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Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 18 January 2022

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

Time for Reflection

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

The first item of business is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader today is Josh Kennedy, who is a member of the Scottish Youth Parliament and its outgoing chair.

Josh Kennedy MSYP (Scottish Youth Parliament): Thank you, Presiding Officer, for inviting me to address Parliament today. It is a real privilege to be here.

The Scottish Youth Parliament is the democratically elected voice of Scotland's young people and, as we are never shy of telling people, we are one day older than the Scottish Parliament.

Our members represent young people aged 12 to 25 the length and breadth of Scotland and, like members here, our role is to stand up for the issues that our constituents care about.

The young people whom we represent continue to endure the ramifications of the global pandemic and the inequalities that it has exacerbated. We have been hit hard by the pandemic, but have risen to the challenges that we have faced. Now, more than ever, the generation that I represent expects, given all that we have endured, that we will be listened to and taken seriously.

As we recover from the pandemic, my generation will no longer stand aside and allow themselves to be ignored, or to be on the periphery of decision making, which was too common in the past. Instead, we will be at the centre of decision making and power. On issues including climate change, education reform and mental health services, my generation expects to be heard and to be treated as equal partners by those who hold that power. The SYP, working closely with staff at Holyrood, are ideally placed to support members of the Scottish Parliament to deliver that.

Thousands of young people across Scotland voted to elect a new cohort of MSYPs in our elections at the end of last year. Those new MSYPs are raring to go and to make their impact, but they need members' help to have their voices

heard. I encourage all members to reach out to their newly elected local MSYPs. By working with them, members can help them to get the issues that young people care about addressed. Furthermore, MSYPs can help members to understand what issues young people in their constituencies think are most important.

We often hear it said that young people are the future. That is true to an extent, but it misses the bigger point that we are also the present; we are here, now. We are really excited to work with all members during this parliamentary session to improve young people's lives in the future and in the present. Thank you for listening.

Point of Order

14:03

Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con):

On a point of order, Presiding Officer. On 8 October last year, I wrote to the Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity to ask simple questions about the proposed deposit return scheme. Although there has been acknowledgement of receipt of my letter, there has been no response from the minister for more than three months.

Businesses, councils and the public are being kept in the dark about the scheme. The scheme has been delayed twice, the contracts have been hidden from the public and there is no word on start-up costs, risk to public finances or possible job losses at councils.

Presiding Officer, I seek your guidance on how we can ensure that ministers respond in a timely manner to provide answers that are very much in the public interest.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

Thank you, Mr Golden. You might be aware that matters relating to ministerial correspondence are not points of order.

However, in relation to the avenues that are available to members to scrutinise the Government, there are a range of options of which you will be aware, whether in the chamber, during committee meetings or through written questions. It is, of course, a matter for each member to consider which of those options they wish to use.

Topical Question Time

14:04

People with Learning Difficulties (In-patient Units)

1. **Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** [*Inaudible.*]—response is to a recent report by Enable Scotland that highlights that over 250 people with learning disabilities are living in NHS Scotland—[*Inaudible.*]—with one woman being there for 60 years. (S6T-00438)

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

Will the minister confirm whether he was able to hear enough of Mr Rennie's question?

The Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care (Kevin Stewart): I think I got the gist of it, Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. Please respond.

Kevin Stewart: It is completely unacceptable for people with learning disabilities and more complex needs to spend long periods of time in hospital. That is why, in March 2020, the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities commissioned a working group to look at the issue. The group's report is expected to be published in the next few weeks.

We have already allocated £20 million of funding in 2021 to integration authorities to significantly reduce out-of-area placements and hospital stays by 2024. The report includes recommendations for a framework to directly address Enable Scotland's concerns, a national register and a national panel to support it. That is vital.

In addition, the Scottish Government is bringing forward legislation to establish a commissioner for learning disabilities and autism. The role of that commissioner will be to fully protect rights with a range of statutory powers that could include bringing individual cases. Visibility and accountability are critical.

The Government fully intends to move forward and ensure that people with learning disabilities and complex needs have homes in their communities. We need strong partnerships, nationally and locally, to make that happen without delay.

Willie Rennie: The problem is that the Government has been declaring that as an urgent priority for years. There were reports in 2018, and the original right to their own home was declared back in 2000 but, 21 years later, 250 people with learning disabilities are stuck in hospital and the

guidance that was required last year has still not been published. I hope that the minister understands that there is a lot of frustration out there. Some authorities think that multibed units are appropriate, but that is just a new form of institutionalised living. Will the minister rule out multibed units?

Kevin Stewart: I understand some of the frustration out there. I have heard that frustration when I have talked to folks with lived experience and people who are actively involved in the learning-disabled and autism communities.

The guidance on the community living change fund makes it clear that it should be used to design community-based solutions that negate or limit future hospital use and out-of-country placements. Going forward, we will work closely with health and social care partnerships to ensure that the funding is spent in line with the guidance and the content of the upcoming delayed discharge report, when that is published.

The use of the term “multibed units” is not good: we know that people can share homes and thrive well. That happens in my Aberdeen Central constituency and across Scotland. However, use of the term leads me to think of an alternative to hospital; I am sure that Mr Rennie is of the same view. That is not what we want. We want people to have homes in their communities.

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): I agree with the concerns that Willie Rennie has expressed. This year, we have already seen the unlawful practice of sending elderly patients to locked Scottish care homes and units being banned. NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, specifically, was taken to court for that by the Equality and Human Rights Commission. Further to the data on that being uncovered, will the Scottish Government agree to an independent review of all the vulnerable individuals who are living in such facilities?

Kevin Stewart: We have gone through the process of having a short-life working group look at the issue. We will act on its recommendations and on the recommendations and asks of—*[Inaudible.]*—as we move forward.

We have to ensure—I agree completely and utterly with Mr Briggs on this—that we take a person-centred approach, that we look at people’s individual needs and that we put human rights at the heart of all the work that we do in this regard.

Paul O’Kane (West Scotland) (Lab): As we have already heard, Enable Scotland’s report calls for

“a Community First principle for the commissioning of support for all adults and children who have a learning disability in Scotland.”

The report welcomes the community living change fund, which has £20 million assigned to it. However, Enable Scotland says in the report that that

“is not a lot of money per HSCP area, per person”

and that the money has not always led to real and meaningful action for people in communities. Will the minister share evidence of how the fund is being used? Will he commit to further national funding to build the availability of high-quality sustainable support in every community?

Kevin Stewart: I am more than happy to keep Parliament informed about how the £20 million is being spent, and I assure Parliament that I will be keeping a very close eye on how that resource is being utilised. Of course, as we move forward, in order to get this right we will have to look at further resourcing in the future to ensure that we do our level best for folks with learning disabilities and more complex needs.

Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): Enable Scotland’s report highlights that people with learning disabilities might be placed in inappropriate settings, including care homes for elderly people. What action can the Scottish Government take to ensure that provision of appropriate residential care for younger people, including those with learning disabilities, is expanded?

Kevin Stewart: I did not quite hear all of that question. However, on Ms Mackay’s final point, I say that we have to get this right for everyone. We must listen to individuals about what their needs are. We know that the needs of young people are often different from those of older folks, so in order to get it right we must listen to young people and their families to ensure that the right provision is in place so that folks can live as free and independent a life as possible.

OVO Energy (Job Losses)

2. **Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on any discussions it has had with OVO Energy regarding its reported decision to reduce its workforce by 1,700 employees. (S6T-00439)

The Minister for Business, Trade, Tourism and Enterprise (Ivan McKee): I was concerned to learn of OVO Energy’s plans to reduce its workforce by 1,700 across the United Kingdom and, following reports that OVO plans to close sites in Perth, Cumbernauld and Dunfermline, the implications that that might have for staff in Scotland. It will be a very anxious time for OVO’s employees, their families and the local areas.

I sought an urgent meeting with the company and will speak tomorrow to Adrian Letts, who is the chief executive officer of OVO's retail energy business, when I will seek clarity about the potential impact on Scotland. Scottish Enterprise is also in contact with OVO and will work with it to look at ways of mitigating the impact on Scottish jobs.

Should job losses happen, we will provide support to all affected employees through our initiative for responding to redundancy situations—the partnership action for continuing employment, or PACE.

Jim Fairlie: The minister will, no doubt, be aware of how concerning the news is for people right across the country. At the Perth site alone—which is in my constituency—there are some 700 employees who have no idea what their employment status will be and, as the minister has just pointed out, OVO also plans to cut two offices in Edinburgh, one in Dunfermline and one in Cumbernauld.

The strength of the response to the announcement will be felt by members across the chamber. Does the minister agree that the announcement is not in keeping with what senior management at OVO told employees and politicians when it bought the SSE retail arm? What support will the Scottish Government provide for employees impacted by the decision?

Ivan McKee: I share the member's concerns as the situation unfolds across various sites in Scotland. I know that Jamie Hepburn MSP and Stuart McDonald MP have already met OVO to discuss the unfolding situation in Cumbernauld. When I meet OVO tomorrow, I shall make those very points in order to understand the rationale behind the company's decisions and how those square with previous statements that it made regarding the importance of its Scottish sites to its operations.

As I said to the member, Scottish Enterprise and PACE stand ready to engage with the workforce and to support them throughout the situation if job redundancies take place.

Jim Fairlie: When OVO agreed to acquire SSE Energy Services, the OVO chief executive and founder Stephen Fitzpatrick said, as is quoted on the company's website:

"SSE and OVO are a great fit. They share our values on sustainability and serving customers. They've built an excellent team that I'm really looking forward to working with."

Now that we see him systematically and rapidly dismantling that excellent team, does that mean that the values of SSE and OVO include viewing the workforce as dispensable? Is the minister as disappointed as I am at the decision?

Ivan McKee: I am disappointed by the decision. When I meet OVO tomorrow, I will seek clarification on its changing position and why it has a different attitude now from the one it had previously. I shall work to understand the rationale behind the decision, which, on the surface, does not look to be right for employees, their communities or for OVO, which is walking away from a valued workforce. I shall endeavour to find out as much as I can from the company tomorrow, to impress on it the importance of the situation and to encourage it to review the decision and take alternative measures.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): There is real anger in Perth about the move by OVO. Just two years ago, when the company took over SSE's retail arm, it said that it was committed to maintaining a presence in the city.

My colleague Liz Smith and I will meet OVO later this week. The minister has said that he is seeing the company tomorrow. Will he explore with it the extent to which existing staff might be able to continue in their jobs by working remotely and from home if they are unable to relocate to Glasgow or to some other place where OVO is maintaining a presence?

Ivan McKee: I shall do that. When I meet the company tomorrow, I will emphasise the importance of those jobs to local communities. I will also seek to understand the commercial logic behind the decisions and will explore alternatives that would keep those jobs in place, while meeting the company's requirements.

I shall also explore the options for employees to work from home. Changes in working patterns make that a realistic and practical possibility. I shall ask the company about the extent to which that option has been considered and could be implemented for employees in Perth and other affected locations.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): This is not the first time that OVO has broken its promises to staff. Hundreds have been laid off in the past. Can we expect companies that contravene the Government's fair work agenda to face penalties as a consequence of their actions? What support can the minister bring forward through the Tay cities deal to ensure that there are new opportunities and support for workers in the months ahead, as was achieved at the time of the closure of the Michelin factory in Dundee when support was given to workers who lost jobs there?

Ivan McKee: We will look at all those possibilities. The Scottish Government takes the fair work agenda increasingly seriously. I met the Fair Work Convention this morning to discuss its plans to move the agenda forward and how the Scottish Government can support that. We take

every opportunity to discuss our position on fair work with all employers in Scotland.

With regard to the specifics of the city region deal, that is clearly something that can be explored. Other priorities have already been identified for the resources that are being deployed there, but I am happy to speak to the relevant minister and others to discuss what the possibilities are with regard to opportunities that may be created as a consequence of the deployment of the funds from the city region deal.

Business Motion

14:20

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-02849, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on changes to this week's business. Any member who wishes to speak against the motion should press their request-to-speak button now.

Motion moved,

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

(a) Tuesday 18 January 2022—

after

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

insert

followed by Ministerial Statement: ScotWind Offshore Wind Leasing Round

delete

5.00 pm Decision Time

and insert

5.30 pm Decision Time

(b) Wednesday 19 January 2022—

after

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
Health and Social Care;
Social Justice, Housing and Local
Government

insert

followed by Ministerial Statement: Strengthened Fire Alarm Standards

after

followed by Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party Debate: Education Failures and Guaranteeing the 2022 Exam Diet

insert

followed by Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body Debate: Appointment of Member of the Standards Commission for Scotland

delete

5.10 Decision Time

and insert

5.40 Decision Time

(c) Thursday 20 January 2022—

after

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:
Constitution, External Affairs and Culture

insert

followed by Ministerial Statement: Publication of the Second Strategic Transport Projects Review

followed by Ministerial Statement: Prestwick Airport
after

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Coronavirus (Discretionary Compensation for Self-isolation) (Scotland) Bill

insert

followed by Financial Resolution: Coronavirus (Discretionary Compensation for Self-isolation) (Scotland) Bill—[George Adam]

Motion agreed to.

Covid-19

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is a statement by Nicola Sturgeon, giving a Covid-19 update.

14:21

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I will report on the current and, at this stage, much more positive course of the pandemic. I will explain why, although significant pressures and uncertainties remain, the latest data nevertheless gives us confidence that we have turned the corner on the omicron wave. I will then confirm our next steps in lifting the protective measures that were introduced before Christmas. I will also indicate what we can all continue to do in the immediate period ahead to keep cases on a downward trend and reduce the pressure on the national health service and the wider economy. Finally, I will provide a further update on the vaccination programme.

First, though, I turn to today's statistics, which show that 7,752 positive cases were reported yesterday through both polymerase chain reaction and lateral flow tests. There are 1,546 people in hospital with Covid, which is 21 fewer than yesterday. There are 59 people in intensive care, including 17 who have been in intensive care units for more than 28 days. That is one more than yesterday. Sadly, a further 31 deaths have been reported, which takes the total number of deaths under the daily definition to 10,093. Once again, I send my condolences to everyone who is mourning a loved one.

As we can see from the data, omicron is continuing to infect large numbers of people here in Scotland, across the United Kingdom and indeed in many other countries around the world. Hospital admissions and overall hospital occupancy associated with Covid also remain high.

However, notwithstanding the very real challenges that Covid continues to present, the evidence that I set out last week suggesting that the situation was beginning to improve has significantly strengthened over the past seven days. A combination of booster vaccinations, the willingness of the public to adapt their behaviour to help to stem transmission and the temporary protective measures that were introduced in December has helped to blunt the impact of the omicron wave.

Last week, I said that the data indicated that cases were falling across most age groups. I can report today that that trend has continued. Some caution still needs to be applied in interpreting case data at this stage, given the recent changes

to guidance on PCR and lateral flow testing. However, data for the past 13 days, taking account of both PCR and lateral flow tests, shows a significant fall in the number of new positive cases.

