry. If there are particular concerns that the organisation wishes to discuss with me, I am more than happy to look into them.

### **Beavers (Compensation for Farmers)**

**3. Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what compensation will be made available to farmers who have been impacted by beaver activities. (S6O-00508)

**The Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity (Lorna Slater):** The reintroduction of beavers represents a step forward in restoring Scotland's biodiversity. We want to ensure that more of Scotland benefits from the biodiversity enhancements that are brought by beavers.

NatureScot will continue to support land and fisheries managers who are experiencing negative beaver impacts by providing free advice and help with practical management through the Scottish beaver mitigation scheme. We want to work with land managers to find ways of co-existing with beaver populations. Developing support mechanisms for land managers who are delivering positive biodiversity outcomes will be more productive in the longer term than providing compensation that is based on negative impacts.

**Murdo Fraser:** The Government's recent decision to allow the expansion of the beaver population into new parts of Scotland has been welcomed by some, but many farmers are already suffering significant financial loss—for example, due to beaver damage to flood banks or beavers cutting down trees, resulting in the loss of crops. Hearing that they will be offered free advice will be of very little comfort to them when they are facing significant financial loss. I ask again what new financial assistance will be made available to farmers who are suffering as a result of this Scottish Government decision?

**Lorna Slater:** The NatureScot beaver mitigation scheme is now in place and can offer land managers advice and practical assistance with mitigating the impacts of beavers, including by taking proactive measures to prevent impacts. That includes the protection of high-value trees—heritage trees, landscape trees and amenity trees—the installation of flow devices in beaver dams and, where appropriate, beaver exclusion fencing. NatureScot will continue to work with stakeholders in developing the mitigation scheme with new and innovative approaches. Licensing approaches are available to prevent serious damage where mitigation cannot resolve issues.

**Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green):** As Scottish Environment LINK's beaver champion, I am delighted that beaver populations will now be allowed to expand across the country. It will mean that many more people will benefit from the ecological benefits that beavers bring as ecosystem engineers, as well as from the sheer joy of once again sharing our natural environment with these charismatic animals. I am sure that there are many land managers who would benefit from receiving beavers that are unwelcome elsewhere. Will the minister advise what they need to do to receive a translocated beaver family?

**Lorna Slater:** I thank the member very much for her question and for her work as Scottish Environment LINK's beaver champion.

Many people in Scotland would love to have beavers on their land, if they had the appropriate environment for them. Any land manager who is interested in having translocated beavers on their land should contact NatureScot through the email and contact details on its webpage: [beavers@nature.scot](mailto:beavers@nature.scot) or 01463 725264. NatureScot will discuss the different aspects of translocating beavers to a site, including scoping site suitability; carrying out effective public engagement and consultation; the practical aspects of trapping and transportation; captive holding while animals are being health screened; and some level of post-release monitoring.

**Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP):** There is no doubt that there are farmers not far from my and Mr Fraser's constituencies who have looked to get beavers translocated to their land. I accept that they make an important contribution to restoring Scotland's natural environment, but, in some places, their modifications to the environment can have a negative impact on agricultural land. Can the cabinet secretary provide further information about what the support from the Scottish Government will be, particularly for the flood defences that Mr Fraser mentioned a minute ago, to negate the negative impacts of beavers being introduced?

**Lorna Slater:** The member is quite correct in saying that the reintroduction of beavers demonstrates our commitment to protecting and enhancing biodiversity. Beavers have a positive impact on biodiversity by creating new wetland habitats for a range of important species. They also help to reduce flood risk by slowing down flows, and they improve water quality by filtering out sediment.

The NatureScot beaver mitigation scheme is in place and can offer land managers practical assistance in mitigating their impacts in ways that I have already listed: protecting high-value trees, insulation of flow devices and, where appropriate, beaver exclusion fencing. NatureScot will continue

to work with stakeholders to develop the mitigation scheme to make sure that landowners and land managers can live alongside beavers.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Questions 4 and 5 were not lodged.

### Farming (New Entrants)

**6. Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its work, outlined in the programme for government, to determine how best to support new and young entrants into farming. (S6O-00511)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands (Mairi Gougeon):** We are continuing to work on options that will best add to the existing support provided by our farming opportunities for new entrants group, the Scottish Land Matching Service, the Farm Advisory Service and direct payments. Our aim remains that the outcome will be announced soon.

**Sandesh Gulhane:** Despite the Scottish National Party throwing taxpayers' money at encouraging young women to join the agriculture industry, the young farmers start-up grant scheme handed out funding to only 62 women across Scotland in four years. In 2019, there was only one successful applicant. Young farmers deserve better than that, especially young women in rural areas. Does the cabinet secretary believe that a single successful applicant in one year is an acceptable return on the investment? Will she outline exactly what measures she is taking to improve on that abysmal record?

**Mairi Gougeon:** We are absolutely committed to ensuring that we have more new entrants to farming. Just this week I visited an opportunity that has been made available through the farming opportunities for new entrants programme, and we are looking at the opportunities that could be offered through public land to encourage new entrants.

Can we do more about getting more women and more diversity into agriculture? Absolutely; I agree with that. That is why we made specific commitments in our manifesto to getting more women into agriculture and to making Scottish agriculture more inclusive. Women living and working in Scottish agriculture are an essential part of the future of the rural economy, and developing and expanding their skills will ensure the long-term sustainability of the sector.

This financial year, we have committed £300,000 to finding practical solutions to support women, including the wider roll-out of the "Be your best self" programme, personal development training, a pilot of agricultural business skills training, a project to test innovative solutions for

childcare, and the development of SkillSeeder, which is a skills-sharing app that encourages greater participation in rural and land-based learning. During the current parliamentary session, we will double to £600,000 funding to support women in agriculture.

### **Livestock (Avian Influenza)**

**7. Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what measures it is putting in place to protect livestock against avian influenza. (S6O-00512)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands (Mairi Gougeon):** The chief veterinary officer for Scotland confirmed a second outbreak of the highly pathogenic avian influenza H5N1 at premises near Gretna in Dumfries and Galloway, on 3 December. As with the earlier case in Angus, protection and surveillance zones were immediately established around the infected premises, which puts in place a range of mandatory disease-control measures, including restrictions on the movement of poultry, domestic mammals, carcasses, eggs and other poultry products.

In response to an increased risk of spread of disease from migratory birds, the Scottish ministers introduced a national avian influenza prevention zone on 3 November. On 29 November, those measures were enhanced to require housing of all poultry and captive birds and the application by keepers of further robust biosecurity measures, which are key to preventing the spread of disease.

Advice from public health officers and from epidemiologists is that this strain of highly pathogenic avian influenza represents a very low risk to human health and to mammals. Investigations into the source of the infection and links with the premises and livestock that are currently infected are an element of the wider epidemiological investigation process to ensure that the disease is stamped out as quickly as possible.

**Marie McNair:** With Covid-19 impacting businesses in various ways, what support is in place for bird keepers if the worst should happen to their livestock?

**Mairi Gougeon:** Compensation is paid for birds that have to be culled as part of our disease response in line with valuation tables, which are updated regularly by the Animal and Plant Health Agency on behalf of the Scottish Government. The Scottish Government does not compensate for dead or visibly ill birds, which is in line with policy elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

If a larger poultry or captive-bird business is in a disease-control zone, there might be trade issues

that are associated with regionalisation. The Scottish Government works with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs market access and veterinary trade facilitation teams, which liaise with poultry industry stakeholders and the APHA centre for international trade to understand and address the issues and priorities for poultry exports.

DEFRA market access also liaises with British embassy colleagues globally to answer trade-related queries from central competent authorities, to provide updates to third-country trading partners and to seek clarity on the terms of trade, where that is required.

The Scottish Government will liaise with NFU Scotland and the British Egg Industry Council to support affected businesses, where that is required.

I emphasise that it is extremely important for keepers to practise good biosecurity in order to reduce the risk of their birds being infected by a notifiable avian disease.

### **Net Zero (Agriculture and Fisheries)**

**8. Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to support the agriculture and fisheries sectors to play a leading role in delivering a net zero Scotland. (S6O-00513)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands (Mairi Gougeon):** The Scottish Government is committed to driving action to support all sectors to transition to net zero and to ensuring that that transition is a just one. It is clear that agriculture and fisheries must play a leading role in that process. Policies and programmes such as the blue economy vision, the future fisheries management strategy and the agriculture reform implementation oversight board, as well as practical measures such as the marine fund Scotland and the national test programme, are enabling conversations and supporting innovation, as well as helping farmers and fishers to understand how their work impacts on climate and nature, and what they can do to deliver change.

**Colin Smyth:** The partnership agreement between the Greens and the Scottish National Party has nothing to say about ending overfishing, ending the wasteful practice of discarding or landing a bigger share of the catch closer to home in Scottish ports. Does the cabinet secretary think that that is consistent with securing sustainability and environmental recovery for our inshore seas and fisheries?

**Mairi Gougeon:** Our co-operation agreement with the Scottish Green Party is highly ambitious in a lot of areas, and it seeks to protect our marine environment. The fact that some specific elements

are not listed in the agreement does not mean that they are not important.

As part of our future fisheries management strategy, we have set out the steps that we intend to take to make sure that our marine environment is a healthy one and that we continue to fish in a sustainable way.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I will take a few supplementaries.

**Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD):** There are plans to locate offshore wind farms in rich fishing grounds west of Shetland to provide electricity for oil and gas installations. Shetland Fishermen's Association has highlighted flaws in the offshore wind farm consultation process, to which Jamie Halcro Johnston alluded earlier. Will the Scottish Government commit to gathering and fully assessing data on all fishing activity in the areas in question, and to listening to local fishermen's concerns?

**Mairi Gougeon:** I reiterate my previous response to Jamie Halcro Johnston. I am the fisheries minister: it is critical that I listen to the concerns that are voiced. I am more than happy to engage with the Shetland Fishermen's Association and to listen directly to their concerns.

**Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** In light of the climate emergency and the urgent need to give farmers, communities and landowners clarity about net zero, will the Scottish Government join Scottish Conservative calls, backed by the Woodland Trust Scotland, to simplify and make changes to grant schemes for riparian planting now, rather than waiting until 2024 when it might be too late to save iconic species, such as salmon?

**Mairi Gougeon:** A number of pieces of work to protect our iconic species are on-going. I would be happy to contact Rachael Hamilton about her suggestion regarding how riparian tree planting will be considered in the future.

**Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP):** Can the minister provide any further details about the steps that are being taken to reduce ammonia emissions in the agricultural sector?

**Mairi Gougeon:** We have updated the regulations that govern controls on storage and application of slurry and digestate. By introducing a legislative requirement to use low-emissions precision spreading equipment, we can reduce the ammonia emissions that are caused by agriculture by up to 70 per cent. That protects our vital water environment and reduces the impact of agriculture on climate change.

That will also make an important contribution to our commitments to reduce air pollutant emissions that are caused by agricultural activity. Those are

set out in our new air quality strategy, which was published earlier this year. The national test programme, which I announced at the end of October, will also provide support for nutrient management plans through supporting more efficient fertiliser use and thereby reducing ammonia emissions.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes portfolio question time. There will be a slight pause while front-bench members change places before the next item of business.

## Culture

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** The next item of business is a statement by Jenny Gilruth on supporting culture in Scotland. The minister will take questions on the issues raised in her statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:52

**The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development (Jenny Gilruth):** We will soon hear from the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy on the Scottish Government's budget for the coming financial year. Supporting our economic recovery is absolutely vital to our continued navigation out of the Covid pandemic, but there can be no economic recovery without our culture sector.

Many of us will recall how it felt to experience culture again at the end of the second lockdown. There were emotional scenes as people returned to our museums and galleries and as musicians and actors returned to the stage. Supporting Scotland's culture sector to recover and ensuring that access to culture is equitable have never been more important.

The culture sector was one of the parts of our society that was worst impacted by pandemic restrictions. Following the initial lockdown, the gross domestic product of the arts, culture and recreation sector was found in May 2020 to have decreased by 56 per cent below pre-pandemic levels. The sector has still not fully recovered, with the latest statistics for September of this year showing that GDP for the sector was still 12 per cent lower than pre-pandemic levels, compared with a reduction of just 1 per cent for the economy overall.