To put some detail on that, I note that, on Sunday, Monday and Tuesday of last week, 36,526 new positive cases were recorded through PCR and lateral flow tests. This week, on Sunday, Monday and today—Tuesday—20,268 cases have been reported. That represents quite a significant drop. If we look just at PCR tests, although I ask everyone to bear in mind the limitations in doing so, we see that cases have fallen from an average of almost 13,000 a day to just over 4,600 a day. That is a decline of 64 per cent, and cases have fallen across all age groups. Test positivity in PCR tests has also declined, from almost 30 per cent in early January to under 20 per cent now.

The most recent data from the Office for National Statistics, which covers the week to 7 January and therefore has a time lag associated with it, reinforces that more stable and positive assessment. It indicates that the number of people with Covid in that week—around one in 20—was broadly the same as in the previous week.

Taking all of that into account and triangulating the various sources of data allows us to say with some confidence that the rise in cases that was driven by omicron peaked in the first week of January and that we are now on the downward slope of that wave of cases.

That assessment is reflected in the data on hospital admissions. Hospital occupancy—the number of patients who are in hospital with Covid at any given time—is higher than it was seven days ago, having increased from 1,479 then to 1,546 today; however, that increase of 67 is significantly smaller than it was in the previous seven days. In addition, encouragingly, admissions to hospital of people with Covid, albeit still too high, are nevertheless now falling. In the week to 7 January, 1,040 were admitted; in the week to 14 January, that was down to 960. The number of people in ICUs, which, this time last week, was rising, has also fallen slightly over the past seven days—from 65 to 59.

All of that is very positive news and comes as an enormous relief, I am sure, to all of us. Of course, we need to recognise that there are still some uncertainties ahead, and that throwing all caution to the wind would therefore be a mistake. For example, the full impact of the return to work and school after the festive break will not yet be apparent in the data, so it is possible that we will see case numbers tick upwards again in the next couple of weeks. In addition, just as the introduction of some protective measures may have helped to slow down transmission, it stands

to reason that the lifting of those measures could have the opposite effect. That is exactly why it makes sense to lift measures on a phased basis. Lastly, although cases are now falling, the NHS remains under acute pressure, and staff absences are still causing some disruption across the economy and our critical services.

Therefore, although we can take great heart from the latest data, we know from experience how important it is to be responsible and appropriately cautious in the face of the virus. That is the context for the decisions that the Cabinet reached this morning.

Yesterday, the limit on attendances at outdoor public events was lifted. The remaining statutory measures that were introduced in response to omicron are as follows: limits on attendance at indoor public events; the requirement for 1m physical distancing between different groups in indoor public places; the requirement for table service in hospitality premises that serve alcohol on the premises; and the closure of nightclubs. Given the improving situation—and as I said last week that we hoped to be able to do—I can confirm today that all those measures will be lifted from next Monday, 24 January. From that day, we will also remove the guidance that advises adults against non-professional indoor contact sports, so that those can resume as normal, and we will lift the guidance that asks people to stick to a three-household limit on indoor gatherings.

However, it is important to stress that, notwithstanding the improving situation, the level of Covid infection that is circulating in the community is still high. To minimise the risk of getting the virus, therefore, it would be sensible for all of us to remain cautious in our social interactions at this stage. Even though, from Monday, we will no longer recommend a fixed upper limit on numbers of households, if we all continue to keep gatherings as small as our circumstances allow for now—and, I suggest, until the end of this month—we will reduce our chances of getting infected.

Of course, we should continue to take lateral flow tests before meeting up with people from other households. I ask people please also to remember to record test results, whether those are positive or negative, through the UK Government website. I stress that that is even more important now that we are no longer advising confirmatory PCR tests for those without symptoms who test positive through lateral flow devices. Recording those results ensures that we are able to make better assessments of the trends in infection.

Finally, we will continue to ask people to work from home whenever possible at this stage, and for employers to facilitate that. However, we will

engage with business now about a return to a more hybrid approach from the start of February.

The baseline mitigation measures that were in place before omicron, and the requirement for businesses, service providers and places of worship to take reasonable measures to minimise the spread of Covid on their premises, will be retained at this stage to help keep Covid contained as this wave recedes.

That means that face coverings must still be worn in public indoor settings and on public transport, that businesses and other organisations should continue to have regard to guidance and take reasonable steps to minimise the spread of Covid, and that hospitality premises should continue to collect contact details for customers, which is important for the effective operation of test and protect.

In addition, the Covid certification scheme will continue to apply for now to large indoor and outdoor events and to late-night venues—all settings where transmission risks can be higher. As of yesterday, guidance stipulates that organisers of events with 1,000 or more in attendance should check the certification status of at least 50 per cent of attendees or 1,000 people, whichever is higher.

I indicated last week that the Cabinet would consider and decide today whether to extend the certification scheme to other premises, such as licensed hospitality venues. That was undoubtedly the most difficult decision that we faced this morning and—yet again—the judgment that we have arrived at was finely balanced.

On the one hand, extending Covid certification could offer public health benefits. Ensuring that people attending certain venues are vaccinated or tested reduces, to some extent, the risks of transmission and the risk of serious illness should an individual contract the virus in one of those settings. On the other hand, we understand that extending certification could create additional costs for businesses at an already very challenging time—and, of course, the smaller the business, the more difficult those costs can be to bear.

The task for the Cabinet today was to weigh those considerations and decide what—in the current circumstances—would be proportionate. Given that cases are now falling quite rapidly and that the current wave is receding, we decided that we will not at this stage extend the Covid certification scheme to other premises.

We will of course reconsider that should circumstances—and therefore the balance of judgment—change in any significant way. If cases were to start to rise very sharply again, extension of certification may well be a more proportionate

alternative to other, more restrictive measures. However, our conclusion today, given the improving situation, is that extending certification would not be proportionate at this stage.

However, we will propose one reasonably minor change to the certification regulations. At the moment, nightclubs and other late night venues must apply the Covid certification scheme if they have, in use, a designated area for dancing. We intend to amend the definition here to provide greater clarity and to prevent premises from avoiding certification simply by having tables on a dance floor—and therefore claiming that it is not a dance floor—but nevertheless permitting dancing to take place. That change will take effect from Monday when late-night venues are able to reopen.

Finally, let me say a few words about the updated rules on self-isolation after a positive Covid test. Those rules, which were confirmed two weeks ago, remain in place. If you test positive, you will be advised to self-isolate for 10 days. However, if you do not have a fever and you take two negative lateral flow tests more than 24 hours apart on day 6 and day 7, you can end self-isolation on day 7.

Last week, the United Kingdom Government announced further changes to self-isolation in England. That was publicised as allowing people to end self-isolation after day 5. In essence, however, that change simply brings England's rules into line with those already in force in Scotland. That is because, in Scotland, we count the day of a positive test as day 1 of isolation; in England, that is counted as day zero. In addition, in England, you can end self-isolation only after day 5; in Scotland, you can end it on day 7.

The slightly different ways of defining the beginning and the end of the self-isolation period has therefore given the impression of difference. However, the substance—the period that people are actually required to self-isolate for—is, in fact, the same in Scotland and England. It is important that people are clear about that.

The lifting, from Monday, of the protections introduced in response to omicron is possible, in part, because of the efforts that everyone has made—voluntarily and as a result of guidance and statutory measures—to help stem transmission. I put on record again today my thanks to people across the country.

It is also, of course, down to the success of vaccines. At this stage of the vaccination programme, we continue to offer boosters and implement the latest advice from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation.

Just before Christmas, the JCVI recommended that booster jags should be offered to 16 and 17-

year-olds, 12 weeks after their second jags. Therefore, any 16 or 17-year-old who had a second jag 12 weeks ago or more, or who is just approaching that point, can now book a booster appointment online through NHS inform. They can also turn up at a drop-in centre and get the booster there.

In addition, second doses of the vaccine are now available for 12 to 15-year-olds who had a first dose at least 12 weeks previously. Again, appointments can be booked online. Alternatively, young people can choose to go to a drop-in centre. Parents and carers are, of course, welcome to attend with them.

So far, the JCVI has recommended that booster jags should be offered only to those 12 to 15-year-olds who are at particular clinical risk from Covid. Any 12 to 15-year-old who is in that position will receive a letter inviting them for a booster 12 weeks after their last primary dose. There is no need to book an appointment.

Finally, 5 to 11-year-olds with specific medical conditions that put them at greater risk from Covid will be invited for their first vaccination from this week onwards. Again, I stress that they will be contacted directly: there is no need for them—or, more appropriate, their parents or carers—to book online. In due course, 5 to 11-year-olds who are household contacts of people with immune suppression will also be invited to receive vaccination. Of course, we stand ready to quickly implement any updated advice from the JCVI about vaccinating all 5 to 11-year-olds.

There are good reasons why the JCVI has given different advice for different age groups, but I realise that it can be confusing. The NHS inform website now has a self-help guide for parents, carers and children, which sets out what young people need to do to get vaccinated, and when they can do it. People who cannot get online can get that information by phoning the vaccination hotline on 0800 030 8013.

The final point that I want to make relates to vaccinations for adults. Scotland has achieved very high rates of vaccination. We are the most vaccinated part of the UK in terms of first, second, third and booster doses. However, there are still more than 600,000 people over the age of 18 who are eligible for a booster but have not yet had it, and there are hundreds of thousands more who have not yet had a first or second dose. I encourage anyone who falls into one of those categories to make an appointment as soon as possible or go to a drop-in clinic: there is plenty of capacity and you will be made welcome.

The latest available data, adjusted for age, shows that someone who is not fully vaccinated is at least four times more likely to require hospital

treatment than someone who has had a booster or third dose. Although being fully vaccinated does not eradicate the risk—for any of us—of getting Covid, it reduces that risk and therefore reduces the risk of our passing Covid on to others.

Therefore, if you choose, without good reason, not to be fully vaccinated, you are putting your own and others' lives at unnecessary risk. If you have not had a booster or third jag yet, please come forward as soon as possible, and if you have not had a first or second dose yet, please do so without delay. It is never too late to get the Covid vaccine and to start getting the protection that the vaccines offer.

The situation that we face today is undoubtedly less severe and much more positive than it might have been without the sacrifices that everyone has made over the past few weeks, although, despite what people might be hearing from media commentary, we have not yet moved from the epidemic to the endemic phase of Covid. I hope that that transition is under way.

We are, I hope, once again entering a calmer phase of the epidemic. That then allows us to consider the adaptations that we might need to make to build our resilience and manage the virus in a less restrictive way in future, as we move into an endemic phase. As I have indicated in previous weeks, we have started work on an updated strategic framework; we will consult on that over coming weeks.

All that gives us much cause for renewed optimism. That said, we are still in a challenging position. The NHS remains under very significant pressure. Indeed, as is reflected in today's accident and emergency waiting time figures, the past couple of weeks have probably been the most difficult that the NHS has ever faced, as Covid-related staff absences have compounded the other pressures with which it is dealing.

The number of Covid cases across Scotland, although declining, also remains high, and because omicron is so infectious, there is still a significant risk attached to social meetings and interactions. That is why, although we can be increasingly optimistic at this stage, we must all still play our part in helping to further slow the spread of the virus.

I highlight again the steps that we can all take to help to do that. First, as I have just talked about at length, please get fully vaccinated if you have not already done so. Secondly, take care when socialising. Until Monday, keep indoor gatherings to a maximum of three households. I suggest that, after that, for the rest of this month, try to keep indoor gatherings as small as your circumstances allow. Test before you go, every time. Lastly, please take all the other precautions that we know

make a difference. If you are meeting indoors, keep windows open. Continue to work from home for now if you can. Wear a face covering on public transport, in shops and when moving about in hospitality settings, and follow all advice on hygiene.

Those measures make a difference. The fact that so many people have stuck with them has helped to make it possible to lift the protective measures that were put in place before Christmas. If we continue to stick with those measures, we can all continue to do our bit to keep each other safe, protect the NHS and keep us firmly on the path—even if only metaphorically speaking—to a much sunnier spring and summer.

The Presiding Officer: The First Minister will now take questions on the issues that were raised in her statement. I intend to allow around 40 minutes for questions, after which we will move on to the next item of business. I would be grateful if members who wish to ask a question were to press their request-to-speak buttons now or to enter R in the chat function.

Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): I begin by urging everyone to keep getting vaccinated. Even if you have, so far, been against the vaccine, there is still time to change your mind and get your first jab.

The First Minister's statement begins a sea change in the Government's policy, starting to shift from a rules-based approach more towards trusting the Scottish public, as the Conservatives were pushing for. Yesterday, we called for an end to all business restrictions, an end to guidance on household mixing and social distancing, and an end to the ban on indoor sports. We did so because the data shows that we are past the peak of omicron. At this stage, protecting mental health, physical health and Scottish jobs is every bit as important as slowing the spread of Covid. Most of the approaches that we have called for have been taken, but the Government has still not gone far enough in two key areas. First, we welcome the move away from guidance on working from home, but can the First Minister explain the evidence behind that decision? Why, at this stage, can we not go further? Perhaps she could publish all the evidence that was used to make that decision.

Secondly, it is right that the First Minister has backed down on extending the vaccine passport scheme. For many Scottish businesses, it remains a burden and a potential risk. The First Minister has twice threatened to extend the scheme to Scottish businesses, and twice she has backed down. Is it not about time that the First Minister accepted that the scheme is a dud and scrapped it altogether?

Finally, although we are past the peak of the omicron crisis, we are at the peak of the crisis in A and E departments. The latest appalling A and E figures show the worst-ever waiting times for patients. Double the number of patients were waiting more than the target time, compared to the same week last year. My colleagues on the front line of the NHS are overwhelmed. Covid is making things worse, but the root of the problem is not omicron; it is the lack of a credible plan from Humza Yousaf. How many wake-up calls does the health secretary need before he finally devises a coherent strategy to tackle the unacceptable emergency waiting times in Scotland?

The First Minister: Throughout the past two years, Government policy and approaches to tackling Covid have adapted—and they will continue to adapt—in line with changes in the path of the virus. Keeping the public as safe as possible will continue to be our driving imperative. The approach that we are taking and have taken is balanced. It is appropriately and suitably cautious, and it is data driven. For all those reasons, it stands in stark contrast to the approach that the Conservatives have proposed at each and every stage.

I gently remind the chamber and, indeed, the public at large that, at every turn, whenever decisions have been taken, the Conservatives have—in my view, rather opportunistically—opposed whatever the Scottish Government has recommended. That has been the case on face coverings, working from home and mitigations in our schools. With the greatest respect, given that the Conservatives have called it wrong at every key juncture in the tackling of this virus, forgive me if I continue to follow clinical advice and make careful judgments rather than follow the advice that the member is offering today.

The member raised two specific issues. On working from home, I continue to be surprised that Dr Gulhane asks me for evidence of things that even non-clinically qualified people now see as being pretty obvious. When we are coming out of a wave of this virus, the worst thing to do would be to lift the restrictions at exactly the same time and allow the mixing and interactions that we have been trying to restrict to happen again all at once. What is the evidence for saying that people should work from home so that they do not have to, for example, travel to work and come together in canteens at lunch time? It is that, when we reduce that interaction, we reduce the opportunities for the virus to spread. While we are lifting other restrictions, it is prudent to keep that piece of guidance in place for a couple of weeks longer. I would argue that that is common sense, and I think that most people across the country understand that.