Our museums closed, our theatres shut and live music could no longer be experienced, but the pandemic has also shown the incredible ingenuity of Scotland's culture sector. That resilience has been the overarching theme of my meetings with the sector since May. Whether by digitising content or by ventilating premises, the sector kept going. Our support to digitise content included the creative digital initiative, which was supported by £1 million of Scottish Government funding. That funding supported creative and cultural businesses to enhance creative opportunities as they responded to Covid-19.

Nonetheless, there remain challenges for the sector as it continues re-emerging from the pandemic. Since the start of the pandemic, the Scottish Government has provided more than £175 million of emergency funding to the culture sector, far in excess of the £97 million of culture

consequentials that we received from the United Kingdom Government. That support has been a lifeline to our freelancers, venues and organisations. The funding has allowed libraries to re-open, supported artists to keep working, enabled community cultural activities to continue and has helped protect children's wellbeing through creative learning.

However, the withholding of funding by the United Kingdom Government is placing Scottish artists and cultural organisations at a significant disadvantage compared with their counterparts elsewhere in the UK.

The UK Government has recently made further announcements on the allocations in England from the £300 million of cultural recovery funding that was announced in the March budget. Scotland's culture sector, meanwhile, still awaits its full share of Barnett consequentials.

As the omicron variant continues to make its way through our population, I know that there is a real sense of anxiety in the culture sector. The pandemic has also presented challenges in the form of human behaviour, which has naturally adapted in light of the restrictions. Audience confidence has been affected. Indeed, as the event industry advisory group told me recently, the current percentages for no-shows at events are far higher than the percentages pre-pandemic. In some instances, they are up to 40 per cent.

The Scottish Government's business ventilation fund, which launched last month, provides some assistance in that space, allowing audiences to feel safer as they return to live events. The Covid vaccination certification scheme has also given event organisers in Scotland a level of certainty since its introduction. It is certainly welcome that the UK Government is now following suit. The scheme has allowed events to continue and it has further encouraged and supported audience confidence.

However, the impacts of the pandemic have additionally been magnified by the impacts that have been created following the Brexit deal that was negotiated by the UK Government last year. The ending of free movement and the loss of key EU programmes such as the creative Europe programme have only exacerbated the challenges that were initiated by Covid.

The trade and co-operation agreement does not contain visa-free mobility arrangements, which means that creative professionals now have to navigate differing visa requirements and exemptions, with significant increased costs and red tape. The Scottish Government has funded Arts Infopoint, which is a pilot mobility scheme that helps to provide advice on visa applications, tax and social security, but there is of course a limit on

what we can do in this space. I raised the matter on two occasions with the former culture minister in the UK Government, and I know that the other devolved Governments have done likewise. The obvious solution is for the UK Government to negotiate a visa waiver agreement to allow visa-free touring for musicians.

In June this year, further funding of £25 million was announced to support further rounds of the culture organisations and venues recovery fund and the performing arts venues relief fund. That included £700,000 for the Tron Theatre in Glasgow, £238,000 for the Beacon Arts Centre in Inverclyde and £1.25 million for Aberdeen Performing Arts. The support that Government had to—to put it bluntly—get out the door back in May was absolutely crucial and I know that it prevented many organisations from going to the wall. The support that the Government must provide now needs to better reflect our new landscape.

Yesterday, the Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture announced funding for Kelvin Hall in Glasgow, where we have invested £7.9 million in a £12 million project. That significant investment in the screen sector is helping Scotland to seize opportunities and build sustainable Scotland-based film and television businesses. It is not only about creating state-of-the-art facilities; it is about developing and retaining new skills and talent here in Scotland so that we can make even more high-quality productions right here.

I am really pleased to announce today that further spend to support the culture sector's recovery will be made in three distinct areas. First, over £4 million of the remaining culture consequential will be provided to support our innovative culture collective programme. For example, Stellar Quines is creating four creative hubs across Fife to deliver Young Quines, which is a free-to-access youth theatre activity for young women.

That additional funding will support the creative communities network to build its capacity and extend into new communities, but it will also continue to embed the links that were developed during the programme's first year. The funding recognises the need to provide direct support to our communities and it reinforces the central vision of our culture strategy, which is that culture is for everyone. On that note, I was really pleased to meet the culture conveners group earlier this week to hear directly about the challenges and opportunities that investing in culture in our communities can bring. I hope that the funding will be welcomed by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, and I look forward to working with the

culture conveners group to further ensure that recovery is rooted in community accessibility.

The second amount of funding relates to the museums and galleries sector, and developing its resilience. A £1 million fund will now be available to support that work. I know that, particularly for many smaller organisations, investments in this area can make a real difference. The funding is going to help with equipment and adaptations that help to respond to the pandemic and it will also restart activity as our cultural venues continue to welcome back audiences and visitors.

Thirdly, I will provide £1 million of capital funding in this financial year to support the re-establishment of the Scottish Crannog Centre in Kenmore as part of an overall package of £2.3 million for it to relocate to a new site following the terrible fire at the centre in May. The crannog is a very special place that is not just a site of significant archaeological interest but a community, an educational outreach base and part of the cultural landscape that tells this country's story.

I do not think that I will ever forget being able to hold a piece of fabric that dates from the iron age when I visited earlier this year. I know that the fire caused not only devastation to the site itself, but significant emotional distress to employees and local people alike. I hope that the funding goes some way to assuring the impassioned director, Mike Benson, and all in the Crannog community that the Scottish Government recognises and values the special role that the centre holds in Scotland's cultural heritage.

Despite the devastating impact of the pandemic, culture, creativity and heritage played a vital role in people's lives during lockdown. When none of us could leave our homes, we could, at least, still experience culture. The wellbeing impacts associated with culture—whether from listening to music or reading a book—cannot be underplayed in our recovery from the pandemic. On that note, I want to mention just a few of the many examples of where, with our support, cultural organisations have harnessed the power of creativity to address social isolation and mental health during the pandemic.

The National Theatre of Scotland has been tackling social isolation by supporting the cultural and social rights of the LGBTI+ over-50s group and have run a programme aimed at tackling anxiety in teenagers. Scottish Ballet has delivered dance programmes tackling mental health and wellbeing for healthcare staff and primary and secondary school pupils. National Museums of Scotland provided tailored programming for those living with dementia. Our support for the arts alive programme, run by the Scottish Book Trust, and Sistema Scotland's big noise programme, has

been making a difference to the confidence, resilience and happiness of thousands of schoolchildren across Scotland.

Our national performing companies moved quickly to pivot to their new virtual audiences. Those companies included the National Theatre of Scotland, which recently launched its digital education platform. The platform is an online resource bank for secondary school teachers and students that offers free digital access to NTS productions and resources, ensuring that every young person can now experience an NTS production.

Supporting the culture sector's recovery from the pandemic is not a job just for me or the cabinet secretary, because culture impacts on and intersects with every part of Government responsibility. Last month, a Cabinet paper was agreed to that sets out the next steps for how we plan to drive that recovery. In education, health, economic development and net zero, culture has a key role to play in our recovery, and investing in culture can help to deliver wider wellbeing outcomes as we move towards a wellbeing economy. I look forward to working with ministerial colleagues as we bring those plans forward.

As I mentioned, culture—reading books, listening to music and even watching the television—helped many of us through the pandemic. Now it is time to ensure that Government helps culture by delivering a sustainable recovery for all. Volkan Bozkır, president of the United Nations General Assembly, observed:

“As we look to recover from Covid-19, we must simultaneously draw upon the skills of those in the creative sphere and ensure that no artist or cultural profession is left behind”.

From our festivals to our libraries, from our theatres to our castles, this Government is committed to delivering an equitable cultural recovery, for the benefit of the people of Scotland.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The minister will now take questions on the issues raised in her statement. I intend to allow around 20 minutes for questions, after which we will move to the next item of business. It would be helpful, as ever, if members who wish to ask a question could press their request-to-speak buttons now or as soon as possible.

**Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con):** I thank the minister for advance sight of her statement. The pandemic has clearly had an impact across our economy and it is clear that the culture sector has perhaps faced some of the greatest hardships: theatres unable to open, artists and musicians unable to perform, and in

every part of Scotland, the curtain has come down on too many local venues.

The Scottish Conservatives acknowledge the additional funding for the sector that has been announced today. Frankly, the sector needs all the help that it can get, but it is not just funding that is needed to support the arts through this phase of the pandemic. The sector needs practical advice and support, too. Productions are being forced to change or close at the last minute, which can be a real issue for many smaller companies across the country.

Although the new funding is welcome, we know that cultural organisations have reported that sometimes it takes too long for funding to reach them when it is needed. Having met various groups, I feel that the Creative Scotland application process is hard to navigate. What can the Scottish Government do to streamline the process and protect those companies that could go to the wall if funding is not delivered quickly enough?

**Jenny Gilruth:** Sharon Dowey raises a number of important issues. On the economic impact, which I touched on in my opening statement, we need to be cognisant of the fact that the economics of where we are as a country have really impacted on the culture sector in ways that they have not impacted on other parts of our society, which were able to reopen fully even at the start of this year.

In May this year, after the election, theatres were still in a level of lockdown, and there were still restrictions relating to social distancing, which had an impact on the number of people that theatres could accommodate. There was a real challenge there in May.

I do not think that the same challenge exists now. The challenge is different, but we need to be very much alive to the risks that new variants present to the sector. I am very conscious of that in my regular dealings with the sector.

Sharon Dowey mentioned practical advice and support to organisations. As she will know, funding is primarily administered via Creative Scotland, and not directly from Government. If there is an issue around funding not getting to those organisations quickly, I would be keen to raise it with Creative Scotland. In fact, I am meeting Creative Scotland tomorrow, so I will raise that hugely important issue with it on Sharon Dowey's behalf. We had an issue back in May around accessing funding and ensuring that it could be delivered quickly, which we managed to resolve, but I acknowledge some of the challenges that Sharon Dowey speaks to.

On engagement more broadly, I spend a lot of my time, as minister, speaking to the event

industry advisory group that I mentioned, which is not shy about telling me where the challenges are at the moment with regard to our recovery from the pandemic. I suppose that it is a note of reassurance to Sharon Dowey that that engagement very much continues. That is vital, because we face an increasingly challenging time with the pandemic and the changing nature of the virus. If there are organisations that Sharon Dowey would like to make me aware of, or organisations that would like direct engagement with Government, I am more than happy to give my time to them, because I recognise the challenge, and the need for on-going support and the practical advice that Sharon Dowey spoke to in her question.

**Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** I, too, thank the minister for advance sight of her statement. I agree with the importance of funding to support our culture sector, our venues and those who work in the sector. However, will the minister acknowledge the huge impact on cultural venues and organisations of the requirement to draw down their reserves before they qualified for Scottish Government funding during the pandemic? Those organisations are now under massive pressure, given the length of time that they were unable to operate—which the minister has acknowledged—and the long financial shadow that Covid-19 has cast over their capacity to recover and get back to where they were pre-Covid. What financial support can she offer them today?

I also agree that culture is critical to our collective wellbeing. Will the minister commit to offering the same support and recognition that she has offered to Arts Culture Health and Wellbeing Scotland to develop, to the arts in education recovery group to support those who have worked tirelessly throughout Covid to ensure that young people have access to cultural experiences?

Finally, will the minister consider arts prescribing to help people to recover from Covid? As she mentioned, we have some great programmes, but do we not need everyone to be able to benefit from the arts, when they need it mentally, regardless of where they live, to promote our collective health and wellbeing going forward?

**Jenny Gilruth:** Sarah Boyack touched on a number of issues, which I will try to respond to in detail.

Ms Boyack's first point related to venues drawing down on their own reserves before they were able to access funding. She will acknowledge some of the challenges that the Government faced at the beginning of the pandemic, and the financial situation in which we found ourselves. Nonetheless, I take her point. The support that the Scottish Government has

been able to provide to the culture, heritage and events sector, which is more than £175 million, is, as I mentioned, far in excess of the £97 million of consequentials that we received from the UK Government. There is an outstanding question about those consequentials, which have been delivered to cultural organisations in England and not to their equivalent here in Scotland. That is deeply concerning.

On Sarah Boyack's point about additional funding, I mentioned in my statement the funding commitments that will go to support museum recovery, including the Scottish Crannog Centre, which found itself in a unique situation earlier this year.

The cultural collective work is hugely important. A lot of our current recovery plans are focused on driving a community recovery with regard to our culture sector. That work is vital and has to be rooted in accessibility. We know that our poorer communities are less likely to have access to culture, so it is important that our recovery plans reflect and challenge that, and ensure that funding gets to those who need it most.

Ms Boyack mentioned funding for the arts in education recovery group. We will hear later from the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy about the budget, so I do not want to prejudge any announcement that she will make.

In general, I am very supportive of arts prescribing as a method to ensure that there is a cultural recovery. I would refer to that as preventative spend; making those interventions is hugely important. In my statement, I touched on the paper that went up to the Cabinet a few weeks ago. The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture and I will be meeting a number of other cabinet secretaries very soon, including the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, to discuss some of the opportunities there. As Ms Boyack will know, I am very keen, with my former teacher hat on, that we further explore the opportunity through arts in education. Arts prescribing more generally is a valid place that I would like us to explore in more detail.

**Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** As the minister said, Brexit has undoubtedly thrown up barriers, including barriers to artists' ability to tour and perform. What steps is the Scottish Government taking to support Scotland's artists and musicians to tour and perform in Europe?

**Jenny Gilruth:** Brexit has undoubtedly created challenges for touring artists, some of which I mentioned. We are yet to see the full impact, given Covid-related travel restrictions, but Brexit has introduced costs and administrative barriers to accessing the sector's largest overseas markets.

As I noted, we have provided £10,000 to support Arts Infopoint UK, which has been set up to help artists to navigate the new administrative challenge that Brexit has created.

The Scottish Government will continue to make the case that the UK Government and the EU should agree visa-free travel arrangements to allow UK and EU artists to move freely. I last met the UK Government culture minister in June and I am yet to meet the new minister, although I have asked to do so. Getting movement on the issue is hugely important for our music sector. There is a pragmatic solution and it is time that we had movement to protect jobs in our music sector.

**Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con):** Many cultural venues across Scotland have succumbed to damage in the past few months, after underuse as a result of the pandemic and battering from recent storms. What will the Scottish Government do to protect some of the most vulnerable buildings in communities across Scotland?

**Jenny Gilruth:** Jeremy Balfour asks about cultural venues. The Scottish Government has provided support by contributing significant funding through our culture organisations and venues recovery fund, which totalled £25 million, and I gave examples of its impact.

There might be a potential challenge to buildings that Mr Balfour is alive to and I am not. If he would like to share details that relate to the heritage sector, I would be more than happy to discuss that with him in more detail.

I recognise that the heritage sector has challenges in reopening buildings. To be blunt, climate change is also a challenge. I saw that well illustrated by the Hill house box project—some members might have seen it—which involves the Charles Rennie Mackintosh building in Helensburgh. That is a fantastic example of how the National Trust for Scotland is preserving a hugely significant building by encasing it in a metal box, which will guard against the impacts of climate change.

I am not sure whether Mr Balfour was alluding to such matters. I am happy to have a further conversation with him and to hear any learning that he has for the Government, because I recognise the challenges.

**Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP):** An issue has been escalated to me in my capacity as the convener of the cross-party group on music. The Scottish commercial music industry task force wrote recently to the UK Government to highlight its concern that only £9 million of £40 million that was committed to in Barnett consequential for culture has been given to the Scottish Government. The minister has referred to that.

What discussions has she had with the UK Government about that very concerning situation?

**Jenny Gilruth:** The discussions that I have had about the matter were in the two meetings that I had with the previous culture minister, which were in May and June. We still seek clarity from HM Treasury on why the £40 million has not yet been passed on in full. We continue to press the UK Government to deliver the remaining £31 million of consequential, which relate to the budget that the chancellor announced in March.

As for the Scottish Government's wider work, I have invited the Scottish commercial music industry task force and the Music Venue Trust to a round-table discussion next week, on 15 December, with me and the Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture. That will allow us to better understand how the Scottish Government can support the music industry in its recovery from the pandemic. The Scottish commercial music industry task force has also written to the UK Government about the matter.

**Foyso Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab):** I thank the minister for advance sight of her statement. More access to funding is crucial for small and community-based organisations, as countless bodies are still struggling to recover from the impact of Covid-19. Many small community organisations still face barriers to unlocking their full potential as the driving force of our culture sector. The complexities and delays in the application process prevent them from planning and being sure of the financial support that they desperately need. Events such as Edinburgh Diwali and the Eid celebrations that are organised by smaller organisations and visited by hundreds of people, including the minister, are still struggling. How will the Government ensure that small organisations can gain access to crucial funding to enable them to recover and that they will not have to wait until a week before their events start to learn whether funding is secured?

**Jenny Gilruth:** I enjoyed my experience at Edinburgh Diwali, at which Foyso Choudhury and Ms Boyack were present. It was a fantastic experience and a privilege to be a part of the event a couple weeks ago.

On the support that we have been able to provide, the Scottish Government understands how deeply impacted the sector has been by the pandemic. Foyso Choudhury rightly speaks to some of the challenges that smaller organisations have experienced. One of the announcements that I confirmed today was the museums and galleries fund. That £1 million fund will deliver small amounts of funding to smaller organisations. That is hugely important.

Next year is Scotland's year of stories. There is a vital story for our museums sector to tell in that regard, because it tells the stories of our local communities. If we can get funding to smaller museums, we can help to share that story in Scotland's community and embed the sense of place.

I have not had any correspondence on hold-ups, complexities and delays in applications but, if Mr Choudhury wants to write to me, I am keen to raise it. It is the second time that it has been raised. As I mentioned, I am meeting Creative Scotland tomorrow, so I am more than happy to raise the issue. I do not want smaller organisations to be in some way prohibited from bidding for the funding or for them to be more likely to feel the financial impacts of the pandemic because they are smaller and, therefore, less robust in dealing with them. I will take that matter away. If Mr Choudhury writes to me on the specifics, I will be more than happy to speak to him on the issues that he has raised.

**Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** I refer to the economic impact of investment in culture. The Great Tapestry of Scotland centre was built in Galashiels with £2.5 million in Scottish Government funding. To date, since its opening in late August, 7,000 tickets have been sold despite Covid. Does the minister agree that the £2.5 million was an investment not only in the centre and the regeneration of Galashiels but in the wider Borders economy?

**Jenny Gilruth:** Absolutely. It is fantastic that the new, world-class Great Tapestry of Scotland visitor experience, which was designed to support regeneration and wellbeing, has opened in Galashiels in Ms Grahame's constituency.

The Scottish Government has been a strong supporter of the Great Tapestry of Scotland from its inception. The creation of the new visitor centre is part of a wider economic and social regeneration across the south of Scotland, as Ms Grahame alluded to in her question. It is incredibly fitting that, for many people who visit the area, Scotland's story will begin just 3 miles from Abbotsford, the home of Sir Walter Scott. The centre's opening is an inspiring moment as we look forward to the celebration of the year of stories in 2022 and I look forward to being able to visit the great tapestry in the new year with Ms Grahame.

**Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** I thank the minister for her statement and, in particular, the increased funding for the culture collective and the Scottish Crannog Centre. We have all had incredible experiences at the centre. It is an absolute time machine and it would be great to see the crannog recreated.

The statement underlines the importance of the creative sector to wellbeing, regeneration, place making and mental health. The sector consists of busy, creative organisations, but they often spend a lot of time applying for annual funding year after year. A lot of creative time is wasted through that funding process, so what hope can the minister give us that we will move to a multiyear funding process that ensures that creative organisations have the certainty to invest in their communities and deliver all the amazing wellbeing benefits that we are used to them delivering?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Before the minister responds, I invite members who are moving into the chamber for the next item of business to respect the colleagues who are engaged in the statement and asking questions.

**Jenny Gilruth:** Mark Ruskell rightly speaks to the hugely important wellbeing impacts that investing in culture can have. There are wider, cross-governmental priorities that investing in culture will allow us to deliver. I am keen to meet ministerial colleagues on that along with the Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture in the next few weeks.

The funding issue that Mr Ruskell raises is a matter for Creative Scotland but, as I have mentioned in two answers, I am meeting the agency tomorrow, so I am more than happy to take the matter up. The point on financial certainty is well made. However, I again relay the point that the uncertainty that has been created by our not receiving the full amount of the culture consequential that were due to Scotland is not welcome in the sector. If we could get some clarity from the UK Government on that in the immediate future, it would be welcome. However, in the interim, I am happy to raise the matter with Creative Scotland.

**Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP):** I thank the minister for her statement. How will the Scottish Government ensure that the history and culture of rural and island areas, especially in Gaelic, will be reflected in its policies?

**Jenny Gilruth:** A range of Gaelic initiatives are in place in areas of low population, such as MG Alba, Stòrlann—if I do not pronounce the following correctly, please correct me; I see Kate Forbes sitting beside me—Sabhal Mòr Ostaig and Ceòlas, which create employment for young Gaelic speakers and opportunities to use and learn the language. There is also a network of Gaelic development officers operating throughout island and rural areas to support the Gaelic language. I recall from my time in Education Scotland sitting across from some of those development officers.

The Scottish Government is working closely and positively with the local authorities in those areas

in early years education and in the arts to support Gaelic. I would be happy to provide any further information on that to Jenni Minto.

We also have a number of manifesto commitments to support Gaelic and Scots. Naturally, as those develop, we will ensure that rural and island communities are reflected in those plans.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Your pronunciation was a valiant effort, minister.

**Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con):** What discussions has the Scottish Government had on working together with the cultural sector to ensure that as many people as possible use lateral flow tests before they attend venues? That is not mandated by the Government.

**Jenny Gilruth:** The primary way in which we have engaged with the sector on that matter has been through the event industry advisory group, which meets every three weeks, I think. I meet it then, and that issue, which is hugely important, is regularly raised with us.

At our previous meeting, which was two weeks ago, the issue of our communications package was raised. We are working with the events industry on that. It is hugely important that we continue, particularly with the emergence of new variants, to relay that messaging to people as they experience events. We all want to support our cultural recovery, but it is important that the population does that safely. The main way in which people can do that is, of course, by taking a lateral flow test before they attend an event.

The communication with the event industry advisory group continues, and we are working on the communication package with the group and officials to ensure that the messaging gets to those who need to hear it and that people test before they go to experience live concerts and events. That is particularly important in the run-up to Christmas.

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** The minister mentioned Scots. The Scots language is a huge part of Scotland's culture, and the promotion of Scots has been affected by the pandemic. What work is the Scottish Government undertaking to further promote the use of the Scots language across Scotland as we emerge through and out of the pandemic? Will the minister agree to attend a future meeting of the re-established Scots language cross-party group to provide an update on work in relation to Scots, which I am told includes Doric as well?

**Jenny Gilruth:** I recognise Emma Harper's interest in, and commitment to, the Scots language.

The Scottish Government has made it clear that our support for indigenous languages includes Scots, of course, and it is essential that those who wish to use the Scots language are given every opportunity to use the language of their choice. For many Scots, the Scots language is the language of home and community, and its use in other areas of Scottish life should be encouraged.

Emma Harper extended an invitation to me to attend her cross-party group. I would be more than happy to take up that invitation.

## Budget 2022-23

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

The next item of business is a statement by Kate Forbes on the Scottish budget 2022-23. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of her statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

15:25

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy (Kate Forbes):** Today's budget will help to tackle the climate emergency, to support economic recovery and to reduce inequalities. It comes at a crucial moment for Scotland. It is the first budget of the parliamentary session and of the partnership Government, having been developed in co-operation with the Scottish Green Party. It delivers on key commitments that were made in the Bute house agreement, from free bus travel for young people to doubling the Scottish child payment.

As a result of that partnership, the budget redoubles our efforts to meet our emissions reduction targets in a fair and just way that creates economic opportunities and harnesses opportunities for green jobs, prosperity and greater wellbeing. Both PricewaterhouseCoopers and Lloyds Banking Group have concluded that Scotland is the top-ranked part of the United Kingdom for green jobs and green economic prosperity.