Secondly, on accident and emergency departments, going back to my earlier point, I would simply say in passing that, had we followed the advice—to use a polite term—of the Conservatives and lifted measures prematurely at previous stages and not had the mitigations that we had in place, we would be in a much worse position with Covid than we are in right now, and the pressure on our health services and A and E departments would be even greater.

We continue to support our national health service. The figures for A and E today reflect that the past couple of weeks have probably been the most difficult period in the history of the national health service, with staff absences compounding the other pressures. I hope that those figures will start to improve in the weeks ahead. We will continue to support the NHS in every way that we can, but the most important thing that all of us can do to support the NHS right now is continue to act in the careful way that we have been doing in order to keep cases on that downward trajectory.

Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): I start by sending my condolences to all those who have lost a loved one during this pandemic.

Today's announcements offer hope to a lot of people, who can look forward to once again getting some more normality back in their lives. However, too many businesses are still teetering on the brink and too many workers have found themselves waiting for weeks with no support. I will give the First Minister one example from my home city of a situation in which she needs to do more now. More than 100 staff who work at two Glasgow theatres have been left without pay for an entire month. That is just one example from one sector that tells a story about the lack of urgency on the part of this Government.

The scheme that will support those workers will not even publish its guidelines until tomorrow, and applications will not open for another week, never mind the disbursement of the actual money. Those workers have bills to pay and families to feed. What will the First Minister do today to support those workers and all like them across Scotland?

We are two years into this pandemic and, by now, we should have a system that has built-in resilience. We all hope that the worst is behind us, but, going forward, any changes in the restrictions cannot be ad hoc. We need a system that sets clear trigger points for what people can expect when cases rise and that lays out what support will be made available to people, when they will be entitled to it and when it will be received.

When can we expect a meaningful debate in this Parliament on detailed proposals for such a framework? Although the restrictions are well intentioned, they have had a detrimental impact on

people's mental health and wellbeing, and we cannot expect people to live their lives like that indefinitely.

The First Minister: First, on business support, I remind people that much of the money that is available in Scotland is not available in other parts of the UK. It is flowing, where appropriate, from local authorities and, in the case of theatres and people in the culture sector, from Creative Scotland—which, for example, has already started paying successful applicants to the freelancers hardship fund, and other funds will follow.

As I said last week, we are working with local authorities and other agencies to get the money out the door and into the bank accounts of those who need it as quickly as possible. However, there are checks and processes that have to be applied to guard against fraud. Yesterday, I noted the Chancellor of the Exchequer saying that £4.3 billion that had been fraudulently claimed earlier in the pandemic was being written off. I can imagine Anas Sarwar's reaction if we took decisions here without doing the appropriate checks. Work continues to get that money out to people as quickly as possible, because we understand how badly needed it is.

On the second point, I have already said that we have started work on the framework. In the coming weeks, we will consult parties across the chamber, businesses and others across society, and we will bring it to Parliament for debate and a vote.

It is important to understand the uncertainties that still exist. I understand the clamour for certainty—we all want certainty—but we are dealing with an unpredictable virus. At the moment, fixed trigger points would not serve anybody well, because we need to continue to apply judgment. To use omicron as an example, it was a new variant but we quickly found out that it does not behave in exactly the same way as delta behaves; therefore, trigger points that were designed for delta or that were later designed for omicron might not be appropriate for the variant that comes along next. We have to retain a degree of flexibility, and anybody who suggests otherwise will not navigate a path through the virus that serves the country well.

Much of what we have done has been in line with other countries across the world. In the latter phase of the pandemic, we have had far fewer restrictions than some other countries have had. No country has the magic answers, but, as we learn more, we can have more certainty about the path that we take. However, I say very forcibly, based on all my experience of the past two years, that it is really important to retain that degree of flexibility.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): It is gratifying to hear that the Scottish Government has determined that it would be disproportionate to roll out the further use of vaccination certification at this stage. The Liberal Democrats have always said that Covid identity cards are disproportionate, full stop, and I hope that they will now fall away.

Today's announcement will represent light at the end of the tunnel for many people, not least in the hospitality sector, which was hobbled by the restrictions over Christmas. Many of those people are still looking for answers, and answers matter. People need to trust that, if further restrictions are required in the future, they will be based in transparency and in a science that they can see. Therefore, it is concerning that, last week, the Scottish Information Commissioner ruled that the Government acted unlawfully in withholding projections about a second wave.

In the light of the rebuke by the Scottish Information Commissioner, will the Government commit to moving forward with transparency?

The First Minister: On the issue of vaccination certification, the difference between the Scottish Government and Alex Cole-Hamilton is that we assess the proportionality on the basis of the evidence, and we make balanced judgments. If the evidence shows us that certification is a less restrictive option than other measures, we will consider it. Alex Cole-Hamilton takes a fixed, ideological position, which, in the face of an infectious virus, is not appropriate. That is perhaps the key difference.

None of us wants to go back to restrictions. Even the further protective measures that have been in place over the past few weeks were far less restrictive than those at earlier stages in the pandemic, because, as we have been doing for most of this year, we are gradually learning to live with Covid in a greater way. However, we need to continue to assess matters on the basis of the evidence.

The Government has been totally transparent—we publish figures every single day. People say, "Show us the data," but we publish the data every day. The evidence is in how the virus behaves, and we know from epidemiological evidence that the virus spreads when people come together—more so in particular settings. We will continue to enhance the data as our knowledge becomes more developed.

On the freedom of information issue, the commissioner actually found that the information being withheld was of a type to which the exemption that covers development of Government policy applied. He accepted that the information was intended to assist in developing

policy in relation to a possible second wave, but he took a different view in assessing the public interest issue. We will consider the commissioner's decision carefully and respond appropriately.

The Presiding Officer: I call Ruth Maguire. On behalf of the Parliament, I take the opportunity to welcome Ms Maguire back. [*Applause.*]

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): I was hoping to slip in quietly, but thank you anyway, Presiding Officer.

On Saturday, NHS Ayrshire and Arran held a drop-in vaccination clinic for pregnant women and women who had recently delivered their baby at Ayrshire maternity unit. That was a very welcome initiative. It is crucial that women who are looking to conceive, including those who access specialist in vitro fertilisation treatment, are also provided with timely information and advice on vaccination and how that might impact their hopes of conceiving. An example of where that did not happen was raised with me recently. Those involved were left devastated. What action is the Scottish Government taking to ensure that women who are looking to conceive and those who provide their healthcare are kept properly informed about the importance of vaccinations?

The First Minister: It is brilliant to have Ruth Maguire back with us as a friend, a colleague and, indeed, the MSP for my home town. It is absolutely brilliant to see her back in Parliament and looking so well.

Ruth Maguire has raised an important issue. It is important to stress that Covid continues to pose a serious risk to unvaccinated pregnant women and their babies. Data from Public Health Scotland shows that 98 per cent of pregnant women with Covid who required intensive care in Scotland were unvaccinated. The decision was therefore taken by ministers to temporarily defer fertility treatment for women who are not fully vaccinated.

I fully understand that undergoing fertility treatment is an emotional experience for those involved. Treatment centres provide counselling to women who want to discuss vaccination in more detail, and they are in touch with patients to provide further information on treatment and vaccination. Public Health Scotland has also produced information leaflets and online information to encourage vaccine uptake among pregnant women, and additional guidance on fertility and vaccination can be found on our Parent Club and NHS Inform websites.

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): Throughout the pandemic, I have raised with the First Minister the issue of hospital parking for NHS staff. I welcome some of the steps that the Government has taken, but, from the start of this week, NHS staff in

Edinburgh are having their parking rights removed at Edinburgh royal infirmary. More than 20,000 people have signed a petition that calls for a rethink. Does the First Minister agree that front-line NHS staff who work night shifts should always be given the option of a parking space? Will she agree to a national review of hospital parking for NHS staff?

The First Minister: I agree that NHS staff should not have to pay to park their cars when they turn up to work. I was the health secretary who removed car parking charges at NHS-owned car parks, and, at the start of the pandemic, when Jeane Freeman was health secretary, she managed to secure the removal of car parking charges from the private finance initiative car parks that still had them. That is an important principle.

I will ask the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care to engage with the health board on that particular issue so that we can ensure, particularly at this exceptionally challenging time for those who work on the front line of our NHS, that they are not being penalised unfairly.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): As we all know, the challenges of the pandemic and, more recently, the omicron variant have placed increased pressures on social care settings. The health and social care partnership in Aberdeen is having to take staff away from other services and redeploy them to ease that pressure. What impact does the First Minister anticipate that the funding of Scottish Social Services Council registration and protection of vulnerable groups checks will have on staffing levels in the sector? Is there anything more that we can do to help the social care front line?

The First Minister: The introduction of Scottish Government funding for SSSC registration fees and PVG checks aims to assist the easing of winter pressures across the sector by removing any financial barriers that might prevent people from applying for a career in care. It is all about supporting those who work in the sector.

Health and social care partnerships continue to face significant challenges in providing social care, due to increased levels of demand and staff absences, so we will continue to look at all options to further support the workforce. Indeed, later today, the Deputy First Minister, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care and the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government will meet council leaders, local authority chief executives, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, NHS boards and the third sector to discuss the need for a whole-system response to prioritise social care and agree what more can be done nationally and locally.

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): People who live in care homes in which self-isolation is 14 days—it can last longer—were not mentioned in the statement. Many of them fear that they are being forgotten as the rest of us move on. Some families from care home relatives Scotland describe their loved ones as having no visitors, no freedom and, worst of all, no hope. Will the First Minister listen to their concerns and reassess the proportionality of the 14-day isolation rules? While we wait for the Government to give effect to Anne's law, will she ensure that full use is made of personal protective equipment, testing and vaccines to facilitate safe visiting and contact between care home residents and their loved ones?

The First Minister: Care homes should ensure appropriate visiting for residents and make full use of PPE and testing. I know that they are working hard to do that.

Specifically on self-isolation, although decisions have understandably been subject to question and criticism, our overriding priority throughout the pandemic has been to safeguard and protect residents and staff in care homes. At times, during the pandemic, those have been some of the most difficult decisions with some of the most challenging and difficult outcomes. However, it remains really important that we take very careful decisions on the matter, given the frailty and vulnerability of the people we are discussing.

The measures that are in place ensure that loved ones can have contact with residents while balancing the Covid risk and the need to keep people safe, in line with clinical and public health advice. That is especially true given the emergence of omicron, which is much more infectious. However, as I think that I said in the chamber last week, given the recent changes to self-isolation more generally that we announced two weeks ago, we had already commissioned public health experts to review the guidelines that are in place for care home residents. We expect to be able to announce an updated position on that imminently, but I hope that Monica Lennon and, indeed, all members will accept that it is important that we do so on the basis of quality clinical and expert advice.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): My understanding is that the latest round of business grants for hospitality and similar businesses has gone to businesses that got support in the previous rounds. Is it possible for businesses that are new or whose circumstances have changed and that missed the first round on a technicality to get a grant in the latest round?

The First Minister: Yes, it is. New hospitality businesses that did not previously receive funding can complete an application form. That means that

local authorities will be able to assess their eligibility and will contact them within 14 days of receiving the application. The application form is live on the Scottish Government website.

The reason for support automatically going to businesses that previously got it is for speed of getting money to people, but we do not want to exclude anybody who did not get support previously if they are entitled to it now.

Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): I am pleased that there is a downturn in cases but, as we know, the situation can change rapidly, so it is essential that caution is maintained. I am relieved that we are not following the reckless advice of the people who suggested scrapping self-isolation for those who test positive. We need to ensure public compliance with measures, which means supporting people who need to isolate. Will the First Minister confirm that the Scottish Government will continue to make support available for those who need to isolate?

The First Minister: Yes, I confirm that. It is an important point to raise. Isolation remains a really important part of our response to the virus to help us to break the chains of transmission. That is obviously particularly the case when someone has tested positive. One of the unanswered questions in what the Conservatives called on us to do yesterday—which, as I read it, was just to remove everything and take our chances with Covid—is whether they were actually suggesting that we should remove self-isolation for people who test positive. Perhaps they will take the opportunity to clarify that.

We will keep in place support for people who are self-isolating, because we recognise the financial challenges. None of this is easy or what any of us wants to be doing but, particularly at this stage—almost two years into the pandemic—it is really important that we take basic precautions to avoid, as far as we can, the situation going into reverse again.

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): The vaccination certification programme has been pivotal in allowing people to take part in activities in Scotland during Covid restrictions and in allowing those who travel abroad for work or pleasure to meet the requirements of the country that they are visiting. Will the First Minister give any advice to people who rely on a paper copy of the vaccination certificate to ensure that they can prove their booster status and access an up-to-date QR code?

The First Minister: Paper certificates are available, as I set out again last week. They are accepted at domestic venues where the certification scheme is in operation, and they are accepted by most countries around the world for

entry through borders. Boosters were added to paper certificates on 13 December. People should request a new copy if their certificate was issued before that date. In addition, QR codes are regularly updated for security reasons, and paper copies should be renewed every three months to ensure that a valid QR code is used.

We encourage people to use the app where possible for domestic purposes and for international travel certification requirements, as it updates all QR codes each time the app is activated. However, paper copies continue to be available.

Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con): Today, the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service published new data about tens of thousands of pending criminal trials, many of which have been delayed by Covid. Its most recent figures, from December, show that 760 of those are in the High Court. In every single one, there is a victim or a murder victim's family waiting for justice.

The Scottish Government rejected my party's call for additional funding to clear the backlog. What would the First Minister say to those victims and their families?

The First Minister: We are, of course, making funding available to the courts service to help with the backlog, and we have ensured in the draft budget that was published a matter of weeks ago that the justice system more generally, including the courts system and the Crown Office, is getting a fair settlement in the light of the circumstances that we face.

I deeply regret the impact of the virus on everybody who has suffered because of it. Many people have suffered health impacts because they have had the virus and have become seriously unwell. Sadly, too many people across our country are bereaved as a result of the virus. Even for those of us who have not had the virus or who have not lost a family member, there have been a plethora of other impacts, and that undoubtedly includes victims of crime having trials delayed.

I wish that none of this had happened, and I wish that we were not in, and had never been in, this global pandemic, but we are, and we need to continue to manage its impacts. Getting and keeping Covid under control and moving into a phase where we can manage it much less restrictively is a key part of that. Supporting and funding organisations to catch up on the backlog is work on which we will continue to focus this year, and that will undoubtedly be the case, in some respects, beyond that. We continue to give all of that our utmost priority as we move forward.

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): What further help can the Scottish Government offer vaccine trial

participants so that they are not disadvantaged by recent changes to rules on self-isolation and international travel, in particular the requirement for a booster, which is something that many trial participants do not yet qualify for?

The First Minister: That is an important question for those who took part in trials. I stress that clinical trial participants are treated in the same way as the rest of the population. They are therefore eligible for boosters and are offered them in line with the normal eligibility criteria for the booster programme.

For domestic and international travel and self-isolation on return to Scotland, clinical trial participants are treated as if they are fully vaccinated. Therefore, they should follow the guidance on testing and self-isolation that is detailed on gov.scot. For travel to other countries, all travellers should follow the relevant individual guidance and entry conditions required. Further information on other countries' entry requirements is available at gov.uk.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): On 5 January, the First Minister confirmed that £375 million would be made available for business support. I believe that, to date, only £262 million has been allocated, leaving £113 million. If that is correct, when will that sum be allocated? Will the provision of that support afford the Government the ability to address the issues that were outlined by Mr Mason and to extend support to sectors that, so far, have completely missed out, such as retail, given the deeply damaging impact that restrictions have had at this most critical trading time of the year?

I remind the Parliament of my entry in the register of members' interests.

The First Minister: We continue to liaise with individual sectors to try to make sure that any remaining funds that we have to allocate are targeted as effectively as possible. We started by allocating funds to those that are most obviously impacted, but there are a variety of other impacts, which we want to ensure that we properly understand and, as far as resources allow us to, address and respond to. Further announcements will be made in due course and as quickly as possible.

We will also publish, as we did in previous stages of the pandemic, outturn data on the disbursement of moneys. That will be published towards the end of January.

We will do everything in our power to make sure that all businesses across different sectors that have been impacted by the latest phase get some help and as much help as we are able to provide.

Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP): People throughout Scotland have been disgusted by the hypocritical behaviour of the Prime Minister, who has flouted the rules of his own Government on numerous occasions yet continues in his role. What would the First Minister say to those people who feel that that situation undermines the credibility of the public health message?

The First Minister: I have made my views clear, as many other people have, about the reports of repeated—serial—breaches of the Covid rules on the part of the Prime Minister and those working for and around him. I absolutely understand the intense anger that people feel about that, given the very painful sacrifices that so many people have made over the past couple of years.

Of course, all that has the potential to undermine compliance with the things that we are still asking people to do. However, this is what I would say to people: the reason for complying with any guidance or protective measures that are in place at any time during the pandemic is not because a Prime Minister, First Minister or any politician tells you to do so; the reason for all of us to do that is to keep ourselves, those we love and the whole country as safe as possible.

While we are still in the pandemic, I appeal to everybody not to allow understandable and justified anger at politicians to get in the way of doing the right thing for themselves and their loved ones.

Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con): With so many people contracting Covid over the festive period, many will not be able to get their booster for another four weeks. As the First Minister said in her statement, more than 600,000 people over the age of 18 are eligible for a booster but have not had it yet, and there are hundreds of thousands more who have not yet had a first or second dose. Will the First Minister commit to keeping mass vaccination centres, such as the Scolty centre in Banchory, open for the foreseeable future?

The First Minister: I give the assurance that we will keep vaccination open, available and accessible. It will never be too late to get vaccinated.

I will not stand here and say that every single centre that was open and necessary while we were vaccinating large numbers of people on a daily basis will remain open because, as we go through different phases of the vaccination programme, different models of provision will be more appropriate. A large vaccination centre, when we are dealing with more of a trickle of people rather than a big flood of people, would not be a good or efficient use of resources. We will

judge that on an on-going basis, as we have done throughout.

I do not pretend that, on any aspect of handling the virus, we have got everything right all the time; manifestly, we have not. However, right now, on first, second and booster doses, we are the most vaccinated part of the UK. That would suggest that the approaches that we have taken so far have been effective, and we have a responsibility to ensure that they remain so.

On the central question, we will, of course, absolutely make sure that anybody who is not already vaccinated and wants to come forward to be vaccinated is able to do so.

Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): The support that the Scottish Government has announced in recent weeks has been welcome, particularly given that such support is not available to businesses elsewhere in the UK. However, my office has been contacted by a local independent travel agent, who continues to struggle due to Covid. Given that the Scottish Government does not have the powers to borrow resources to extend support to other businesses, what representation has the First Minister made to the UK Government to provide funding for those businesses that are currently not eligible for financial support?

The First Minister: We have repeatedly called on the UK Government to increase the level of support that is made available during the omicron wave across the UK, or—we have been joined in this call by the Governments of Wales and Northern Ireland—to make available a process whereby our devolved Governments can do so.

Some new money has been provided, but not nearly as much as I think would have been appropriate. However, we continue to ensure that we maximise what we are able to provide from our own resources and to get the money to businesses as quickly as possible.

As I said in relation to a previous question, there are some funds that we have made available that we have not yet allocated. We are consulting affected sectors—this might be relevant to Marie McNair's question—about how that can best be targeted.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): I want to press the First Minister on my constituents who have been affected by the closure of theatres in Glasgow. They have gone a month without wages and they need direct assurance from the First Minister that they will be helped. That is a serious financial imposition at this time, so I ask the First Minister to take direct oversight of the issue. Up to 150 workers are affected. Can they please get a clear solution from the First Minister? I am happy

to follow up the matter with the First Minister, if necessary.

The First Minister: I have oversight of all aspects of the response to Covid. That is my job and my duty. I understand how difficult it is for any organisation, whether a theatre or another business that has been impacted by the recent restrictions. That is why we have allocated money and are working to get that money to organisations and, therefore, to those who need it most, as quickly as possible. I will ask the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy to follow up in more detail with the member, should that be helpful.

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): Last week, it was announced that a £4 million funding package would be put in place to support unpaid carers. What impact does the First Minister anticipate that that will have on the lives of unpaid carers, who have faced greatly increased pressures during the pandemic?

The First Minister: Lots of people—almost everybody in the country, but particularly certain groups of people—have been severely impacted by the pandemic, but there are few groups who have been impacted more severely than unpaid carers. They already carry a significant burden and they have had that burden seriously exacerbated because of the pressures and strains of dealing with Covid.

There is no amount of money that will ever repay unpaid carers for the debt that we owe them, but through a number of strands, such as the supplement to the carers allowance, we try to do more to help. That additional money will help to provide some respite for carers and additional support in different ways to help them to deal with the burden that they are currently carrying. We will continue to look at all ways in which we can further support unpaid carers in the period ahead.

Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con): From large-scale events, such as Edinburgh's Hogmanay, to smaller ones, such as Prestwick's Christmas market, events organisers have had a tough festive period. That has had a knock-on effect on other businesses, including bed and breakfasts, which have already had a difficult year. Cancelled events have only added to their problems.

My question is twofold. How much of the £21 million to support culture and events is now in the pockets of recipients? What support has been provided to B and B owners and other providers of short-term accommodation since December 2021, and what plans are there to introduce additional support?

The First Minister: The money that we have made available across different sectors is in the

process of flowing to businesses. As I said in response to Paul Sweeney's question—or it might have been Daniel Johnson's question—we will publish outturn information on each of the strands of business support that will show exactly how much of it has been allocated. We will publish that information at the end of January. We will continue to ensure that we are doing as much as possible to support businesses—whether it is B and Bs or businesses in other parts of the hospitality and leisure sectors—that have been very badly affected by the pandemic generally, but in the past few weeks in particular.

I repeat a central point: the most important thing that we can do—perhaps it is not the most important thing, because in the immediate term that is providing financial assistance but, overall, the most important thing that we can do—is keep Covid under control. That is why I appeal to everybody across the chamber to understand why a careful and cautious path out of this wave is really important in the wider economic interests, as well as the health interests, of the country.

Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP): How does the Scottish Government plan to ensure that the inequality gap does not widen as a result of the thousands of people who are being plunged into debt due to the pandemic, along with soaring energy prices and food costs, coupled with the cut to universal credit?

The First Minister: In this Government, we are taking a range of actions to tackle inequality, such as the national mission to tackle child poverty and the commitment of more than £800 million to provide more affordable housing.

In the Covid recovery strategy, we set out specific actions to tackle the inequalities that have been exacerbated by Covid. That includes work to increase financial security for low-income households. In this financial year, we are providing more than £7 million to support free debt advice, including funding to meet increased demand over the winter period. Starting this week, we have had TV adverts through our money support campaign, which make it clear that people do not have to deal with financial problems alone and signpost them to free debt advice services. That is just some of the support that this Government is providing.

Evelyn Tweed is absolutely right that all that support is being undermined by the lack of action on the part of the UK Government to help with soaring energy costs and wider inflationary pressures, and it has all been severely undermined by the completely wrong-headed and cruel decision to remove the £20-a-week universal credit uplift. As we take action, it is incumbent on all of us in the chamber to call on the UK Government to live up to its responsibilities to

ensure that inequality does not get worse as a result of the pandemic that we are living through.

ScotWind Offshore Wind Leasing Round

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): Good afternoon. 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 Michael Matheson on the ScotWind offshore wind leasing round. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of his statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

15:22

The Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport (Michael Matheson): I would like to update the Parliament on the outcome of the ScotWind leasing round, which is a major milestone in our journey to net zero.

ScotWind will provide us with enough power for every home in Scotland, place Scotland at the forefront of the green hydrogen revolution and allow us to become a major exporter of clean energy. There is a huge economic prize on offer: at least £1 billion of investment for every gigawatt that is built, which will help to create thousands of jobs and transform the Scottish economy. It is the first offshore wind leasing round to be held since the devolution of the Scottish Crown estate and it has been administered by Crown Estate Scotland, which announced the winning applicants yesterday.

ScotWind was created with delivery at its core. It was established with the aim of creating a strong pipeline of projects that would drive our just transition and serve as a cornerstone in delivering our commitment to tackle the climate crisis. We put the challenge to the market, which has responded so positively that Crown Estate Scotland has been able to offer awards for 17 major projects. That is a tremendous vote of confidence in Scotland. The level of ambition that has been shown by the market recognises the seriousness of Scotland's commitment to achieving our net zero targets and sustainable economic growth. ScotWind is by far the world's largest commercial round for floating offshore wind and breaks new ground in putting large-scale floating wind technology on the map at gigawatt scale.

It is encouraging to see the ambition that has been set out by the provision of floating offshore wind. As members might be aware, our sea bed is considerably deeper than waters in England and Wales. Without technology such as floating wind, it would not be possible to develop renewable

energy projects in those areas. It is therefore inspiring to see the tremendous rate of innovation in the technology and to consider what more could be possible 10 to 15 years from now in this fast-moving and growing sector.

Many of the consortia that have been successful in securing lease options also have ambitions for green hydrogen. That presents a range of new energy and export opportunities for Scotland and will help us to achieve our ambition of generating 5GW of renewable and low-carbon hydrogen by 2030 and at least 25GW by 2045. We will further consider those opportunities and what they will mean for our energy system in our energy strategy and just transition plan later this year.

ScotWind will also deliver around £700 million in revenues to the public purse for the initial awards alone. We have already made clear that we will invest from those moneys to help tackle the twin crises in climate and biodiversity. In addition to those revenues, ScotWind promises to deliver billions more in rental revenues once projects become operational. Those will be invested for the benefit of the people of Scotland.

Importantly, ScotWind promises to be transformational in delivering wider economic supply chain benefits to help power Scotland's green recovery the length and breadth of the country. As part of the bidding process, all applications had to submit a supply chain development statement outlining how they would deliver benefits to Scotland. I welcome the commitment that developers have made to invest at least £1 billion in the Scottish supply chain for every gigawatt generated via ScotWind projects.

The supply chain development statement, a mechanism that was developed through engagement with the Parliament, provides us with an excellent tool to ensure that, by working with the sector, Scottish communities reap the maximum possible economic benefit from ScotWind projects. Those statements are not only an indication of what Scotland can achieve but our expectation of what the winners will deliver for Scotland.

We must now work together to ensure that that happens. As was highlighted in the strategic infrastructure assessment for offshore wind that was commissioned by the Scottish Offshore Wind Energy Council, there must be greater collaboration between developers, the supply chain and the public sector, both to help focus activity and investment in Scottish ports and to help Scottish suppliers to grow and win offshore wind work. We will work closely with SOWEC to implement the five key recommendations in the strategic infrastructure assessment, starting with the creation of a Scottish floating offshore wind port cluster, in which ports will act in partnership to

provide the required infrastructure area and capability needed to attract manufacturers to invest in Scotland.

To achieve that, SOWEC is leading on the development of a collaborative framework to encourage the sector to come together and work collectively to support the delivery of offshore wind projects from ScotWind, with a focus on growing capability and expertise, particularly around the growth of floating offshore wind. We fully support the creation of the collaborative framework. We expect the successful ScotWind projects to actively engage in the process from the outset, and to take collective action not only to grow Scotland's supply chain but to deliver the wider economic transformation that will benefit communities across Scotland.

To that end, the scale of the winning bids augurs well for creating the volume of sustained demand that will mark a step change in developing the capability and capacity of Scotland's infrastructure and its manufacturing and service sectors.

We are at the start of a journey that will take some years before we see the developments constructed. As well as the supply chain opportunities, the focus now switches to the planning and consenting regimes, ensuring that those work as effectively as possible as we process applications from developers, and to the potential that can be delivered in light of environmental and other impacts.

The stated collective aspirations of the projects that have been awarded options are highly ambitious, and that is to be welcomed. ScotWind will make Scotland a global leader in offshore wind energy, and all the consortia that are holding options are fully aware of the responsibilities that come with the development opportunities that they have won.

However, ScotWind will also be shaped by our continuing commitment to responsible stewardship of our incredibly rich natural marine resources, as well as the need to fully understand the impact on other marine users. We will work with the sector and all affected stakeholders to ensure that the process and its benefits are realised in a manner that recognises the concerns of all interests as we embark on this journey.

It is not possible at this stage to predict what scale of development will be permitted, but through our internationally recognised sectoral marine planning and licensing process, there is an established pathway to facilitate development. By following due process and taking into account all stakeholders and considerations about impact, the Scottish Government can maximise the huge opportunities for energy, the environment and the

economy that the large-scale development of offshore wind can bring to Scotland.

The ScotWind awards are a phenomenal mark of confidence in the Scottish offshore wind sector. We are now the biggest offshore wind market in the world and we are demonstrating global leadership in tackling the climate challenge. However, the real work starts now. Tomorrow, the First Minister and I will hold a summit with all the successful parties. We will be clear in stating our expectations to all who are involved. I will meet the successful developers both collectively and individually on an on-going basis to understand how we can work together in a collaborative manner to deliver the best for Scotland. In addition, the Minister for Environment and Land Reform is meeting marine environmental interests and fishers today and tomorrow to ensure that their perspectives and concerns are taken into account.

This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity that has to be realised, to be maximised and to deliver the environmental and economic benefits for all of the people of Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary will now take questions on the issues that were raised in his statement. I intend to allow about 20 minutes for questions. It would be helpful if those members who wish to ask a question would press their request-to-speak button now.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): The Scottish Conservatives welcome the announcement on ScotWind as we look to drive the United Kingdom forward with our collective ambitions to achieve net zero.

It is particularly notable that what we might call big oil is at the forefront of the drive towards renewable energy. Indeed, of the £700 million that is expected to be raised, it will pay nearly £240 million. BP has set Aberdeen as the location of its global operations and maintenance centre of excellence for offshore wind, and TotalEnergies reckons that the west of Orkney wind farm could deliver renewable hydrogen power to the Flotta hydrogen hub.