The budget supports Scotland at a point of transition, balancing our response to the immediate pressures of Covid and the cost of living crisis with longer-term action. If my last two budgets have been shaped by our immediate experiences of Covid, today's aims to lift our eyes to the future—while remaining vigilant, of course, to the effects of new variants. It is a transitional budget, as people, businesses and services get back on their feet.

We cannot leave anybody behind in our determination to increase prosperity. The budget therefore directly contributes to our national mission to end child poverty, by doubling the Scottish child payment and investing in employability schemes to get people back into work.

Government alone can never deliver on all those ambitions, so we need to work collaboratively with all areas of Scottish life—public and private, national and local—to build on

the renewed approach to partnership that we saw during the pandemic. However, in the absence of Covid-related funding—despite the very real ongoing impacts of the pandemic and in combination with the pressures of inflation—the budget is one of choices.

Although the budget lays the groundwork for a green economic recovery from Covid-19, we must be clear that the UK Government's spending review has hindered rather than helped us on that mission. In practice, Covid funding having been removed, our day-to-day funding next year is significantly less than in the current year, at a time when we undeniably need to invest in the economy and help public services recover.

That means that the budget cannot deliver the resources that all our partners will want, and, to be clear, there are areas in which I would have wished to go further. However, I present a budget that addresses key priorities, targets resources for low-income households, and paves the way for future investment over the life of this parliamentary session.

It is a budget of choices, but I believe that we have made the right choices. It is a transitional budget, maximising funding, where we can, to deliver key priorities now, but also paving the way for future fiscal choices.

Alongside today's Scottish budget and medium-term financial strategy, I am publishing a framework for the resource spending review that will be published in May 2022 and will set out the Government's multiyear spending plans. The framework sets out our principles, and I look forward to contributions from members of all parties.

I will now update the Parliament on the economic and fiscal context. First, I take a moment to thank the Scottish Fiscal Commission for the forecasts that inform the budget. Supply chain bottlenecks, labour market shortages, inflationary pressures and rising energy prices are all placing extra pressure on businesses and households that are trying to recover from the impact of the pandemic.

The Fiscal Commission forecasts a level of long-term economic damage to the Scottish economy from Covid-19 of around -2 per cent. That is similar to the Office for Budget Responsibility's forecast for the UK economy, which means that the long-term impact of Brexit on the economy will be worse than that which has been caused by Covid-19: the OBR attributes a 4 per cent long-term reduction in living standards due to the UK's exit from the European Union.

The impact of Brexit has not been felt equally across the UK. The latest figures from the ONS show that Northern Ireland is the only part of the

UK where the economy has recovered nearly to pre-pandemic levels. That is not surprising, given that Northern Ireland has, in effect, remained in the EU's single market for goods as a result of the Northern Ireland protocol. Although all other parts of the UK have experienced a negative impact as a result of Brexit, the scale of that impact is three times higher in Scotland than in London.

We said that Brexit would be bad for Scotland and that it would have a differential impact on our economy; it is, and that is having a direct impact on our budget. Members should be under no illusion that the budget that I am presenting today is smaller than it would have been because of the impact of Brexit on our economy—a Brexit that has been imposed on Scotland against the express wish of the people who live here.

Brexit, along with UK Government policy on immigration, continues to affect income tax receipts in Scotland. Based on the latest SFC and OBR forecasts, Scottish income tax receipts are estimated to be £190 million lower than the block grant adjustment next year. A number of factors explain that. The SFC and OBR both state that the continued uncertainty around the pandemic means that the uncertainty around forecasts may be greater than usual. The final position on the performance of income tax revenues next year will be known only once outturn data is published in 2024.

Strong earnings growth in London and the south-east, in particular among the highest earners, means that our budget is being reduced even while earnings grow in Scotland. That issue is accounted for in the fiscal framework for Wales, but not in ours, and we are clear that it must form part of the upcoming fiscal framework review. Rising inequality in England should not lead to Scotland's budget being reduced.

Ultimately, however, without full control over economic policy and immigration, which the UK Government refuses to give us, we do not have full powers to mitigate the effects of Brexit, secure a green economic recovery from the pandemic and raise the revenues that our public services need.

Despite all that, there are reasons for optimism in the Scottish economy. The Scottish Fiscal Commission now forecasts that our economy will recover to pre-pandemic levels by April to June 2022, almost two years earlier than was forecast at the previous Scottish budget in January. Although the SFC is expecting a peak unemployment rate of 4.9 per cent at the end of this year, that is far below the 7.6 per cent forecast at the time of the previous Scottish budget.

I have taken those forecasts, and the overall state of our economy, into account when setting

tax policies for the year ahead. I am proud of the consultative approach that we take to taxation in Scotland. We consulted widely in advance of the budget and met with a broad range of stakeholders. We will maintain our progressive approach, which we will reinforce when we publish Scotland's first framework for tax.

Of course, I recognise the on-going need for stability and certainty for taxpayers at this time, in addition to targeted support, as a foundation for recovery. For businesses, over the past two years, I have delivered 100 per cent rates relief for the retail, hospitality, leisure and aviation sectors. Unlike England and Wales, we did not cap the level of support that was available at any time during that period. We were also the first Government to offer the certainty of a relief in 2021-22 when businesses needed it most.

On 1 July 2021, when retail, hospitality and leisure businesses in England started paying rates, their equivalents in Scotland continued to receive 100 per cent uncapped relief for a further nine months. Those decisions, along with our unprecedented decision to cut the poundage at the peak of the pandemic, have saved businesses in Scotland around £1.6 billion through the rates system alone since 1 April 2020.

Recognising that we have offered the most generous rates relief anywhere in the UK for the past two years, and the importance of phasing the return of rates liabilities, rates relief for the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors will continue at 50 per cent for the first three months of 2022-23, capped at £27,500 per ratepayer. That will prevent a cliff edge for businesses in those sectors.

I will also continue to offer the lowest non-domestic rates poundage in the UK, at 49.8p, delivering a below-inflation uplift for the fourth year in a row. That is in addition to our having the UK's most competitive package of annual reliefs, worth £745 million.

I have heard the calls to support small businesses and our high streets in particular. A small business with a rateable value of less than £15,000 on a Scottish high street will continue to pay no rates for the entirety of next year, irrespective of what sector it is in, through the small business bonus scheme. A new-build in one of our towns will pay no rates for the first 12 months of occupation, through the business growth accelerator. Our competitive rates reliefs are directly seeking to revitalise our high streets.

On income tax, the Government's priority has been to make the tax system fairer and more progressive, and to protect low and middle-income taxpayers. With increases in the cost of living and rising fuel prices likely to impact lower-income families the most, I believe that those principles

are more important than ever. I can therefore confirm that income tax rates next year will remain unchanged. The starter and the basic rate bands will increase in line with inflation, and the higher and top rates will remain frozen at their current level.

Our progressive income tax policy means that the majority of Scottish taxpayers will continue to pay less income tax than they would if they lived elsewhere in the UK, while those who earn more will pay more. It maintains spending power in the households that need our support the most, yet also raises crucial revenues for our public services from those who can most afford it.

On land and buildings transaction tax, we will maintain both residential and non-residential rates and bands at their current levels next year. We will shortly launch a call for evidence and views on changing the additional dwelling supplement.

On Scottish landfill tax, we will increase both the standard and lower rates of tax on 1 April, to maintain consistency across the UK and support our ambitions for a more circular economy.

In sum, with our devolved tax policies we are delivering a more progressive approach to tax, while also supporting recovery. We are also generating the revenues that we need to invest in our national health service recovery plan, our new national care service, our real-terms budget protection so that our police can keep us safe, and the doubling of the game-changing Scottish child payment to £20.

The continued threat that Covid poses will remain the primary focus of the Government in the immediate term, not least in the face of the risk of further variants. Today, I can set out our plans to provide increased funding to respond to the pressures that have been created by the pandemic and to ensure that everyone can get the care that they need at a time, in a place and in a way that suits them. We are doing that despite the absence of Covid consequential from the UK Government, which means that we must absorb those additional Covid costs within our overall budget.

In total, this budget provides record funding of £18 billion for health and social care, not only to address immediate pressures across the NHS, but to deliver the first step in ensuring that front-line funding, which directly supports patient services, increases by at least £2.5 billion by 2026-27. As we set out in our manifesto, we will deliver on our commitment to pass on all health and social care consequential in full, with additional spend in excess of £1 billion in health and social care.

Members will be aware of the staffing difficulties being experienced in the care sector, with Brexit and the ending of freedom of movement once

again being a major factor. The transfer to local government for social care includes an additional £200 million, which will deliver the £10.50 minimum wage for all adult social care staff in commissioned services and support the recruitment and retention of care staff, who are so vital to the health and care system, as we begin the process of creating a new national care service over the course of this parliamentary session.

The overall package provides £1.2 billion for mental health, taking forward our commitment to ensure that direct mental health funding increases by 25 per cent and that 10 per cent of all front-line NHS spend goes to mental health by the end of this session.

We also reaffirm our commitment to keep the promise, which will see the establishment of an initial £50 million whole family wellbeing fund to provide person-centred holistic support for children and their families. That funding will build during this parliamentary session as capacity and capability for transformational change builds in the sector.

The budget also deepens our partnership with local government. It delivers a settlement for local government that recognises the leadership role that councils play in their communities and their part in delivering a national recovery. It provides increased resources for social care and education, ensuring the continued delivery of vital local services across Scotland while working to increase the fiscal autonomy and power of local government, and it puts more say over how local budgets are raised in local hands. It includes record increased investment in teacher recruitment, supporting the recruitment of at least 3,500 teachers and 500 classroom assistants during this session of Parliament.

My investment plans for public services and action across portfolios are directed by three priority themes: tackling inequalities, supporting Scotland's economy and ending Scotland's contribution to climate change.

The budget backs our national mission to tackle child poverty and make Scotland truly a land of opportunity for everybody. The most immediate and direct way to tackle poverty is by putting more money into the pockets of the people who need it most, ensuring a decent standard of living for children, in particular. The budget invests in increasing family incomes and driving down the cost of living.

It provides £200 million for the Scottish attainment challenge—the next instalment of our commitment to provide £1 billion over this session of Parliament to tackle the poverty-related attainment gap. It provides more than £4 billion

across social security and welfare payments, providing vital support for low-income families, carers and disabled people, including £1.95 billion to start delivery of the adult disability payment next year. It also provides £41 million for the Scottish welfare fund, helping people in times of crisis, £80.2 million in discretionary housing payments and £110 million for the provision of free bus travel for young people from January, putting more money in their pockets and encouraging more use of public transport.

The budget includes more than £72 million for the continued expansion of free school meals, providing lunches for all children in primaries 1 to 5 and special schools and supporting the infrastructure required to roll out lunches to all primary school children. It includes £544 million for the delivery of free funded early learning and childcare for three and four-year-olds and for two-year-olds from lower-income households, while taking forward work to expand that to one-year-olds from low-income households within this session of Parliament.

It also includes £831 million for affordable housing, progressing our commitment to deliver 110,000 affordable, energy-efficient homes across the next decade, leveraging private sector investment and supporting employment in the construction sector.

There is no question but that those measures will make a huge difference, but we can and must do more. I know that there is consensus in the Parliament for taking greater action to tackle child poverty, and it is right that the Government stretches every sinew to do so. That means that we have to make hard choices elsewhere in the budget, where necessary. We do so in order to fund the most ambitious anti-poverty measures anywhere in the UK and to respond to the UK Government's decision to scrap the £20 uplift to universal credit.

The budget not only delivers on the pledge in the programme for government to double the Scottish child payment to £20 per week; as the First Minister announced last week, we will also bring forward that commitment to April 2022. That is nearly £200 million in next year's budget going directly to lift children across Scotland out of poverty.

I know that, when our economy is prospering, more public revenue can be reinvested, and we cannot talk about public services without ensuring that we support businesses to recover. The budget therefore invests in Scotland's ambition to be a wellbeing economy that enables successful and profitable business activity, entrepreneurship and innovation that is environmentally sustainable and that supports all parts of Scotland to thrive.