However, the industry has been much maligned by many who failed to see the pivotal role that it would play and took positions that could discourage investment and forward planning. What diligence has been done on the successful bidders to ensure that they have sufficiently strong balance sheets to deliver the £700 million?

Another issue is the supply chain. It is not lost on me as a north-east representative that 70 per cent of the successful bids came from within 100 miles of Aberdeen. However, given that it is only once agreements have been officially signed that the details of the supply chain commitments in the

supply chain development statements will be published, how will the Scottish Government ensure that there is maximum benefit to our local and UK supply chains and that jobs, manufacturing and the like remain in the UK?

I note that Crown Estate Scotland's website says:

"Capital from sales is reinvested in new opportunities to strengthen the value and revenue earnings of the estate".

What will happen to the £700 million that has been raised? Whose budget will it augment? For what purposes can it be used?

Michael Matheson: I am grateful to the member for welcoming the outcome from ScotWind and for recognising the huge economic opportunities that it creates.

The member made reference to the oil and gas sector. A number of those that have secured lease options are major oil and gas companies. That is to be welcomed. Those oil and gas companies are making the transition out of hydrocarbons and into renewable energy. That is exactly what the Scottish Government has been encouraging them to do. The engagement that I have been having with them is all about helping to make sure that the transition from a hydrocarbon-based economy in Scotland, particularly in the north-east, offers people in the oil and gas industry an opportunity to move into the renewables sector. The success of some of those oil and gas companies is therefore to be welcomed, on the basis that it allows staff in those organisations to make that transition and to utilise the very considerable skills that our oil and gas sector has—particularly in the subsea sector, which will be very important in supporting the development of some of the projects. That is a positive and welcome step.

The member referred to due diligence on the ability of organisations to secure the lease options. It is worth keeping in mind that, at this stage, they are lease options; organisations still have to get consent and still have to get planning permission for development to take place. I am sure that the member will recognise that, in order to secure that consent, they will have to go through the financial disclosure process. At this stage, it is too early to know what their balance sheets are, but all the companies that have secured lease options through ScotWind operate internationally within the field and are committed to investing in the renewables sector. That includes those that are in the oil and gas sector.

On the member's final point, which was about the £700 million that has been raised, we have made it very clear that that money will come into the Scottish exchequer; that it is funding that we will use, in part, to support our net zero ambitions;

and that we will then consider how to utilise it across the rest of the Scottish block grant.

It is also worth keeping in mind that, although there has been incorrect commentary over the past 24 hours suggesting that the £700 million is all that there is, that is not the case. An on-going annual rental payment will come in from those who go on to start producing electricity from those developments. That in itself will bring in further billions of pounds, over many years, while the projects are operating. Again, that money will help to benefit the whole of Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Daniel Johnson.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): It is Colin Smyth.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I do not call Daniel Johnson. I call Colin Smyth, albeit that we were advised that the speaker would be Daniel Johnson.

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): I would be happy to hand over to Daniel Johnson, but I will continue.

In the journey to net zero, the need to fulfil Scotland's huge potential in offshore wind energy is clear, and the award of the licences is an opportunity for the Scottish economy and for Scottish jobs. However, this time, it must not be squandered. History has shown us that, if developers can go elsewhere, they will. Just weeks ago, the Government sank plans for a publicly owned Scottish energy firm, and Scotland's sea beds are now being franchised entirely to private overseas-owned big multinationals and investment funds—a move that, I hear, is welcomed by the Tories. That will raise around £700 million for the public purse but billions more for firms, none of which are registered or owned in Scotland. It is a case not just of offshoring wind energy but of offshoring the profits from that. It must not also mean offshoring the jobs.

The Government's record on green jobs is not good. It promised 130,000 of those a year but has delivered less than one fifth of that. Given that the bidders' supply chain commitments, which remain unpublished, were excluded from the option tender and assessment process, and that the penalties for failing to deliver developer statements are negligible, will the cabinet secretary tell us what binding action will be taken to ensure that the bulk of the work—not the crumbs—remains here in Scotland? Surely the cabinet secretary knows what percentage of the work will be carried out in Scotland for the benefit of Scottish jobs.

Michael Matheson: The member will recognise that the supply chain development statement

process was developed in consultation with the Parliament, given the experience of the past. I accept that we have not achieved in our renewables sector the level and scale of inward investment and supply chain development that we would have wanted. That is why it is critical that we maximise the potential benefits from this ScotWind leasing round. It is worth pointing out that this is the first ScotWind leasing round; there is an opportunity for further rounds in the years ahead.

I assure the member that we will do everything that we can to ensure that the level of investment in the Scottish supply chain that was stated in the supply chain development statements will be delivered, which, as I stated, works out at roughly £1 billion for every gigawatt that comes on stream. Our expectation is that that will be delivered.

The process that we have in place with SOWEC through its strategic infrastructure assessment and the collaborative framework that is being developed is about maximising that opportunity and doing so in a way that ensures that we reap the economic and social benefits that can come from such a significant level of financial investment in the Scottish supply chain. We will do everything that we can to ensure that they deliver on the commitments that were set out in those statements.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before I call the next questioner, I ask for more succinct questions and answers. I gave a bit of latitude to front benchers, but I cannot give everybody the same opportunity or we will not get everybody in.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): The announcement unlocks certainty for developers, operators and the supply chain. It is a huge investment that will create thousands of jobs. Now that we have that certainty, how will we ensure a smooth transition for those working in high-carbon sectors such as oil and gas who want their future to be in renewables?

Michael Matheson: As I mentioned earlier, one of the outcomes from the ScotWind leasing round has been the number of oil and gas companies who have moved into the renewables sector. There is an opportunity for those who are presently employed in high-carbon industries to transition into the renewables sector. It is important that we maximise the skills and knowledge in our oil and gas sector to support that transition and the build-out of the projects that have secured leasing options through ScotWind. I assure the member that we want to make sure that there is a just transition for people who work in our oil and gas sector, and ScotWind provides a pathway to help to achieve that.

Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con): There is a risk that Scotland loses out here. The projects that will come through ScotWind, which I welcome, are mostly larger than 1GW. That will be a big challenge for the Scottish supply chain unless there is an opportunity to develop and scale up local capabilities, particularly in the north-east.

Scottish innovation projects are currently limited by a 100MW cap, compared with 300MW for English and Welsh projects. Will the cabinet secretary lift the cap on projects in the INTOG—innovation and targeted oil and gas—planning process, which would increase their competitiveness compared with the 300MW projects that will be available in the Celtic Sea? That would provide a vital opportunity for the supply chain to work up its capabilities in advance of ScotWind.

Michael Matheson: The member raises an interesting point, although I think that he misses one of the key risks of what he has just asked for. INTOG is capped at 100MW to support innovation in the sector in order to scale up in support of the decarbonisation of oil and gas, but also to help to prevent it from impacting on the ScotWind development rounds, because of the danger of overdevelopment in some areas.

Raising the cap to 300MW could compromise ScotWind and its developments, which is one of the reasons why INTOG has been capped at 100MW and why it is different from the approach that has been taken in England and Wales. Its key purpose is to drive innovation in the sector and those who are involved in the innovation side of the sector support the level of the cap.

Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Yesterday's welcome announcement will mean that the waters around the Western Isles will contribute substantially to Scotland's journey to net zero and present vital economic opportunities. What community benefits and supply chain opportunities for the Western Isles can we expect to see from ScotWind, and how will the Government ensure that partners such as the local authority are fully involved?

Michael Matheson: Alasdair Allan raises an important point for his constituency about the potential benefits of the developments off the Western Isles. I assure the member that we are keen to ensure that all parts of Scotland, including his constituency, have the opportunity to benefit from the investment that will be made in the domestic supply chain to support the roll-out of the ScotWind projects. For example, the deepwater port development that is planned for Stornoway could play an important part in supporting the industry with its build-out.

I assure Alasdair Allan that we will look to work with all stakeholders, to ensure that we maximise the economic and social benefits that can come from the build-out of the projects, including in his constituency.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): The sites could generate upwards of £6 billion for international firms, which will pay just £700 million for the rights for 10 years. What does the Scottish Government assess the payback period and net present value of the projects to those corporations to be? Does that represent good value for money for the Scottish taxpayer, or are the profits simply being blown offshore?

Michael Matheson: We have had an open option process, which has attracted interest from global companies in investing in offshore renewables here in Scotland. I hope that the member welcomes the commitments that those companies have made to invest, potentially, £25 billion—and potentially a further £10 billion—in the Scottish supply chain. That is good for the Scottish economy and for Scottish communities.

On the wider point, I suspect that the member is making reference to the question whether the projects should all be with Scottish or UK businesses or in public sector control. If only we had powers in that regard, in relation to the energy sector. Mr Johnson's colleague referred incorrectly to a Scottish energy company; that would have been a retail company, not a production company, because we do not have the capacity or the powers in that regard. I do not know whether the member is saying that we should nationalise energy; his leader in London said that that is not his party's policy.

We want to make sure that we secure the economic benefits in Scotland. That is exactly what the supply chain development plans are all about. I hope that the member can find it in himself to welcome such significant investment in the Scottish economy.

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): It is hugely welcome that ScotWind will deliver such substantial revenues to the public purse. For the sake of clarity, can the cabinet secretary provide further assurance to my constituents that the revenues will be invested for the long term, to support our transition to net zero?

Michael Matheson: We are considering how the funding will be deployed. We have committed to making sure that it supports us in achieving our net zero ambitions and tackling the climate and biodiversity crises. We also want to use the funding in a way that enables it to have a legacy that benefits all communities in Scotland. We want to capitalise on it in a way that has a long-term benefit to every part of Scotland.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): ScotWind represents a sea change in realising Scotland's offshore wind potential. It also underlines the importance of our islands, which have long been at the forefront of renewables innovation and delivering on our net zero ambitions.

Following his response to Alasdair Allan, can the cabinet secretary assure communities that, rather than there being a top-down approach, local communities will have control over decisions about how the funds are invested? What assurances can he give about the involvement of other stakeholders, notably the fishing industry, in shaping how each development is taken forward?

Michael Matheson: The guiding light on any of the developments is the sectoral marine plan, which takes into account the consenting process and how stakeholders should feed into it. I assure the member that people in the fishing community who want to make representations in relation to any development will be able to do so through the normal consenting process. Their voices and views will be taken into account through the normal process for considering such issues.

On how the funding will be utilised, I am sure that the member recognises the very significant amount of funding that will be brought into the Scottish Government. We need to ensure that we utilise the funding so that all Scotland gets the benefit—that includes coastal communities such as the member's constituency. I assure the member that we will consider that carefully and utilise the funding in a way that maximises the benefits to all parts of the country, including his constituency.

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): We can all agree that ScotWind opens up a vast range of opportunities that can be maximised for our economic and social benefit.

Is the cabinet secretary able to give an update on any benefit for the Ferguson Marine shipyard in Port Glasgow in relation to the ships that are required, as per the BP Alternative Energy Investment bid?

Michael Matheson: Within the bidding process, some stakeholders have been engaging with a range of Scottish supply chain companies. We will certainly ensure that those stakeholders take forward the commitments that they have set out in their supply chain development statements, including those that might involve the building of vessels here in Scotland. I have no doubt that the member will want to engage with those companies that have made commitments to businesses that are based in his constituency—businesses that are highly valued in his constituency and that provide a lot of employment there—to ensure that

tier 1 companies that have secured lease options live up to the commitments that they have set out in the supply chain development statements in their bids.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): I refer members to my entry in the register of interests.

The cabinet secretary seems to accept that the Scottish National Party did not deliver on its economic promise of making Scotland into the Saudi Arabia of wind power or on the thousands of green jobs that it promised. The cabinet secretary told Liam Kerr and Colin Smyth that the Government will do everything that it can to ensure that we see onshore supply chain development, local manufacturing and the jobs that everyone is talking about. What exactly does the cabinet secretary mean when he says that the Government will do everything that it can?

Michael Matheson: The member seems to have quite a short-term memory issue; he may recall that one of the reasons why there was a sudden halt to the significant level of wind energy development in Scotland was that the UK Government decided to cut the subsidy to support the industry, which resulted in a massive downturn in the sector.

I am sure that the member is aware of the contracts for difference process, which the UK Government is responsible for. I have no doubt that he will want to ensure that that process holds up the commitments that companies have made to help to support supply chain development. That is why, for the first time in the UK, we have required, through our leasing round, supply chain development statements. The purpose behind those is to ensure that we do not make the errors that the UK Government made when it was responsible for the last leasing round, when it made no requirements on the industry. I can assure the member that we will be doing everything that we can to deliver on those commitments and that we will not repeat the mistakes of his colleagues at Westminster in mismanaging Scotland's oil, gas and renewable energy reserves, as they have done for many, many decades.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): Unlike Mr Kerr, I found yesterday's statement breathtaking—the scale of investment, the scale of the increase in renewable energy capacity and the scale of the jobs that will come to our communities. I think that any young person hearing that announcement yesterday would have been inspired, too.

Of course, it is important that we also tackle the nature emergency alongside the climate emergency. What lessons can be learned from the

previous offshore consenting rounds to ensure that birds and marine life will be protected?

Michael Matheson: We have a robust consenting process that requires that any proposed project includes a detailed environmental impact assessment and wider impact assessment on any marine environment linked to the development. That process will be applied in all of the proposed developments.

We need to ensure that, as we look to maximise the potential economic benefits to Scotland, we also recognise the potential environmental impacts that those developments can have. The sectoral marine plan is the guiding light in those matters. It is the process that will be used to ensure that those projects are properly assessed. If mitigations need to be put in place, or if it is not appropriate for a development to take place at the scale of the ambition set out by the developer, we have a consenting process that takes all of those matters into account prior to a decision being made, including the importance of protecting our precious natural environment and ensuring that it is not degraded further as the result of a development.

Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP): This is an enormous opportunity for Scotland. Can the cabinet secretary confirm that the three main aims of the Scotland leasing round are to move quickly from deployment to licensing; to secure supply chain jobs for Scottish companies; and to optimise the auction and revenue payments for the taxpayer? On Scottish supply chain jobs in particular, when will details of the opportunities be made public, and what powers does the Scottish Government have to ensure that licensees deliver on their proposals for Scottish jobs?

Michael Matheson: The member is correct about those three aims. We have moved quickly with ScotWind. I can also assure her that we are adding additional resources to the consenting process in order to help to ensure that we have the capacity and capability to deal with the scale of the potential bids.

The member rightly points to the supply chain statements and the benefits that will be driven to the domestic supply chain in Scotland. That is hugely welcome and will be transformative in terms of our green energy sector.

In terms of the financial elements, it is clear from the outcome in relation to ScotWind that there are significant financial benefits with regard to not only the leasing options and rental provision, but the investment that will go into our domestic supply chain, which I believe will be transformational in the years ahead. I hope that everyone across the chamber will support that and get behind the success of the ScotWind bidding process.

Retrofitting Buildings for Net Zero

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a debate without a motion on behalf of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee on the retrofitting of properties for net zero.

I invite members who wish to participate in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons now or enter R in the chat function, and I call Ariane Burgess to open the debate on behalf of the committee.

15:56

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): The Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee is delighted to have the opportunity to debate the retrofitting of housing for net zero. The committee is beginning work on the issue, but it is not only an issue for our committee; it is relevant to the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee and, as we move closer to the deadline for meeting the agreed net zero target, it will be an issue for the whole Parliament. We hope that the debate will be helpful as we consider next steps.

Homes account for around 13 per cent of Scotland's total greenhouse gas emissions. To reduce emissions by 75 per cent by 2030 and hit net zero by 2045, Scotland's homes will need to be far more energy efficient. The Scottish Government aims to reduce emissions from heat in buildings by 68 per cent by 2030. There is a tremendous job ahead to deliver on that target, and that is recognised in the heat in buildings strategy. The committee agrees that targets should be that ambitious.

Before describing the committee's work and the challenges ahead, it is worth stepping back to consider what retrofitting involves and how it contributes to targets. Simply put, retrofitting means adding new technology or features to existing buildings to make them more energy efficient. That can include loft, floor and wall insulation, draught proofing and secondary, double or triple glazing. As well as being about energy efficiency improvements, it is about installing zero-emissions or net zero-emissions heating or connecting homes to heating networks that are supplied by low carbon or renewable heat sources. In Scotland, only 11 per cent of households have no or low carbon-emitting heating systems.

The committee visited a retrofit project in Niddrie Road in Glasgow, which is concerned with retrofitting a tenement comprised of eight one-

bedroom flats. We were impressed with the work being done and we thank John Gilbert Architects and Southside Housing Association for hosting us. We recognised the time and effort required to deliver a project of that scale.

The Scottish Government proposes that homes must meet energy performance certificate rating C in future. In 2019, less than half of Scotland's homes were at EPC rating C or better. There are around 2.5 million homes in Scotland. When we consider the work that is involved in delivering the Niddrie Road project and the fact that such work might need to be done on more than 1 million homes, we realise the herculean scale of the task.

How do we increase the scale and the pace of the work? What must be in place? In November, we met stakeholders to explore those issues—I thank them for participating. They raised a range of issues and we agreed to write to the Scottish Government to seek its views on them.

We started by asking how it intends to increase the pace of retrofitting. In doing so, we highlighted models of collective purchase, such as bulk buying, payment plans, community ownership and third-party ownership. In its response, the Scottish Government recognised that the pace needs to increase significantly. It is looking at the models highlighted and working closely with stakeholders to develop them.

We asked the Scottish Government what role it sees for local heat and energy efficiency strategies in setting out long-term plans for decarbonising buildings and improving energy efficiency across local authorities. From the response, we note that the Government's intention is for each local authority to publish its strategy by 2023. Given the urgency of the situation, we hope that the strategies can be in place before then.

From the climate change plan, we note that the Scottish Government has committed to considering how local tax powers, such as for council tax and non-domestic rates, could encourage retrofitting. I would be grateful for any updates on the progress of that work.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): At this morning's Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee meeting, I asked witnesses whether communities were aware of the impending deadlines and any support of which they might be able to avail themselves in order to do the retrofitting. I was told, "I think the answer is no to all those questions", and "there is a lack of anywhere householders can go for knowledgeable expert advice that they can actually trust."

How does the committee think that that can be changed or challenged?

Ariane Burgess: As I said earlier, the committee is just beginning the process and asking questions of the Scottish Government. I will continue, as I have a few more questions to ask on behalf of the committee.

One recurring theme that we heard was the importance of public buy-in. Witnesses suggested that the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP26—has raised public awareness of climate change, which provides an ideal opportunity to advance public understanding of the role of housing in reaching our targets. The public need to know what will be expected of them, how much it will cost and how it will be paid for.

We asked the Scottish Government about its plans to improve public awareness, and the role of the national public energy agency in that. It is pleasing to see that the Government recognises the importance of public awareness, and I am keen to hear more about the role envisaged for local authorities in improving it. To drive that work, there must be adequate funding. We are concerned that not enough funding is in place to deliver those plans. That is our most pressing concern, and what prompted us to initiate our work.

The committee recognises that funding will be a joint effort among Government, social landlords, private landlords, private lenders and owners. However, even allowing for funding from different sources, it will be challenging to find the £33 billion that the heat in buildings strategy estimates is required.

It was good to hear that the Scottish Government is establishing a green heat finance task force to report by September 2023. It would be good to hear more about the task force and how the Scottish Government intends to encourage investment in the interim.

We also heard about the challenges of accessing funding. Derek Logie of Rural Housing Scotland described current funding as an “alphabet soup”, with challenges in knowing where to find funding and how to get it. I welcome the recognition in the minister’s letter of the importance of the consumer journey, and it would be good to hear more about what the Scottish Government will do to improve it.

Bryan Leask of Hjalmland Housing Association Ltd told us that funding for organisations is not being allocated strategically, but rather through a bid process. Therefore, we were pleased to read in the minister’s letter that the social housing net zero heat fund is no longer allocated on a competitive basis.

For retrofitting to work for all, it must be delivered in line with just transition principles. We

recognise that the heat in buildings strategy contains the principle of no detriment, which we welcome. Nobody should be worse off due to retrofitting their home.

The committee also heard about the importance of a fabric-first approach, and the need to improve the fabric of existing homes to make them more energy efficient. It is pleasing to see the Scottish Government’s commitment to fabric first and to legislating to require buildings to meet energy efficiency requirements. Of course, that will work only if there is public buy-in and funding in place. However, funding and public awareness are not the only challenges—there will be particular challenges around retrofitting in mixed-tenure blocks.

Witnesses suggested that there is insufficient clarity on how that will be delivered in the heat in buildings strategy. The minister’s letter is welcome in offering more detail on how some of those challenges might be overcome. We are keen to be kept updated on that.

There must be a skilled workforce in place. We considered that the heat in buildings strategy sets out broad plans for putting in place such a workforce. The minister’s letter provides more detail on that, and we look forward to scrutinising the Scottish Government’s heat in buildings supply chain delivery plan. The potential for 16,400 jobs being supported across the economy in 2030 due to investment in the deployment of zero emissions heat is a welcome prospect.

The committee recognises that the challenges are more acute in a rural setting. In particular, we noted the increased costs and skills shortages. The minister’s letter refers to the provision of more funding and the role for the islands energy strategy. We are keen to hear more about how the green jobs workforce academy will respond to the demands of rural settings.

I note that the Existing Homes Alliance Scotland calls for a rural homes just transition package. I would be interested to hear the minister’s perspective on that suggestion.

The committee heard about the challenges of retrofitting under the current planning system. In some cases, planning departments have placed obstacles in the way. We do not believe that the two are in conflict. As noted in the minister’s letter, we will consider that further in the context of national planning framework 4.

With such a significant task ahead, we must draw on experience from elsewhere. It is pleasing to hear about the memorandum of understanding between the Scottish Government and the Danish Government, and it would be good to hear more about what lessons the Scottish Government has learned from elsewhere.

Finally, challenges remain that are outwith the control of the Scottish Parliament, specifically concerning VAT on retrofit work and electricity tariffs. Those issues significantly affect the viability of delivering the retrofit agenda and doing so with just transition principles. We will pursue that with the United Kingdom Government, and we note that the Scottish Government is already doing so.

I reiterate the enormity of the challenge. We must deliver on that and, as a Parliament, we must hold the Scottish Government accountable and ensure that it does everything that it can to make it happen.

16:07

The Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights (Patrick Harvie): I thank the committee for its on-going work on the issues arising from the retrofitting of buildings. As Ariane Burgess noted in closing her speech, that is an enormous challenge that we must confront together as a critical part of our response to the climate emergency.

The challenge is significant in part because of the scale and pace of the emissions reduction that we need to achieve across our building stock. That includes switching more than a million homes from fossil fuels to zero-emissions heating by 2030. It is ambitious because it needs to be. Parliament has set us the statutory requirement to reduce emissions by 75 per cent by 2030. What we are debating today is what we need to do in our homes and other buildings to deliver that. Not delivering it is simply not an option.

Although we must be clear-eyed about the scale of the retrofit challenge, we must also recognise that investment in the heat transition brings great opportunities: green jobs in a burgeoning clean heat sector; new skills and training; and greener, healthier and more efficient homes and workplaces across Scotland.

Last October, I published the heat in buildings strategy, which sets out an ambitious policy package to progress those objectives. I am not for a moment shying away from the fact that the actions that we have committed to are only the start of a multidecade programme of work up to 2045 and beyond. The strategy is a strong foundation, but much work remains to be done to realise an unprecedented transition.

I am therefore grateful to the committee and to other members for joining this debate, and for their input into the efforts to move to zero-emissions heating and energy-efficient buildings. I am keen that we develop a cross-party consensus to take forward that agenda.

I want to highlight three broad issues that are fundamental to making the transition a success. The first of those is public engagement, which Ariane Burgess, the committee convener, mentioned.

I was pleased to hear that committee witnesses suggested that COP26 had raised public awareness of the need for action. However, we need to recognise that most people do not yet have a clear understanding of what that means for their homes. Zero-emissions heat systems, such as heat pumps and heat networks, enjoy long pedigrees in many other European countries but are unfamiliar to most of us in Scotland. I want that to change in a way that engages people in a shared understanding of the need for that change and how to make it.

The upcoming dedicated national public energy agency will play a central role in public engagement. It will also support the streamlining of our delivery programmes by bringing new co-ordination and leadership to the issue and making it straightforward for people to access advice and support as and when they need it.

The second point that I will touch on is certainty. Building owners need certainty about what is needed to meet the requirements of net zero, and companies in the supply chain require sight of a clear pipeline to invest in and grow their businesses. Therefore, a critical component to our approach of creating certainty will be to introduce regulations.

Building on existing standards that require action on energy efficiency and zero-emissions heating, we will introduce regulations that will, from 2025, require all homes to reach a good level of energy efficiency—EPC C rating or equivalent—at point of sale or change of tenancy. From the same year, regulations will also begin to require action to be taken on buildings' heating systems as we phase out the need to install fossil fuel boilers.

Later this year, I will publish a consultation on those proposals. I will introduce legislation during this parliamentary session and I look forward to working with the appropriate committees, as well as the wider Parliament, on developing those regulations.

Liam Kerr: If the minister introduces those regulations and mandates all of those changes, how does he expect people to pay for them?

Patrick Harvie: By happy coincidence, the next paragraph in my speech begins, "The third issue I wish to raise is cost." I recognise that members and members of the public have serious questions. At the beginning of a multidecade programme of work, no Government would be in a position to say what will happen right through to

2045 and beyond. However, we have committed at least £1.8 billion in this session of Parliament to kick-start the growth in markets for zero-emissions heat and energy efficiency and to support those who are least able to pay. I am pleased that, this morning, we announced almost £9 million of support through the low carbon infrastructure transition programme, with an impressive variety of projects that provide zero-emissions heat across homes and non-domestic buildings.

One project in particular will be of interest from a retrofit perspective: a grant of £1.27 million to the reheat project led by Scottish Power Energy Networks to install heat pumps in 150 homes along with smart controls and innovative heat batteries that are manufactured by Sunamp in East Lothian. As well as decarbonising the homes that are participating in it, that project will generate insight into how the grid can accommodate a greater role for electricity in heating our homes, which will minimise the need for capacity upgrades and will drive costs down.

Public investment in the heat transition is critical, but we have to be clear eyed. We estimate that the total cost of the heat and energy retrofit transition to 2045 will be in the region of £33 billion. That sum is clearly beyond the level that the public sector could bear alone so, alongside public investment, we need innovative mechanisms to increase individual and private sector investment into energy efficiency and zero-emissions heating. Therefore, we are establishing the green heat finance task force to recommend ways that the Scottish Government and the private sector can collaborate to scale up the investment. The task force will provide an interim report by March next year and final recommendations by September that year.

A just transition means sharing the benefits of climate action widely while ensuring that the costs are distributed fairly. That means that we must continue to support those who are least able to pay, and that is why we will publish a refreshed energy strategy and just transition plan later this year. It also means that those households, organisations and businesses that have the means will share some of the costs, particularly where they benefit directly.

The transition to zero-emissions heat will be an enormous project, around which we must work together if we are to play our part in halting damaging climate change. I am proud of the leadership that we are showing in Scotland, and I welcome the contributions being made both within the Parliament and across the country to charting an effective and fair course to decarbonising our buildings.

16:15

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): I am pleased to open the debate for the Scottish Conservatives, and I welcome the opportunity to discuss this important issue, which the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee has brought to the chamber today.

“Challenge” is definitely the descriptive word of the debate. The Scottish Government has committed to decarbonising the heating of 1 million homes by 2030, which serves as a prelude to the aim of zero emissions from buildings by 2045. That was set out in law, as the minister has outlined, in the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019. Scottish Conservatives agree with that commitment and share the Government’s ambition to achieve it, with a desire for Scotland to lead by example in the fight against climate change.

The Scottish National Party-Green Government launched its heat in buildings strategy, as the minister outlined, following the consultation that ran from February to April 2021. The key part of the strategy has already been mentioned: how will householders and tenants be able to meet the challenge? Heating accounts for roughly 50 per cent of energy use in Scotland and, in order to cut greenhouse gas emissions, it is important that we reduce our reliance on fossil fuels and instead move towards low-carbon or zero-carbon heating systems.

It is important to say at the outset of the debate that, at a time of rising energy bills and increased focus on tackling fuel poverty, it is critical that ministers do not lose sight of those challenges as we take forward this work. It is also important that, while we seek to achieve that, we keep heating bills at affordable levels—the most affordable possible—and the most effective way of doing that is to reduce energy need with better insulation and efficiencies in homes.

I hope that real investment can be brought forward at an earlier stage. As things stand, homes account for approximately 13 per cent of Scotland’s total greenhouse gas emissions, so a huge amount of work is needed, beyond what has been outlined in warm homes campaigns and targets.

It is absolutely right that Scotland sets itself ambitious and pioneering targets that focus on improving energy efficiency in our homes, and that we move towards zero-emission heating systems. That said, the SNP-Green Government proposals are long overdue, and they require significantly higher investment so that those targets may be reached. There are significant questions around how the targets are going to be met and about the workforce who will be tasked with undertaking so

much of the work. The Construction Industry Training Board found that, to retrofit Scotland's existing built environment for net zero, a revolution will be needed across the construction sector. It is estimated that 22,500 people in Scotland will need to be trained to deliver that energy efficiency by 2028. We have not seen work start on any workforce plan, and that issue is equally important to the debate.

Scottish Conservatives will continue to press the Government to deliver the investment that is required to achieve those goals, to ensure that they are cost effective and that the proposals do not place a disproportionate burden on home owners and tenants.

As well as my work on the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee, I also sit on the Social Justice and Social Security Committee, which recently took evidence on fuel poverty. Tenants from Glasgow gave us evidence regarding the changes that they had seen with the fitting of heat pumps to their properties. They expressed significant concerns in a number of areas, which I hope the minister will take on board. The new systems have been significantly expensive, which pushed a number of tenants into fuel poverty. Housing associations have not listened to tenants' concerns, and tenants were not properly consulted when the pumps were fitted to their properties. We must take that on board, as we need to take people with us on this journey. Tenants in Glasgow deserve better than what they told us they received.