We know that the biggest challenges that businesses face now are labour shortages, rising costs and inflationary pressures. Our budget seeks to respond to each of those issues, to invest in skills and employability and to make catalytic investments that regenerate areas, boost trade and keep costs low. That process will be long term, and I will shortly publish the Government's national strategy for economic transformation, to provide vision and leadership for the longer term. However, the process also starts now, with this budget.

Today's budget provides over £205 million in capitalisation for the Scottish National Investment Bank, helping it to deliver against its missions of supporting Scotland's transition to net zero, building communities and promoting equality, and harnessing innovation.

Scotland's geographical diversity is one of our great economic strengths. I can confirm the investment of £51 million in rural services and islands, including activities that are linked to the national islands plan and the introduction of a new islands bond fund.

Few challenges are as acute as labour shortages, so we will invest more than £225 million in Skills Development Scotland to support a range of national training interventions. The budget also allocates nearly £2 billion to Scotland's universities and colleges to deliver high-quality education and training.

More generally, I am providing more than £370 million to support our enterprise agencies and nearly £50 million to VisitScotland, to strengthen key sectors such as tourism in order to promote innovation and achieve sustained success in new and emerging markets.

Those actions, taken together with the package of non-domestic rates measures, provide a strong platform in the budget to enable Scotland's economy to thrive and prosper now and long into the future.

I turn now to the climate crisis, which is also an enormous economic opportunity for Scotland. Our hosting of the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP26—showcased the work that we are already doing in Scotland and the depth of commitment that exists to go further. I have worked closely with colleagues in the Scottish Green Party to shape that commitment, and I welcome their support and constructive challenge.

Through the budget, we will lay the groundwork to protect and restore our natural environment, decarbonise our homes, industries and transport, and position ourselves as a global leader in renewable energy and green and digital tech. Meeting our ambitious emissions reduction targets

will require transformational activity across all sectors of the economy and society, which will not be an easy task, but we are up for the challenge.

The just transition to net zero needs investment now, and today's budget sets out almost £2 billion of low-carbon capital investment in Scotland's public infrastructure to support the decarbonisation of our homes and buildings, transport and industry. We will also continue to work with the private sector to mobilise investment behind the low-carbon transition. The budget will lay the groundwork to secure a green recovery, and it will follow through on our commitment to implement the recommendations of the just transition commission across the Parliament.

Today, I can confirm the first £20 million of our 10-year £500 million just transition fund for the north-east and Moray; £336 million for energy efficiency and low-carbon and renewable heat, which will cut emissions, make homes warmer, tackle fuel poverty and create jobs across Scotland, and which will include £60 million for large-scale heat decarbonisation projects; and £53 million across a range of energy transition and industrial decarbonisation projects, including £20 million for energy transition fund projects in the north-east.

I can confirm £23.5 million for our green jobs fund to help businesses to create green employment through investment; a record investment of £150 million in infrastructure to make walking, wheeling and cycling safer; £1.4 billion to maintain, improve and decarbonise Scotland's rail network; and £43 million to drive forward Scotland's circular economy.

I can also confirm £53 million to restore Scotland's precious natural environment, including our internationally important peatlands, addressing the twin crises of climate change and nature loss; £25 million this year to start work on transforming farming and food production in Scotland, enabling us to be world leading in sustainable and regenerative agriculture; and an investment of a further £69.5 million in woodland creation and the sustainable management of Scotland's woodlands, to enable an increase of our woodland creation target to 15,000 hectares a year.

Climate change requires global action that is driven by local and national commitments to ensure that we deliver the changes that are needed, and today's budget demonstrates that that commitment exists here. Let no one be in any doubt that this Government, working in partnership with the Scottish Greens, is absolutely committed to meeting our statutory climate change targets and delivering the net zero society that we not only want but need.

Turning to the issue of pay, the principle of fair work is a cornerstone of this Government's economic approach, and I have placed that principle at the centre of my decisions about public sector pay. I recognise the challenges that are presented by inflation and rising living costs, as well as the huge effort that the public sector has made in responding to the pandemic. Our pay policy for next year therefore focuses on people on low incomes, continuing our progressive approach and guaranteeing an inflationary uplift of at least £775 to those who earn up to £25,000, £700 to those who earn between £25,000 and £40,000, and £500 to those who earn above £40,000.

In October, the Government announced an uplift in pay for social care workers to £10.02 per hour. Today, I announce a minimum wage floor of £10.50 per hour across all bodies that are covered by the pay policy, with specific funding to apply that for adult social care staff. Targeted support for many of our lowest-paid staff across the public sector is hugely important, and this budget delivers that support.

Today's budget is a budget of choices. We have chosen to tackle child poverty, invest in the transition to net zero and boost economic prosperity. The budget delivers on our manifesto promises of more teachers, more funding for our police and record investment in our health and social care services as we stand united against the impacts of Covid-19. It is a budget for households facing a cost-of-living crisis, targeting resources at low-income families and making bold choices to address the devastating impacts of child poverty. It is a budget for our businesses and workers, with further financial support for enterprises now and a clear plan to achieve longer-term prosperity. It is a budget for a net zero future, which once again shows Scotland leading from the front in the defining mission of our generation.

I commend this budget to the Parliament and to the people of Scotland.

**The Presiding Officer:** The cabinet secretary will now take questions on the issues that were raised in her statement. I intend to allow around 60 minutes for questions, after which we will move to the next item of business. I would be grateful if members who wish to ask a question would now press their request-to-speak button.

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of her statement, and I thank Labour for advance sight of its questions.

The cabinet secretary is a fair-minded person, but I am astonished that she has not at least acknowledged that, for this budget, she has at her disposal record block grant funding from Rishi

Sunak and the UK Government. That funding is up by 10.6 per cent, proving the benefit of Scotland being part of a strong United Kingdom, which is needed now more than ever as we battle our way out of the prolonged pandemic.

The Scottish Conservatives were clear that the focus of the budget should be twofold: supporting our public services coming out of Covid-19 and accelerating our economic recovery. Those two goals are not separate. Each relies on the other and, achieved together, they will secure the wellbeing of Scottish jobs, companies and families into the future. In that respect, we welcome the doubling of the child payment, which we had called for.

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** That is absolutely shameful!

**Liz Smith:** We had called for it.

**The First Minister:** You can't even keep a straight face.

**Liz Smith:** I can keep a straight face.

We understand that budgets are about choices, and in the lead-up to today's statement, we made choices that show that it is possible to balance support for public services and the move to net zero with the protection of jobs and stimulating economic growth.

Such is our concern on the back of what businesses were telling us, we wanted the Scottish National Party to extend 75 per cent rates relief to customer-facing businesses in the next financial year. That would be worth £631 million to businesses. We therefore think that businesses will be disappointed by today's budget statement. Why is there no commitment to a clear programme for long-awaited structural reforms to the Scottish economy, especially the reform of non-domestic rates, as called for by Liz Cameron and Scottish Chambers of Commerce? Why is there no commitment to greater investment in skills and the digital infrastructure, as called for by business organisations and colleges and universities, all of which will play leading roles in securing Scotland's future economic success?

Secondly, we wanted to ensure that money goes to front-line health services in the care sector, which clearly has significant resource issues. Scotland is set to receive £2.1 billion in healthcare consequential and, although £1.2 billion in consequential is coming to local government, there is clearly a real-terms cut to local government in the budget. Perhaps the cabinet secretary can explain what that choice means and whether the local authorities will have the autonomy to spend the money that is going to local government as they choose.

Thirdly, we will reject any attempt by the SNP, whether now or in later budgets, to backtrack on its £2.2 billion commitment to upgrade the road network, including the dualling of the A9 and A96, which are important for connectivity and economic growth and provide a much-needed lifeline for our rural communities, many of which suffered disproportionately during the pandemic. After all the confusion that we have seen in recent weeks, and the absence of clarity in today's statement, can the cabinet secretary tell us when those two upgrades will be completed?

We will measure all the announcements in the budget against the essential test of whether they will assist efforts to protect jobs and families, and safeguard our economy. The budget process is a chance for the Scottish Government to put aside party-political priorities and act in the national interest. That will be the test of whether this budget delivers for Scotland.

**Kate Forbes:** Let me start with the block grant funding. We cannot, by any calculation, come to any conclusion but that next year's budget is a reduction on this year's. Why? It is because the Tories have wished Covid away. They have stripped out all Covid consequential. That is funding to tackle the impact of Covid on our health service, our justice system and our transport system. We know, and the people of Scotland know, that Covid continues to have an impact, so to wish away and strip out all Covid consequential completely disregards the risks that our public services and people are facing right now.

Liz Smith has made some specific asks. On rates relief, we should remember that, under the Conservative Government, retail, hospitality and leisure businesses started paying rates last July. In Scotland, they are still not paying rates. In terms of dealing with the on-going pressures that businesses face, there is a far bigger cushion in Scotland. Many of the concerns that businesses are raising with us—for example, about labour market shortages, the rising cost of materials, and the impact of inflation—have been inflicted by the Tory Government.

The chancellor has announced his big reform to the non-domestic rates system. Interestingly, he took our best ideas and reformed the non-domestic rates system in England according to measures that were already in place in Scotland.

My last point to the Conservatives is that, if they want to deliver the many choices and options that they have set out today, they will need to tell the Parliament how they would do that. What would they cut, or what taxes would they hike? At the end of the day, if we are to deliver the health and social care funding, to protect businesses against the pressures that they face and—most

important—to absorb all the Covid costs within our budget because there is no additional Covid funding, the Parliament faces very stark choices. Every party, including the Tory party, needs to be clear about what it would cut or which tax rates it would raise.

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** Rather than saying, “Thank you for advance sight of the statement,” perhaps I should begin by saying, “You’re welcome.”

The people of Scotland are not just wondering, “When will we get back to normal?”; the real question that they are asking is, “When will we move beyond the crisis?” Unfortunately, the budget fails to answer that question. Challenging times require bold action but, rather than rising to that challenge, the budget simply offers more managed decline under the SNP.

Of course, there are things in the budget that we welcome. It is right that the NHS gets the bulk of new funding, but we know that there are more people stuck in hospital because we cannot recruit enough care workers to look after them than there are people in hospital with Covid. That is why care workers deserve a fair pay increase to £15 an hour, not a meagre pay rise of barely 50p. That is an insult to those hard-working workers.

High streets and local shops are the heart of our communities, but they face a bleak new year. With “To Let” boards springing up across Scotland, it is not enough to write off retail, manage decline and reset the cliff edge three months into the summer.

Action on child poverty will always be welcome, but the Government’s targets demand not just doubling the child payment, but increasing it to £40 by April 2023.

As we consider the prospect of new restrictions, every parent is wondering whether this winter will bring more disruption to their children’s schooling. Recovery means implementing in our children’s classrooms the same ventilation systems and standards that we demand in our offices, rather than just asking them to open the window and hope for the best.

Over recent weeks—and again today—the cabinet secretary has attempted to dampen expectations, claiming that she has no money, but that is not true. This year, the block grant will increase by £3.9 billion, or 7.7 per cent in real terms. That is the largest increase in the block grant since 2001.

Therefore, the cabinet secretary has choices. She can choose to use those funds to be bold and deliver recovery, or she can use them to continue SNP managed decline. Scottish Labour makes no apologies for pushing her to be bold and make

recovery real, rather than just a political posture or a name check.

How will the cabinet secretary entice more people into social care work when she is offering social care workers an increase in their wages of only 48p, which represents a rise of just 0.6 per cent above inflation? How many retail businesses does she think will go to the wall three months after the new financial year begins? How many businesses pay rates at all, if their rateable value is below £15,000? How far short of its own child poverty targets will the Government be at the end of the next financial year?

**Kate Forbes:** It is unfortunate to hear the Labour Party parroting the Conservatives’ press release in terms of the funding available. The Conservatives will parrot that line, but Labour should get behind the headlines and recognise that we are having to absorb all the Covid costs within our budget.