Retrofitting existing buildings with relevant carbon-neutral technology will form an integral part of Scotland achieving net zero by 2045. I hope that Scottish Government ministers will provide more detail on the target and explain how it can be reached, while keeping things affordable for home owners across Scotland.

In keeping with the Scottish Conservatives' manifesto promises in 2021, the Scottish Government has supported the creation of help-to-renovate schemes as a way of supporting home owners to make their properties more energy efficient. We welcome that, but we also want to see how the rural transition fund will be used. We know that one of the hardest sets of properties to retrofit are those in rural parts of Scotland, and those will need additional funding to help meet the target.

That brings me on to a specific point with regard to the heat in buildings strategy, which the minister touched on: how we can ensure that energy efficiency improvements are put in place. Some of the first elements of that work could be to carry out wall and floor insulation. Those are vital in reducing emissions as they make properties more efficient. I hope that we will see an early emphasis

on those elements in rural properties, especially through the provision of support and part funding. There is much work to do, and this debate presents an opportunity for us to take that work forward.

From statistics that the Government has already presented, only about 11 per cent—or 278,000—of Scottish homes have a renewable or very low-emission heat system, not including the 34,000 homes that are connected to heat network systems. The development of heat network systems is an exciting opportunity, and funding for that should also be brought forward.

To date, as the minister outlined, only £1.8 billion over this parliamentary session has been committed to meeting the challenges. It is worth noting that the Government has missed its legal emission targets for three years in a row.

Although we agree that Scotland needs to decarbonise and to tackle fuel poverty, energy bills are soaring and the cost of living is increasing under this Government. Therefore, we must ensure that we work towards making things as efficient as possible for home owners.

The Scottish Government has not yet allocated the resources that are required for its plans to be met, and we must ensure that reasonable support is provided to home owners.

Today, we call on the Government to work on a cross-party basis to meet the challenge. I genuinely hope that today's debate starts a more focused cross-committee process, to make sure that Parliament holds ministers to account for all related legislation.

16:22

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of members' interests as an owner of a rental property in North Lanarkshire.

Retrofitting and decarbonising our homes has been a huge focus of our work in the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee since last June, and the debate is a welcome start in discussing the benefits and costs of retrofitting.

There was a partial email blackout yesterday. Unfortunately, it was not a full one, so colleagues might already know what I have to say this afternoon.

Householders will be liable for enormous bills. Costs will average £12,500, which will be a huge concern to home owners and tenants alike. The Government's commitment so far of £1.8 billion just will not cut it. As Susan Aitken told the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee outright

last week, the costs will run into the tens of billions of pounds.

The cost of living crisis that we face makes those sums even more concerning. The panic about rocketing energy bills is palpable. It is a bitter irony that the recovery will cause the spiralling of the number of people in fuel poverty who are struggling to heat their homes, which already affects one in four.

We agree that we are in a climate emergency. We agree that, if we improve the fabric of our homes, we can cut fuel poverty, decarbonise our homes, reduce living costs and create vital local jobs. We know that our homes contribute three quarters of the building emissions that are warming the planet. However, no one wants to hear that low-income home owners must fork out thousands of pounds to sort that out.

Right from the start, the Government has been putting too much on to home owners, and tenants, who will ultimately pay more in their rents, too quickly, with too little support. The proposed changes are big and disruptive, with real risks for home owners. The matter is complicated.

Homes need to be made energy efficient, reducing our energy demand and expenditure, and then we should replace heating systems with ones that are carbon free. There are questions about some of the technology and communities know that cowboys operate in the sector, often causing more harm than good. Early experience of carbon-free heating systems is mixed. Social rent tenants and new-build buyers have been the guinea pigs so far.

North Lanarkshire Council told me that its retrofits and heat pump installations have achieved fantastic results against oil heating, with one tenant seeing bills drop by 80 per cent. However, a housing association told me that it is removing an unreliable district heating scheme, and tenants at another in Glasgow are being served with disconnection notices because the costs of the district heating scheme are well above those forecast and tenants cannot afford to pay their bills. Others in the Western Isles have had infra-red heating panels fitted, and they are also getting huge bills. Many of those tenants and associations have no recourse to funds to have the systems removed or remediated, or exceptional costs underwritten.

We believe that households should be protected from the huge up-front costs of retrofitting through grants and loans and, crucially, that the technology should be tested in the real world. Until the costs are comparable to those of a fossil fuel system—the likely point of adoption—is it not right to ask for the excess cost of installation and remediation to be underwritten by Government,

expanding on the no-detriment principle set out in the heat in buildings strategy and mentioned by the committee convener?

Patrick Harvie: I suspect that if it was possible for the public sector to fund every penny of the transition and relieve all homeowners of the need to make any contribution, we would all love to do that. Can the member suggest a way of funding that? Is he actually suggesting that we do more than is in the heat in buildings strategy and pay for every penny of it from public funds?

Mark Griffin: I will come on to other issues around costs, particularly for tenants. I am saying not that the public sector should fund all of it, but that low-income households that are already struggling with their fuel bills should not have to bear the brunt of those costs. I am not saying that the costs should be paid entirely by the state; I am asking whether the state could cover the up-front costs through grants or loans, so that payment could be staged over a longer timescale.

I come on to the cost to tenants, which involves making the case for rent controls to be introduced as soon as possible in this session of Parliament, so that tenants are not left picking up the bills for and costs of social landlords making changes to their homes. The Scottish Federation of Housing Associations' modelling for new energy efficiency standards shows that the standards would reduce fuel poverty by only 24 per cent, but are due to cost £2 billion. Decarbonising the heating source as well would cost £6 billion and SFHA members say that the EPC modelled costs are likely to underestimate the true costs. Concern was also expressed by Chris Morgan, an architect working on the Niddrie Road demonstration project, about getting a Glasgow tenement to EnerPHit or Passivhaus standard, since EPCs do not measure the energy efficiency of buildings particularly accurately.

The Scottish Trades Union Congress has said that we need to learn from past transitions. It said:

“Done wrongly, decarbonising our homes could push costs onto tenants, increase fuel poverty and lead to work needing to be redone.”

If we do not recognise that and make supporting home owners and tenants our primary goal, we will not have their confidence and decarbonising their homes will not be the success that we all hope that it can be.

16:29

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I welcome the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee's initiation of the debate. As the convener said, the committee is in the foothills of its inquiry, but it has already set out clearly

some of the key issues that it will look at in more detail.

We know that 50 per cent of energy use is for heating—as Miles Briggs reminded us—and although we must drive up standards for new buildings, we know that about 80 per cent of the existing housing stock will still be around in 2050. Retrofitting will be absolutely crucial and will affect households and businesses in every part of the country. It is therefore appropriate that members beyond those who are on the relevant committees have an opportunity to contribute.

In that context, I am grateful to those who have supplied briefings for the debate, including those who did so inadvertently. I reassure Mark Griffin's colleague that we have all been there.

In the short time that is available, I want to focus on three key areas: cost, capacity and communications. On the first, we know that the strategy for heat in buildings comes with a £33 billion price tag. Funding of around £1.8 billion has been announced, but there is little clarity on how it will be used. The Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee and the UK Climate Change Committee have expressed concern about the need for greater transparency and for a breakdown of how plans will make achievements on the path towards net zero. In part, those are needed to track progress—or a lack of progress.

At micro level, the Scottish Government estimates that the average cost for installing a heat pump and improving energy efficiency is about £12,000 per home. However, on islands and in rural communities that are off the gas grid, the costs are significantly higher. According to a response from Michael Matheson to a written parliamentary question, it is about £17,000. I can certainly confirm that, on the smaller islands in my constituency, the costs are considerably higher still. Those are communities that, traditionally, have experienced the highest levels of fuel poverty and extreme fuel poverty, so it is incumbent on ministers to be absolutely up front about the funding that is available and about what is realistic in terms of achieving the objectives—the cost contribution that is expected from individual householders and businesses, and what targeted support will be provided to those who are least able to pay and those who face higher costs due to their island or rural location.

As with costs, there seems to be a bit of a mismatch between the Government's aspiration and the capacity to deliver. As the minister rightly said, there is no doubt that we will see the creation of green skills and green jobs, but wishing that it were true will not simply make it so. For example, scaling up heat-pump installations from 3,000 to 200,000 a year will take a lot of people, a lot of training and an awful lot of investment. It is unclear

how that will be achieved in the timeframe that is envisaged and throughout the various parts of the country in which it is required.

On communications, "Heat in Buildings Strategy: Achieving Net Zero Emissions in Scotland's Buildings" acknowledges, as the minister himself did, that public understanding of the role of heating in causing greenhouse gas emissions is low. The convener emphasised that concern in her opening remarks, and I know that the committee wants a process for accessing advice and support that is as easy as possible.

That point has been picked up by the just transition commission, which warned of the dangers in that area. It said:

"The backlash against implementation of new regulations on smoke and carbon dioxide alarms shows how this can go wrong, and we must not risk the same happening for our transition to net-zero."

In addition, Energy Action Scotland confirms that

"In many hard-pressed families, there is no recognition of net-zero. They will have many other issues to deal with. They could feel further alienated or excluded from moves towards net-zero if it isn't well communicated."

I welcome the debate, I wish the committee all the best with its inquiry and I confirm that Scottish Liberal Democrats support the drive to net zero through retrofitting. However, on cost, capacity and communications, the rhetoric is running well ahead of the reality at this stage.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before we turn to the open debate, I remind all members to ensure that their cards are properly inserted in consoles and that, if you are seeking to speak, you have pressed your request-to-speak button.

There is no time in hand. Therefore, any interventions will have to be absorbed within the speaking time of the member concerned.

16:33

Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP): I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests: I am a serving councillor on East Lothian Council.

I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this important debate. Only in November last year, the world came together here in Scotland for the COP26 conference to discuss our collective goal of net zero by 2050. Shaun Spiers, the Green Alliance executive director and chair of a conference session called "Beyond COP26", said:

"There is no simple, off the shelf solution to reaching net zero, but there is a growing understanding of what needs to be done."

We need to build on that, here in Scotland.

The penultimate day of COP26 was dedicated to cities, regions and the built environment. Why? Simply put, it was because there is now clear recognition that the industries of the built environment are capable of doing more to solve climate challenges and reduce emissions.

In 2019, the World Green Building Council released a report that indicated that the built environment is producing approaching half of global carbon emissions—far more than any other sector. It is no surprise that reducing emissions from our homes and buildings will be one of the most important things that we can do to end Scotland's contribution to climate change. We have heard already today that our homes account for 13 per cent of Scotland's total greenhouse gas emissions.

We have some of the most ambitious climate change targets in the world, aiming to reduce emissions by 70 per cent by 2030 and to reach net zero by 2045. The Scottish Government's "Heat in Buildings Strategy" sets out how we plan to improve energy efficiency and support the decarbonisation of Scotland's homes. In its most recent report, the Climate Change Committee said that

"Scotland is ahead of the rest of the UK in setting out buildings decarbonisation policy",

but we need to do more.

Retrofitting existing homes has a significant role to play in addressing the concerns that most Scottish households have about their energy costs and carbon consumption and could help us to make fuel poverty a thing of the past. The Existing Homes Alliance Scotland recommended that local authorities lead the scoping of what work is required in their own areas. That is important. Doing that in my own East Lothian constituency will be different to doing it in the Highlands. We have talked about the challenges of that.

I welcome the green heat finance task force that the minister mentioned. The committee has a role in leading on that and on the approaches to scoping and finance.

The Scottish Government has already committed to decarbonising the heating of at least 1 million homes—that is a big challenge, as we have heard today, but it is one that must be met—and the equivalent of 50,000 non-domestic buildings by 2030. Any action to decarbonise our homes must be taken in a manner that protects people who are in, or are at risk of, fuel poverty from increased fuel bills—we cannot make the changes by risking putting more people into poverty—and avoids placing a burden on those who are least able to pay for the transition.

In its written evidence to the Social Justice and Social Security Committee, The Existing Homes Alliance made it clear that

"We should use the green recovery and net-zero transition as an opportunity to build a more inclusive, resilient, and net-zero society"

and that

"There is absolutely no excuse for poor energy performance of the home to be a reason to be in fuel poverty."

"Heat in Buildings Strategy" sets out the significant steps that the Scottish Government is taking, including taking actions only where they have will no detrimental impact, unless additional mitigating measures can also be put in place. That must be fundamental to how the committee takes the issue forward.

Scotland does not have all the powers that are necessary to deliver the transformational change that is required while leaving no-one behind. We all know about the recent increases in wholesale energy prices. The potential impact on consumers further underscores the urgent need for UK Government action. That must be done on a long-term basis. We can make changes, but any continuing problems with wholesale energy prices will have a detrimental impact.

The Scottish Government's plan for whole-house retrofits and the zero emissions first approach that we have adopted will prove to be vital in proofing homes against fuel poverty and will avoid the costs caused by repeating inventions or replacing fossil fuel heating in a few years' time.

We urgently need a stronger commitment and a clear action plan on heat from the UK Government to prevent the undermining of the Scottish Government's attempts to bring every Scottish household along with us towards a net zero Scotland.

In conclusion, I say that retrofitting gives us the opportunity to tackle fuel poverty and move us towards being a net zero Scotland. As we also heard in the statement about ScotWind, there are also opportunities to develop new skills and new supply chains and to provide skilled jobs. I look forward to working with everyone in my constituency in developing this vitally important sector.

16:30

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): Retrofitting properties for net zero is an ambitious goal, but there is a significant credibility gap, particularly when it comes to the roughly 170,000 Scottish homes—about 7 per cent of the total—that are off grid.

“Heat in Buildings Strategy” requires that zero-emissions heating must be installed in all homes by 2045, with no new or replacement fossil fuel boilers to be installed in off-gas properties after 2025, in favour of zero-emissions heating.

I want to reiterate a point that Liam McArthur made. When I asked how much it would cost to upgrade a

“typical hard-to-heat off-gas grid home”,

the cabinet secretary told me the average cost could be “in the region of” £17,000. In a further answer, the minister conceded that

“While the output temperature of a heat pump is often lower ... when appropriately configured with building fabric and radiators or underfloor heating they efficiently bring indoor temperatures up to adequate levels.”—[*Written Answers*, 4 November 2021; S6W-03776.]

“Underfloor heating”, Presiding Officer! Some organisations suggest that such works could increase the cost to around £30,000 for home owners who are often some of the 25 per cent who are already in fuel poverty.

Indeed, a recent poll of over 1,000 rural households found that 33 per cent were unable to afford to spend any money on a new heating system. The cabinet secretary tells me that they could get a loan of £15,000, but that would still leave a minimum extra payment of £2,000 up front, as well as—of course—the need to pay back the loan.

Nowhere does the strategy address whether electric heat pumps are the best option, practically or financially, for rural or off-grid homes. After storm Arwen, I had innumerable constituents contact me during the electricity outages expressing how lucky they were to still have fossil fuel fires or heating.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): Will the member take an intervention?

Liam Kerr: I ask Mr Ruskell to bear with me. I will take an intervention if I have time.