One advantage of seeing Labour’s asks ahead of time was that it allowed me to do some calculations. We calculate that, overall, those asks would require approximately £3 billion of additional funding. Assuming that the Labour Party does not want us to cut anything that has been published in the budget, does it want every taxpayer in Scotland to pay £1,000 more per year to deliver that?

I come to the specifics of Mr Johnson’s questions. I agree that we should pay our carers more. That is why we have confirmed a wage floor of £10.50 per hour, which is higher than the national minimum wage and higher than the real living wage, and we are fully funding local government to pay it. That uplift takes pay for social care workers significantly higher than the national living wage of £8.91 per hour that applies to many social care workers elsewhere in the UK, including those in Wales who work under the Labour Party. It is also higher than the £10 per hour that the UK Labour Party wants to be paid to carers in England.

On high streets and local shops, we agree that we need to invest in our high streets to ensure that local enterprises can thrive. That is why we have taken 110,000 small businesses out of paying rates altogether. The member knows as well as I do that the investment in our high streets to ensure that our local towns are thriving comes from more than the rates.

Labour members have previously called for the Scottish child payment to be £20 per child per week. Now that we have delivered that, they have increased their figure. I have a question for them. Will they vote for this budget to provide £20 per week for every eligible child in Scotland, or will they vote against the £20 per child per week?

**Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** The Scottish Liberal Democrats will always—[*Interruption.*] Presiding Officer, there seems to be some disruption.

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney):** Just carry on.

**The Presiding Officer:** Deputy First Minister, I thank you for your contribution, but I will chair this meeting of Parliament—[*Laughter.*]—and we will hear Mr Cole-Hamilton.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** Thank you, Presiding Officer.

The Scottish Liberal Democrats will always engage constructively in negotiations on the Scottish budget, particularly in a year such as this, when it carries such importance. We did so last year; an additional £120 million was afforded to mental ill health, so we backed the Scottish Government's budget before the election. We will need to do far more, given the hidden pandemic of mental ill health that has been caused by Covid-19.

Our party is dismayed to see that the budget includes real-terms pay cuts for teachers, nurses and many thousands of public sector workers, in the face of a rise in national insurance contributions and a rising cost of living. I agree with Labour that the derisory pay increase that has been offered to social care staff will not be the transformational injection that we need in order to make it a profession of choice and to attract people into it.

The cabinet secretary described this as “a budget of choices”. It is concerning that she has put preparation for another independence referendum on page 103, but that nowhere within the pages of the budget document does she refer to the 100,000 people in Scotland who are currently suffering from long Covid. The pandemic has been characterised as the biggest mass disabling event since the first world war, but those 100,000 Scots are nowhere in the document. I ask the finance secretary whether that is an oversight. If it is, can we meet to discuss how best to extend care for long Covid? If it is not an oversight, what will she do for the tens of thousands of Scots who are suffering at home from that debilitating condition?

**Kate Forbes:** The pay policy that we have set out today is progressive and fair, and focuses our efforts on the lowest-paid workers. I remind Alex Cole-Hamilton that we did that last year without any consequential funding because the UK Government's public sector pay policy froze the majority of salaries. Once again this year, we are in the dark about what the UK Government is going to do. Despite that, we have moved ahead

to ensure that our public sector pay policy is affordable and fair.

On long Covid, the member will know that we have published our approach paper that sets out 16 commitments to improve care and support for people with long Covid, backed by the £10 million long Covid support fund. On the budget document, I note that we will, with record spending on health and social care, ensure that part of the £18 billion is focused on people who are suffering from long Covid. It is a hugely important issue.

The last point that I make to the Lib Dems is one that I have made to other parties. I have allocated every penny in the budget and I have done so having absorbed all the on-going Covid costs within a reducing budget, compared with last year's. Therefore, if we are going to increase any budget line, my question is this. How? Where would the increase come from and how would we fund it? At the moment, every penny is accounted for.

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** I thank the cabinet secretary for bringing her budget forward by a week to allow the Finance and Public Administration Committee to undertake greater scrutiny. I appreciate her difficulties, given that the resources that are available to her will decline further in the two years following the budget.

Given the fiscal constraints, and as this Parliament has no powers over excise and fuel duty, inheritance tax, VAT, national insurance and so on, all of which are available to the UK Government but which the Opposition parties seek to continue to deny us, how much extra would each Scottish taxpayer have to pay to fund the Tory, Lib Dem and Labour spending demands? I appreciate that that question is not easy to answer, given that many of the demands are completely uncoded.

**Kate Forbes:** It is, of course, for the Opposition parties to explain the detail of their policy proposals and to say precisely what they want to fund and how it would be funded. I have shared my estimation of the cost of the Labour Party's requests, which I reckon to be of the order of £3 billion. As a general illustration, it would cost every Scottish income tax payer about £1,000 a year, on average, if those things were to be funded through income tax rates alone.

We also know that households and businesses across Scotland are facing the challenges of an increase in the cost of living, rising energy costs, rising inflation and a rising tax burden. At the end of the day, I have allocated every penny in the budget; it is for others to determine how additional asks would be funded.

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

Table 5.01 on page 39 of the budget document shows that local government spending, excluding Covid funding, will increase only marginally, from £11.124 billion to £11.145 billion. That represents a substantial real-terms cut. Does not that make it inevitable that we will see substantial council tax increases for hard-pressed households as a result of the finance secretary's choices?

**Kate Forbes:** The local government finance settlement delivers real-terms growth in the settlement. It protects the core budget in cash terms and it ensures that local government will get a fair share of the health and social care consequentials, which local government has long called for. That additional £200 million will directly support investment in health and social care. We know how important it is to invest in the preventative side of health and social care in order to reduce the pressure on acute services.

**Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP):** I congratulate the cabinet secretary on making such an outstanding budget statement, given the severe challenges that have been created by the, to be frank, incompetent UK Government.

The cabinet secretary has rightly put economic recovery at the heart of her budget. As she is the first female to hold her post, I want to ask her about issues that are of concern to many women in business. What can be done to ensure that there is a more granular understanding across government of the economic impact on women of Covid, Brexit and so on? What can be done to ensure that women are not discriminated against in seeking business funding for start-up companies?

**Kate Forbes:** That is an excellent question. Among the work that we are doing right now—specifically because attention was drawn to the fact that fewer women had received some of the Covid business support grants—will be the women's business centre that will be established in the current session of Parliament. We will also work with the enterprise agencies to ensure that funding is shared equally and that women have an equal opportunity to participate not just in the labour market, but in founding and growing businesses. We are working collaboratively with a number of organisations, including Women's Enterprise Scotland, to achieve a level playing field when it comes to participation and pay.

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** There is a huge and growing crisis in social care because of endemic low pay, which has a direct impact on the current crisis in the national health service. In that context, an increase of 48p for the work that social care workers do is derisory. They are the people who are on the front line of the pandemic, the people who are caring for our loved ones, and the

people for whom we have clapped every Thursday evening. Why have the SNP—and the Greens, who put this in their manifesto—not listened to the trade unions, the social care employees and the people who receive care, who say that an uplift to £12 per hour is needed from next year? This is the second budget in a row in which we have asked for that. The proposal is costed and would be affordable without raising income tax by a single penny. Is it the truth that the SNP and the Greens simply do not believe that social care workers are worth it?

**Kate Forbes:** Jackie Baillie will know that the increase has been costed. The Labour Party has been calling for £15 per hour, which would cost £1.8 billion. We have chosen to increase, over the course of this year, social care pay to £10.02 per hour as a priority and now to £10.50 per hour. That is 48p more per hour for social care workers. That is a priority that we have. The amount is higher than the national minimum wage and the real living wage because we believe in the importance of our carers. That is not just because they are part of our ensuring that the health service can continue to deal with the challenges that it faces, but because we want to ensure that we recognise and value the work that our social care workers do.

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):**

The cabinet secretary will know that the Finance and Public Administration Committee has been keen that we move to more preventative spending. On health and social care, can the cabinet secretary say anything about how much of the budget will be considered to be preventative spend and whether there has been any change over recent years?

**Kate Forbes:** The budget underpins our commitment to shifting the balance of spend towards mental health and primary, social and community care. It delivers more than 50 per cent of front-line spending directly to community health services and progresses our commitment to increase primary care funding by 25 per cent over this parliamentary session. Those are examples of where we have tried to increase preventative spending to reduce pressure on acute areas.

The £1.6 billion investment in social care and integration lays the groundwork for a national care service. I can point to other examples where we have tried to shift the balance of spend.

**Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green):** This budget is historic for a number of reasons, including the fact that it is the first anywhere in the UK to be co-produced by a Green Party. Despite the challenges of the pandemic, inflation and cuts from the Westminster Tory Government, it prioritises tackling child poverty and the climate emergency. For example, there is record

investment in making homes and buildings warmer and easier to heat, which will lift families out of fuel poverty and reduce emissions.

The budget will also fund the first full year of free bus travel for everyone aged under 22. Can the cabinet secretary confirm how many young people will benefit from that transformational policy?

**Kate Forbes:** More than 930,000 children and young people will be eligible for free bus travel when the young persons free bus scheme is introduced.

**Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** I, too, refer to the additional funding of £200 million that is going directly to local government to fund the increase to £10.50 per hour—as a minimum—the pay of adult social care staff. That is to be welcomed, but in order to increase recruitment we have to look beyond that to career progression for people in the care sector. Will that form part of the considerations of the national care service?

**Kate Forbes:** That will certainly form part of the considerations of the national care service, but we are not waiting until the national care service is in place; we are starting that work right now. I talked about the £200 million that is directly for pay, but we are also funding other initiatives. For example, we are investing £25 million in social work capacity, £50 million to progress fair work and £40 million in multidisciplinary teams. We are also investing £5 million to support the right to respite for unpaid carers. There is a much bigger picture of our investment in social care over and above our commitment to increase adult social care staffing.

**Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** This is not a green budget for farmers and it is not a net zero budget for the future of agricultural transformation. The Scottish National Party-Green coalition of cuts has slashed the agricultural transformation fund from £45 million per annum to £25 million per annum. Those cuts will affect reductions in emissions targets, agricultural productivity and the transformation of food and farming production. Why is the cabinet secretary cutting that vital agri-environmental funding for hard-working farmers, who are part of the solution to reaching net zero?

**Kate Forbes:** Farmers right now are actually asking what kind of commitment there is to the replacement of EU funding for the agricultural sector here in Scotland. When it comes to investment in farming, and in agriculture more generally, we have set out not only continued support but support to help farmers, crofters and those who work in the agriculture sector to transition to net zero. We know that it will not be

simple, straightforward and easy, but quite clearly there is investment in this budget to support farmers to do that.

**Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP):** I commend the finance secretary on prioritising child poverty—our greatest area of preventative spend—in what is a challenging budget. I commend her, too, on the way in which she has engaged on the issue. What is her estimate of the impact that the £200 million doubling of the Scottish child payment will have on child poverty in Scotland? To what extent will that mitigate the disgraceful cut of £20 a week to universal credit that has been made by the Tory UK Government?

**Kate Forbes:** Once it has been rolled out in full to under-16s, around 400,000 children will be eligible for the Scottish child payment, while an estimated 40,000 will be lifted out of poverty in 2023-24. I know that, as the finance secretary, I frequently use such figures. However, yesterday I had the opportunity to meet some of the families who will directly benefit. Their children were there, hearing about the impact that that money will have on the challenges that they face. It means that the numbers—400,000 children—are far more than just statistics.

**Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):** There is nothing in the budget to keep schools safe and open, and nothing at all on vital ventilation. There is nothing in the budget to help when schools close, no action on those promised laptops and nothing to make good the losses that have already been suffered. The budget is badged as a budget for everyone, but it cuts 12 per cent from the Scottish attainment challenge, meaning cuts to staff working with the poorest pupils. The nine poorest communities will see that funding cut by 60 per cent by the end of this session of Parliament. The budget is not really for everyone, is it?

**Kate Forbes:** On the contrary, I would make a point that somewhat agrees with the premise of Michael Marra's question, which is that the on-going impact of Covid, which is very real in our schools and education system, has had to be absorbed within our overall budget, because there are no Covid consequentials for those issues. However, that said, we have prioritised spending on our schools. We are making the biggest increase in funding to support teacher recruitment since 2007. In this budget, we are funding more than £70 million for primary 4, primary 5 and special school lunches. There is £15 million in this budget towards providing a digital device to every school-age child. We are focused on ensuring that our teachers and schools have the resources that they need, within a very challenging budget.

**Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP):** I welcome the statistics out this week that

show that this Government has delivered nearly 106,000 affordable homes since 2007. Can the cabinet secretary outline how the 2022-23 budget will support the new ambitious target to deliver a further 110,000 affordable homes by 2032?

**Kate Forbes:** We have led the way across the UK in the delivery of affordable housing, with spending per head on affordable housing already three times higher than that of the UK Government. As a result, in the past four years, we have delivered more than nine times more social rented properties per head of population than in England. The budget increases the funding available for affordable housing by a further £174 million next year, so that we will be able to continue the important work that we started in 2007 of ensuring that everyone in Scotland has a warm, safe and affordable place to live.

**Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con):** We have heard at the Finance and Public Administration Committee about the importance of spend on early intervention and prevention, which the cabinet secretary mentioned. Our councils can make a huge difference in prevention, but the derisory uplift to the local government core budget is a slap in the face to authorities, which have done so much in the past year. When will the Scottish Government put its money where its mouth is and properly fund our councils?

**Kate Forbes:** As I said in response to Douglas Lumsden's colleague Murdo Fraser, this is a real-terms growth settlement and it protects the core budget in cash terms. The local government finance settlement includes significant investment in education and social care.

To take a step back, I understand that the Conservative ask for the budget is to pass on health and social care money for health and social care needs. The fact is that there are no Covid consequential in the budget and the uplift is due largely to health and social care funding, so where does additional funding for local government come from? We have gone as far as we can to protect local government, in light of the important role that it plays, but the position is a stark reflection of the settlement that is available to us to pass on.

**Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP):** The Scottish Government's continued focus on addressing inequalities in education is welcome. Will the cabinet secretary provide further detail on how the budget will support the Scottish Government's work to close the poverty-related attainment gap? What measures have been included to tackle the costs of the school day for my constituents in Greenock and Inverclyde?

**Kate Forbes:** We are absolutely committed to tackling the impact of poverty on educational experiences and attainment. The budget includes

£200 million for the Scottish attainment challenge, which is part of a commitment to provide £1 billion over the parliamentary session to tackle the poverty-related attainment gap. That includes continued investment in pupil equity funding, which reaches 97 per cent of schools. To recognise the impact of poverty and the pandemic on pupils across Scotland, the budget includes the distribution of more than £43 million to all 32 local authorities.

**Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab):** The Scottish Government will be aware of analysis by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Fraser of Allander Institute that makes it clear that doubling the Scottish child payment and other measures that are set out in the budget will not go far enough to tackle child poverty. Without further action on social security, including raising the Scottish child payment to £40 by April 2023, the child poverty targets will be missed—targets that the Parliament unanimously set before the pandemic, before any universal credit uplift was in place, and without caveat.

Does the Scottish Government accept that analysis? Will it admit that it is on course to miss the interim 2023-24 child poverty target?

**Kate Forbes:** The member is right to say that a multifaceted approach is needed. In isolation, the Scottish child payment will not of itself ensure that we meet the child poverty targets; we need to take a much more rounded look at how to do that. That includes continued investment in employability schemes, for example, to help parents and ensure that they are paid the real living wage. It includes a reduction in the costs of the school day, which means rolling out free school meals and supporting children through uniform grants and in other ways.

There is a much bigger picture of the action that we are taking. In my budget statement and in the budget, I have made it clear that tackling child poverty is one of the Government's three top priorities. We are absolutely determined to reach the targets—not because doing so is politically advantageous but because having any child in poverty is a blight on the country and requires all of us to step up to the plate to do something about it.

**Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** I am particularly happy to hear about planned investment in affordable housing, which the cabinet secretary—my Highlands and Islands colleague—knows is vital. How will the budget address depopulation issues across the Highlands and Islands?

**Kate Forbes:** The issue is close to my heart and I am delighted that Emma Roddick has asked the question.

The budget does a number of things to tackle depopulation in the Highlands and Islands. It supports the delivery of Scotland's first population strategy, to set out ambitious sets of actions to address demographic challenges. The strategy aligns with our commitments in the national islands plan to address population decline in particular and ensure a balanced population across all Scotland. That work is supported by the islands programme, which is investing £30 million in infrastructure.

Emma Roddick raises an important point, which is that, as part of our overall investment in affordable housing, education and local government, we need to make sure that we are giving our partners the tools and resources that they need to ensure that the Highlands and Islands is an attractive place to live, work and do business.

**Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con):** It is a fact that the number of businesses in Scotland has dropped by almost 20,000 in a year, which is a devastating blow. Does the Scottish Government accept that it needs to do much more to help businesses—particularly small and medium-sized enterprises—to improve their digital capabilities and significantly expand support for upskilling and reskilling, which the Federation of Small Businesses has called for?

**Kate Forbes:** It is nice to agree, and I agree that we need to invest in digital capability. The member might be aware of our commitment to invest in implementing the recommendations of the Logan review, which will help businesses to access digitalisation and improve their tech capabilities. For example, we have set out commitments of £100 million through the digital boost scheme.

To support small businesses, which are the backbone of our economy and certainly the backbone of our villages and towns, we need to give them the resources that they need and understand the pressures that they face. For example, continuing the small business bonus scheme reduces their costs so that they can reinvest in those capabilities.

In relation to upskilling—I missed that part—I agree. The national transition training fund has tried to cater to specific requests and requirements within sectors rather than be a blanket scheme, so that it can be of better use to the tourism industry, for example.

**Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP):** Does the cabinet secretary agree that the UK Government must play its role in our transition to net zero and urgently reverse its illogical decision to overlook the Scottish carbon capture, utilisation and storage cluster for track 1

status, which would support more than 15,000 green jobs?

**The Presiding Officer:** I am not wholly convinced about that question's relevance to the statement. Cabinet secretary, do you want to reply very briefly, in a sentence?

**Kate Forbes:** I believe that, as energy policy is reserved, the UK Government needs to invest in Scotland, and it is important that that is done alongside the investment that we are making through our budget.

**Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab):** Another £137 million in real terms has gone, which includes money for local bin collections, fixing potholes, keeping libraries open and cutting grass. When will our towns and cities get the resources that they need to recover and grow after the pandemic and a decade of SNP cuts to our communities?

**Kate Forbes:** I have set out already—but I am happy set out again—that, in relation to our investment in local government, the budget provides a real-terms increase in the overall settlement and includes protection for the core budget in cash terms. I could go through the list of areas where we are investing in partnership with local government—particularly health and social care, which is one of the biggest pressures that local government faces, and education. Ultimately, I have tried to push as far as I can to protect local government budgets, and that is what the budget delivers.

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** I will pick up the issue of agriculture. In her statement, the cabinet secretary mentioned the £25 million for sustainable and regenerative agriculture. Will she provide further information about how that will be allocated to support farming and food production in Scotland, so that it is world leading in sustainability and takes a regenerative agriculture approach?

**Kate Forbes:** Over the next three years, the Scottish Government has committed £51 million to a national test programme that will enable our farmers and land managers to be better able to contribute to our climate targets and biodiversity goals. The industry is already leading the way, and countless examples of regenerative practices are already under way. Our commitment in this budget is to start that process; therefore, as the member said, there is £25 million in the budget to transform how farming and food production is supported in Scotland.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** The cabinet secretary has spoken about the need to invest to rebuild our economy but, as she will know, infrastructure issues across Scotland, and particularly in the Highlands and

Islands, remain a barrier to growth. Given that the cabinet secretary did not answer the question from my colleague Liz Smith, can she confirm that the funding that is outlined in the draft budget will ensure that the dualling programmes for the A9 and the A96 will be back on track by the end of the budget period and that the Scottish Government will deliver both dualling schemes in full as promised?

**Kate Forbes:** Jamie Halcro Johnston will know that I—perhaps like him—use the A9 at least twice a week every week, so, if anybody knows the importance of delivering on dualling, it is me. I can assure him that there is no dilution of funding for the A9 in the budget. We have a budget earmarked in the 2022-23 capital spending review to fund the A9 and the A96. If Jamie Halcro Johnston is interested, the budget allocation for the A9 will allow us to continue to progress with completion of the statutory processes for, the procurement of and the commencement of the construction of the Tomatin to Moy section—which is in his region but not quite in my constituency—as well as preparations for procurement of the remaining elements of the programme. I hope that that gives Jamie Halcro Johnston and our joint constituents some reassurance.

**Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP):** How will the budget support the introduction of new benefits in the next financial year, including the roll-out of the adult disability payment and the new low-income winter heating assistance to hundreds of thousands of Scots?

**Kate Forbes:** Social Security Scotland is already successfully delivering 11 benefits, seven of which are brand new, and it is getting ready to deliver several more. Low-income winter heating assistance will be launched in the winter of 2022 and it will provide support to around 400,000 low-income households with a £50 payment every year through our investment of around £21 million. Next year, we will launch the adult disability payment, which is our largest and most technically complex benefit to date. It will provide disabled people with a fundamentally different experience in applying for and receiving the support that they are entitled to.

**Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green):** With one in four children in Scotland in poverty and with pressing concerns about pandemic fallout and the cruel actions of the UK Government, eradicating child poverty in Scotland is a moral obligation. That is why the Scottish Greens have been clear that the Scottish child payment should be doubled as soon as possible. I am pleased that we are delivering that from April. It will make a real difference to those who are

struggling most, alongside the commitments on making investments in the just transition.

**The Presiding Officer:** Question, please.

**Maggie Chapman:** Can the cabinet secretary confirm how many children are eligible for the Scottish child payment uplift, and—this is important—how the Government will ensure that all those who are entitled to it benefit?

**Kate Forbes:** As Maggie Chapman said, the Scottish child payment is hugely important. We estimate that, once it is rolled out in full to under-16s, around 400,000 children will be eligible for it and 40,000 will be lifted out of poverty in 2023-24. The Scottish child payment is the most ambitious child poverty reduction measure in the UK. Of course, we are also working with other measures in order to reach our targets on child poverty.

**Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP):** The cabinet secretary may be aware that I am holding a members' business debate next week to highlight the importance of access to defibrillators in communities across Scotland. Access to defibrillators could play a significant role in improving outcomes in out-of-hospital cardiac arrests across Scotland, but, for some communities, the cost of purchasing them and on-going materials continues to be a barrier. Although VAT on defibrillators continues to be a matter that is reserved to the United Kingdom Government, does the cabinet secretary agree that that would be one area in which the Scottish budget could go further if we had the full fiscal levers at our disposal to support community access to that life-saving equipment?

**Kate Forbes:** I commend Jenni Minto for raising the important issue of defibrillators and for the fact that she is holding a debate next week. Perhaps we could raise that issue. I would always be open to writing to my counterparts in the UK Government about the issues that Jenni Minto has identified.

**Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):** I want to press the cabinet secretary on roads again. There is a slight increase in the total budget for motorways and trunk roads, but the road improvement budget has been cut. Will she, once again, have a stab at the question of whether, under this budget, the A96 will be fully dualled? Is there money for that?

**Kate Forbes:** We have set out a budget for continued investment in our roads, including the A9 and the A96. When it comes to progress on the A96, the allocation of funding will allow us to continue to take forward the review of the A96 in 2022 and to progress the preparation stages for dualling between Inverness and Nairn and the bypassing of Nairn. We are committed to improving the A96 corridor in order to improve

connectivity between the surrounding towns and address safety and environmental issues. There is funding in the budget for road improvement, including for the A9 and the A96. I am not sure how to be more blunt on the issue.

**Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP):** I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests, as I am a serving councillor on East Ayrshire Council.

Local government has been at the forefront of our response to the pandemic. It is therefore welcome that, despite a challenging budget situation that is devoid of any Covid consequentials, the Scottish Government is committing to a total funding package of more than £12 billion for local government, in support of its work as we press forward with recovery. As we are all aware, local circumstances and spending priorities can vary significantly. Will the cabinet secretary say more about the steps that the Scottish Government is taking to maximise the freedom and flexibility that local authorities will have over their spending?

**Kate Forbes:** Alongside a funding package that provides an additional £853.9 million—a 7.3 per cent increase on this year—the budget delivers one of the key asks of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities by providing complete flexibility for councils to set a council tax rate that is appropriate to their local authority area. In every year in which I have been involved with the budget and have negotiated and engaged with COSLA, that has been one of its primary asks. I am pleased to be able to write to COSLA today to agree not just to that flexibility, but also to a number of other fiscal flexibilities, including a commitment to collaborative working on a fiscal framework for local government early next year.

**Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** The budget suggests that £20 million of the just transition fund will be made available. What precisely is that £20 million allocated to, how did the Scottish Government arrive at that figure, and does the money come from the Scottish Government's budget or is it loan capital from the Scottish National Investment Bank?

**Kate Forbes:** I did not quite follow what the member said about loan capital. The money comes from the Scottish Government's budget, and it will be used to invest in initiatives in the north-east. A number of stakeholders, who will know the member as well as me, have been in touch to ask for a role in determining the best use of that funding.

Overall, we have set out £500 million of funding over 10 years, and we estimate that it will need to increase year on year, so it is back-loaded, as it were, to ensure that it is spent on the big catalytic

projects that can most use it and help with the just transition. Obviously, it is not the only investment that is being made in the north-east, and it builds on the £62 million for the energy transition fund. Of course, that money would go even further if it were matched by the UK Government.

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** The Climate Change Committee's report "Progress in reducing emissions in Scotland" was published earlier this month. It states:

"we have not been able to establish whether and how ... proposals"

in the climate change plan

"add up to the required emissions reductions ... The annual targets during the 2020s will be very difficult to meet".

Ambitious targets are all well and good, but they mean little without a route map. Will the Scottish Government deliver any finance and transparent policies that can deliver on the Scottish Government targets, as called for by the Climate Change Committee?

**Kate Forbes:** The answer is yes. As the member will know, we are already obliged to provide regular climate change plan updates in terms of the route map that he calls for. Although all parties in the Parliament were agreed on the targets, I agree with him that the setting of targets in and of itself does not make it any easier to meet those targets; it requires a plan, which, he will know, we are obliged to update regularly.

The budget delivers a step change in investment in our climate change ambitions, especially with regard to capital investment in, for example, decarbonisation and transport. The Climate Change Committee has identified those areas as key priorities, and the money that is being invested as part of this budget will deliver the step change that is required.

**Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** The cabinet secretary claims that she has given councils a fair settlement but, in Edinburgh and across the Lothians, we see massive service pressures every day as a result of historical Scottish National Party underfunding and a growing population. In the past year, the integration joint board has had to take £7 million out of reserves in Edinburgh to meet the immediate care crisis that we face, but constituents are getting in touch almost daily to say that, because of the shortage of care workers, they are not getting the urgent care-at-home support that they need now.

Will the cabinet secretary accept that an extra 50p an hour for care workers does not begin to address rising prices, or the huge increase in housing costs that we have seen in Edinburgh?

**Kate Forbes:** The member identifies an important point. One of the biggest pressures that

councils are facing is in social care, which is precisely why we have delivered a significant increase in the investment that is going to local government for social care as part of the health and social care consequential. That has been one of COSLA's asks for a number of years.

On the member's second point, it is clear that pay is a key part of retention and recruitment, and the £10.50 wage floor that I have set out today will help to deliver that. We all aspire to ensure that our care workers are remunerated fairly and we have seen, from this Government, a significant increase over this year to ensure that we not only recognise care workers with rhetoric, but value them in the choices that we have around funding.

**Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con):** The budget that has been published today states, in black and white, that

"everyone should have the right to access justice."

I agree entirely, but the reality is that there is a five-year backlog of court cases to tackle.

The Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service has made a very specific—and, I think, modest—ask of £13 million to tackle that backlog. Why, therefore, has it been offered only a third of that in the budget? How on earth will such a massive shortfall help the SCTS to deliver the true access to justice that victims of crime deserve?

**Kate Forbes:** I suggest to the member, as politely as possible, that that £13 million—if I heard him correctly—is in the budget. We have significantly increased not only funding for the justice portfolio, but the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service funding that is required in order to deal with the backlog. There is a significant increase in the spending on justice to try to reduce the backlog.

I make the same point that I have made already this afternoon. The additional Covid costs—the costs of both mitigating Covid and tackling its impact—have to be absorbed in our budget. The absence of Covid consequential means that those costs have to be absorbed. It is important that we recognise the on-going pressures on our budget as a result of both mitigating Covid and dealing with its long-term impacts.

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** I have a straightforward yes or no question for the cabinet secretary. Scotland's employers want transparency in how the apprenticeship levy that they pay is being spent in Scotland. They say that that is currently far from transparent. Given the vital importance of apprenticeships to the future economy that we must build to achieve net zero, will the cabinet secretary listen to business and agree now to allow the greater transparency that business wants to see?

**Kate Forbes:** Yes.

**Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab):** Over the past 10 years, the Scottish Government's budgets have increased, but local government's budgets have been repeatedly cut. North Ayrshire Council, for example, has had to make more than £100 million in cuts. Given the £137 million real-terms cut to councils' revenue grants in this year's budget, what does the cabinet secretary expect councils to do to continue to provide services and to deliver on her stated aim of reducing inequalities?

**Kate Forbes:** There are two answers to that. The first is that we have protected the core budget in cash terms.

The second point, however, is that, in terms of the overall shape of the budget, the member will know that most parties in this Parliament have a commitment to pass on health and social care consequential, which I think that she shares, although she can correct me if that is not true. Having passed them on means that, over the past decade of austerity, there has been a cut to the rest of the Scottish Government budget. We have, as far as we possibly could, protected local government. However, in this budget I have tried to recognise local government as a valued deliverer of social care and to ensure that some of those health and social care consequential go to local government. The challenge is that it needs to be used for social care once it is there.

**Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con):** NHS Lothian has warned MSPs across the Lothian region, including SNP and Green members in the chamber, that it faces a £100 million shortfall. Have they raised that with the cabinet secretary? If so, why did she deliver the lowest level of funding per head of population to Lothian yet again?

**Kate Forbes:** That is a strange question, if I might say so, considering that I have just announced record funding of £18 billion for health and social care in Scotland, including £12.4 billion of investment in our front-line health boards, including NHS Lothian. As the member will know, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care raises with me, on a very regular basis, the challenges and the financial needs from across our health and social care services. That is why we have been able to deliver record funding for health and social care in this budget.

**Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** The finance secretary has talked about an economic recovery and a green recovery, yet the green jobs budget is only £23.5 million. How many green jobs will it create?

**Kate Forbes:** A lot more than if that funding was not there. *[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer:** Order—thank you. I call Jeremy Balfour to be followed by Clare Adamson.

**Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con):** I follow Fiona Hyslop, Presiding Officer.

**The Presiding Officer:** Apologies. The questions are coming thick and fast. I call Fiona Hyslop.

**Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP):** I thank the cabinet secretary for her statement. Clearly, as she has just said, health and social care are key to the wellbeing of our constituents, particularly during what is still a very pressured pandemic. Can she explain what percentage of the overall budget is still dedicated to health? Can she give further explanation of how we can protect vital services, such as for cancer, for audiology in Lothian—on which a very serious report was published today—or in other areas? I remind members that the attempt to achieve growth, a net zero revolution and the tackling of inequality at the same time that so much funding is still needed for our health and social care budget serves as a stark reminder of the realities of living in a pandemic.

**Kate Forbes:** The member raises a hugely important issue. We must reflect on the needs that we have right across the board, in our health service as well as other public services, and at the same time try to support our households and businesses through what is one of the most challenging times on record, because of not just the pandemic's impacts but the impact of inflation.

I have mentioned already that £18 billion is earmarked for health and social care, as part of an overall budget that is just over £40 billion. That in itself tells a story. The rest of our budget seeks to absorb the on-going pressures from Covid, as well as to invest in growth and prosperity.

**Jeremy Balfour:** I am sure that the cabinet secretary will agree that the third sector has played an immense role in the past two years to support many people in our society. Will she now commit to a three-year funding package, instead of making charities apply year in, year out for funding?

**Kate Forbes:** Yes, is the short answer. I agree with Jeremy Balfour that multiyear spending is hugely important. Today we have set out our framework for the resource spending review, which will allow us to plan spending on a three to four-year basis. I intend to consult a number of stakeholders, including third sector and other public bodies, to ensure that when the final resource spending review is published, it gives them reassurance of their multiyear position.

**Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP):** We find ourselves in a situation in which

we have an unclear path ahead in relation to ensuring that the voices of the Parliament and the Government will be heard in negotiations on the internal market and the EU-UK trade and co-operation agreement. How will the increase in the international and European relations budget ensure that Scotland's voice is heard and that we have a say in the future of Europe and of policy making that will affect our devolved responsibilities?

**The Presiding Officer:** I remind members of the importance of questions having relevance to the statement.

**Kate Forbes:** In terms of the budget, that is important for our economic prosperity. We continue to keep trading links alive with countries around the world, not just countries within the European Union. We have an ambitious export plan that relies on those strong links. A lot of exporters in Scotland, particularly smaller ones, have struggled as a result of the additional red tape due to Brexit. Keeping those links alive is hugely important and requires both the soft diplomacy of Governments speaking to one another and business-to-business links.

**Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con):** The budget allocates £350 million to decarbonise the heating of 1 million homes and 50,000 non-domestic buildings by 2030. That is about £330 per building. I am aware of a hotel that recently decarbonised, which cost around £800,000. Does the finance secretary seriously propose that £330 per building—about the cost of the new Hoover—is enough to see that process through?

**Kate Forbes:** The member raises an important point about the costs of decarbonisation. A point that I am very committed to is how we leverage private sector investment as part of our ambitions. I think it is clear to all of us that public sector investment in isolation will not get us to our net zero targets or enable us to decarbonise at the rate that we need to. We need to work collaboratively with the private sector to leverage in some of that funding and make sure that the public sector funding goes as far as possible. My impression is that most businesses want to do the right thing. It is up to us to make that easier for them. Public sector funding will help, but it will not take us all the way.

**Paul O'Kane (West Scotland) (Lab):** Yesterday, many of us attended a protest outside the Parliament with our trade unions and listened to the testimony of workers who have been on the front line during the pandemic in Scotland. Many of them were care workers, who will be interested in the debate in terms of the pay rise that they are being given by the Government. What does the cabinet secretary have to say to those workers, after she has offered them a derisory 48p an hour

pay rise? She, along with all other ministers and MSPs, was very fond of clapping care workers last year. Now they clap a 48p pay rise. That is unacceptable. What does she have to say to those workers?

**Kate Forbes:** That is the second pay rise in several months, because we value the important work that our carers do. We are committing to going beyond the national living wage and the real living wage to ensure that carers are paid for their labours. That is why we have set out that public sector wage floor of £10.50 per hour, which we are fully funding. What would I say to them? I would say, “We could not have got through the pandemic without you. We enormously value the work that you do.” We are matching our rhetoric with our commitment in the budget to invest in a wage increase to £10.50 per hour.

**Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP):** I put on record my thanks to the cabinet secretary for the groundbreaking child poverty measures that she has announced. Nobody in the chamber should vote against that, come budget time. On that basis, I ask about school uniforms. The cabinet secretary will be aware that I have done some work pushing for them to be more affordable. Will she comment on how that was taken into the decisions around the budget and what more local authorities will now be able to do? I have loads of constituents who cannae afford a £300 Hoover—they need to get their school uniforms.

**Kate Forbes:** That question is hugely important. The work that we are doing on school uniforms is part of a much wider piece of work to reduce the cost of the school day. That work includes significant investment in the expansion of free school meals; the provision of milk; an assurance around funding to provide meals during school holidays; and help for families with some of the additional costs of school, whether around school trips or elements of the curriculum such as art and home economics.

We provide funding to local government to reduce the cost of the school day significantly, as part of our mission to tackle child poverty.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes the ministerial statement on the Scottish budget.

## Decision Time

17:00

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** There are no questions to be put as a result of today’s business, so I close the meeting.

*Meeting closed at 17:00.*



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

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