There are about 120,000 off-grid homes in Scotland that use either liquefied petroleum gas or oil heating. The cost to people who use oil heating of switching to LPG or bio LPG is about £2,000. Those who are currently on LPG can switch to bio LPG without any intervention cost. People might also want to explore biomass systems, which are extensively used in places including Scandinavia and Canada. They can be installed easily and locally at a cost of about £8,000 and they offer a genuinely circular net zero economy.

However, how does the Scottish Government explore those technologies? It does so by proudly announcing:

“We have already phased out oil and LPG boilers from Warmer Homes Scotland, Area Based Schemes or Home Energy Scotland Loans”,

It forces electric-only options on off-grid households. Last week, I met Liquid Gas UK, which is a trade association with around 100 members. I learned a great deal that could help with rural and off-grid Scotland’s transition on the journey to net zero, but I also learned that Patrick Harvie, who is the minister who is responsible for this area, has not met the group at all since being appointed, and neither has the cabinet secretary.

The point that I am making is that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to any of this, be it on energy generation or the satisfaction of demand. A mixed-technology approach to heating is clearly essential to achieving the net zero targets, especially when it comes to off-grid properties. There is a serious disconnect between the £33 billion cost and the Scottish Government’s lack of planning, engagement and financing. It is surely incumbent on us all to work collaboratively with our partners across the United Kingdom—and, as Miles Briggs said, across this Parliament—to find solutions, to consider all options dispassionately against the science and the practicality, and to actually meet and hear from the people in the industry who are best placed to help with that.

16:42

Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP): Mark Wilcock is 58 years old and he works for Highlands and Islands Enterprise. He has lived in Nairn for two years, having purchased a flat in a tenement where a bank formerly carried out business on the ground floor. He chose to live in Nairn for its natural beauty, its history and the lifestyle that it offers.

The building, which was constructed in 1874, is listed. The flat is now draughty and the windows need to be replaced. He obtained a quote for uPVC windows at a cost of £4,500, but he was then advised that, because of the listing, sash-and-case windows would be needed. The overall cost of replacing the windows—there are only six—with that type would be £16,000, which is over three times the cost of new uPVC windows. That is not a bill that he can afford.

I raised aspects of his case with the Scottish Government, and the minister, Jenny Gilruth, arranged a call with senior officials from Historic Environment Scotland. They have been extraordinarily helpful, and dialogue continues on how the work that is needed can be done in order to bring the standards of heat insulation up to the required level.

Although only a small proportion of homes in Scotland are listed—maybe 1 per cent—they are

commonly affected by much higher costs to bring them up to higher standards of insulation, which is essential if there is to be efficient use of fuel, lower emissions and, therefore, a less severe impact on the environment. Mark has allowed me to raise his case today and I am grateful to him. I ask the minister how people in his situation can be assisted in order to tackle what seems to be a very practical problem. For every Mark, there could be thousands of others.

A second constituent—again, she is a flat owner—contacted me to raise the situation where one or more flat owners in a tenement are, for whatever reason, not willing to agree to essential common repairs, or perhaps to pay for them: the so-called missing shares situation.

I understand that some councils in Scotland—the City of Edinburgh Council, I think, and, perhaps, Glasgow City Council, although I am no expert in any of this—have taken a lead in paying for the costs of the recalcitrant or non-co-operating owners and recouping those afterwards, and that that has been highly successful. Will the minister bring in a national scheme? I ask because my constituent in Inverness has no access to such a scheme, nor do many others, who are mostly in rural constituencies, in which, perhaps, there are fewer tenements but still many tenemental owners.

I have raised those two issues because unless we tackle the existing problems that are faced by flat owners throughout Scotland, we are kind of missing the point. Of course, we all want net zero to be achieved, but what about the here and now? What about the people who are faced with an impossible position, right at the moment? Will the Scottish Government bring forward the missing-shares solution, through providing a national fund?

In preparing for the debate, I read an excellent piece of analysis: a report by Douglas Robertson, who is an acknowledged expert on housing, which is entitled, somewhat provocatively—but accurately—“Why Flats Fall Down”. We have a very serious problem with structural failures in flats in Scotland. Here and now, the problem is to get essential repairs done and to improve the housing stock, otherwise, in the future, there may be considerably fewer flats left to tackle the problems of net zero that the minister has described.

16:46

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): I thank the committee for the excellent work that it has done. We are all agreed that we have to reduce carbon emissions by retrofitting our homes. I will speak about the wide gulf between where we want to be and our ability to achieve it. So far, many speakers have addressed that.

What is important is that if Scottish householders are to be adequately supported to make changes, they must have confidence in alternative heating systems. Have we even agreed on what the trusted alternatives are? Mark Griffin, Liam McArthur and Liam Kerr have hit the nail on the head by raising some of those issues.

I am seriously concerned that ordinary families and workers have no idea of how to take matters forward, although I know that the minister has tried to address that. The majority do not have £7,000, £10,000 or £14,000 to spare for a new heating system. Even if they had, who will guarantee that the purchase of a zero-carbon heating system will reduce their heating bills or will be a genuinely more efficient heating system for their homes? There is a lot to consider—not just the financing of it.

The International Energy Agency has stated that if net zero is to be achieved, gas boilers should no longer be sold from 2025. Electric heat pumps—air source and ground source—are seen as the most effective alternatives to gas boilers. However, those can cost anything from £4,000 to £14,000 to purchase and install. That, presumably, is why demand remains low.

Last year, the UK Government announced grants of £5,000 for home owners in England and Wales to install heat pumps. In contrast, Home Energy Scotland offers households a maximum interest-free loan of £2,500 to install a heat pump, and that has to be paid back within 5 years. We see the wide gulf between where we would like to be and where we are. Demand is currently so low that, by October last year, Home Energy Scotland had approved loan funding for only 80 hybrid heat pumps—and in the previous year, the loans that it had approved were in single figures.

In the Glasgow region, which I represent, the cost of retrofitting is eye watering. Glasgow City Council’s leader, Susan Aitken, has estimated that it will cost £9 billion to retrofit around 450,000 homes. That is more than four times the council’s budget. We therefore see the wide gulf regarding what needs to happen.

Glasgow and Edinburgh, in particular, have to wrestle with the problems of retrofitting tenement flats. There are an estimated 182,000 tenements across Scotland, including around 73,000 in Glasgow. Those flats tend to be constructed of sandstone, and most were built pre-1919, which makes energy efficiency solutions much more complicated.

In April last year, the Niddrie Road project began. It is a pilot project to retrofit a block of eight tenements in Glasgow. John Gilbert Architects was commissioned by Southside Housing Association to undertake a full retrofit of the flats,

which are empty. It is a massive job, including the renovation of the internal finishes and fittings as well as the upgrading of external elements such as the roof and stonework. The project aims to assess the replicability of the lessons learned for Glasgow's wider pre-1919 tenement stock. However, the construction cost per flat is an incredible £88,000. When we can see those huge costs, we need to look at what would in fact be possible.

There is a huge number of issues to be addressed, including the huge skills shortage, which will be a problem for retrofitting our homes. I ask the Scottish Government to start engaging seriously with ordinary householders about how we will achieve those targets and to consider the reality that people will need extensive financial help.

Crucially, however, they will need not only financial help but help in relation to the type of heating systems that they can trust: the alternatives that have been tried and tested and that will directly benefit them as well as making sure that we make the reduction in carbon emissions in our homes across Scotland. Ordinary people should not pay a high price for a change.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Please conclude.

Pauline McNeill: It must benefit the whole of society.

16:51

Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): I celebrate the ambitious targets for reaching net zero. However, as others have said, the scope, scale and complexity of the journey is significant—and nowhere more so than in relation to the national challenge of retrofitting homes. It is not an incremental challenge and it requires an exponential scale-up in an order of magnitude. We have heard references to the estimate of £33 billion in the debate already.

I propose to make a few points about both the supply side and the demand side. On the supply side, there are significant barriers for manufacturers. The high capital expenditure needed to create or repurpose existing manufacturing lines is an issue, particularly for the smaller companies that are currently operating in the market. For installers, there are early-stage product risks and capacity issues that will limit scale-up, as has been mentioned. It will also take time for those small companies to build brand awareness. Most operators are currently small and medium-sized enterprises, which can mean weak financial resilience and limited access to investment finance. For all involved in the supply side, there are complex skills considerations, with

the requirements still a bit of a moveable feast. Because there is uncertainty, there has to be hesitancy.

On the demand side, the Scottish Parliament information centre briefing notes:

“The high upfront costs and sometimes uncertain payback periods can put people off making changes to their homes.”

Like other speakers in the debate, I would put it more strongly than that. At this stage, in such uncertain economic times, there is no real demand from home owners, particularly if they do not see their property as their forever home. Some of the costs that are being quoted today, in the range £12,000 to £17,000, will act as a major barrier.

Another point is that new heating models are not yet seen as aspirational in the way that the likes of electric cars are. Despite the urgency of the situation, costs are a concern for suppliers and consumers alike, and on-going assessment for manufacturers, installers, home owners, renters and landlords will be required as initiatives come on stream.

There are other challenges. The Scottish National Investment Bank, capitalised with £2 billion over 10 years, has a key role in addressing market failure. However, at the Finance and Public Administration Committee last week, we heard that with the enabling United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020 leading to the Subsidy Control Bill, it is uncertain whether and how the SNIB can operate as intended and contribute to the addressing of market failure in retrofitting. Despite the bill passing the committee stage in the House of Commons, there is no definition of the rules as to how the SNIB—and, indeed, the British Business Bank—can meet their core purpose. Clarity is not expected from the UK Government for some time, and the required rules might ultimately be developed by an unelected official in the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, without scrutiny by the House of Commons, and bypassing this national Parliament and Scottish Government ministers. The uncertainty will have a cooling effect on councils and other bodies, which will be nervous about risking expensive and time-consuming legal challenges in trying to create programmes that address the issue that we are debating.

Some innovative financing, which would attach funding to the property rather than the individual, has been considered, but such an approach can lead to hesitancy on the part of future buyers and sellers, as we have seen in the context of solar panels.

On financing, the Westminster all-party parliamentary group on fair business banking, for

which I am an ambassador, made an interesting point in a report:

“The SME-dominated retrofit supply chain largely falls between the cracks of existing investment funds and approaches: too late-stage and insufficiently high-growth for venture capital; too early-stage and high-risk for institutional investors.”

The Presiding Officer: Please conclude, Ms Thomson.

Michelle Thomson: I will, Presiding Officer.

I celebrate Scotland’s ambition to take the required steps forward, but, as the debate proves, it will be a considerably complex process to get us to where we need to be.

16:56

Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con): I refer members to my entry in the register of members’ interests: I am a serving councillor in North Lanarkshire Council.

This afternoon, we have heard thought-provoking speeches about retrofitting and transforming the construction industry to help to achieve the net zero target. We have heard calls for the Scottish Government to invest, to be innovative and to say how the retrofitting programme will be achieved, so that targets are not missed and opportunities are not squandered.

We are up against the clock when it comes to climate change. Given that 40 per cent of emissions come from construction and the built environment, there is a need to make the industry cleaner and greener. It will be a significant challenge to reduce emissions across Scotland and the rest of the UK, but the need to do so presents an opportunity for the building sector to find new and innovative ways to retain and grow the workforce, improve the environment and improve the quality of the assets that are built.

It is, undoubtedly, easier to make homes in new-build housing estates more environmentally friendly, as people are working with a blank canvas. Reducing carbon emissions from existing buildings will be a critical part of achieving net zero. Places such as Glasgow will present a significant challenge, as we heard, but the Niddrie Road development is transforming flats in a tenement without damaging the iconic front-facing sandstone structure. As a person who appreciates architecture and the need to conserve an area’s history, I think that it is important that the work that is carried out does not change the original landscape.

We must ensure that the changes that we are talking about are made affordable for local people, as Miles Briggs said when he opened the debate for the Conservatives. If programmes go ahead

but the homes become unaffordable, the project will have failed. We heard such concerns from many members.

I agree with Liam Kerr that a one-size-fits-all approach to transforming our housing stock will not work and that we need to look at a mix of technologies for heating, given the need for affordability.

A key component of a successful retrofitting programme will be the upskilling of the workforce. According to the CITB report “Building Skills for Net Zero”, an estimated 22,500 people in Scotland will need to be trained or retrained in energy efficiency by 2028 if we are to meet climate change targets. The CITB said:

“That represents an increase of around 9% of the current size of the workforce, based on current technologies and ways of working.”

A recruitment drive will be essential. Reskilling and apprenticeships could offer people of all ages opportunities to learn skills for jobs in what should be a secure sector. The Government needs to start the recruitment drive now.

As a member of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee and a councillor in North Lanarkshire Council, I want to talk about councils’ key roles and responsibilities when it comes to improving housing stock and meeting the net zero target. I mentioned Glasgow, but every local authority will have to develop a strategy to make homes across all tenures, not just its housing stock, more energy efficient. Councils will need substantial backing and funding if they are to meet that challenge. I ask the SNP-Green Government please to take note that councils need funding now.

Councils will need to build new relationships with housing associations. That will be vital in ensuring a collegiate partnership approach to achieving the net zero target.

It will come as no surprise when I say that the Scottish Government must do more to meet its net zero targets and make the plans a success. That requires the Scottish Government to hit its emissions targets, which it has failed to do previously. It also requires it to invest in green housing, to be up front about where the money to decarbonise is coming from—as that information has not been forthcoming—and to fund local government properly. Another real-terms cut of £371 million this year will only hinder councils’ net zero targets, and they will struggle to deliver local strategies if the Government continues to treat them with contempt.

17:00

Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): Across the chamber this afternoon, and for many years, we have heard about the critical role that tackling our carbon footprint will play in meeting the climate crisis head on. The constituency that I live in and represent, Glasgow Kelvin, is the Scottish constituency with the highest proportion of flats—96 per cent of the accommodation in Kelvin consists of flatted dwellings, and 30 per cent of Glasgow’s pre-1919 tenemental housing, with its associated challenges, is in Kelvin.

I put on record my admiration for the housing association movement, which, in the past, has been in the vanguard of the work towards low and zero-carbon homes, particularly through energy efficiency measures and higher building specifications in its regeneration and new builds. It has not gone unnoticed by me that, in the affordable housing supply programme, more than half of the 2020-21 approvals for greener standards were for housing associations. In the past, housing associations were accused of gold plating their developments, as if that was a bad thing. Their foresight has paid dividends, and many in the private sector now need to catch up with that.

I recently wrote to every social housing provider in my constituency to better understand the challenges that they face in decarbonising homes. The survey identified decarbonising heating systems, funding models for retrofits and skills shortages as the key issues, all of which are interrelated. Scottish Government funding is welcome, but social housing providers require new models of private investment in net zero and low-carbon infrastructure. On the skills gap, the Construction Industry Training Board believes that a revolution in our construction sector is needed to meet the challenge. I intend to do all that I can to assist in transforming Scotland into a centre of excellence for greener jobs and careers.

It is not only in our housing stock that those changes are necessary; it is in all buildings. Only yesterday, I met the chief executive of Visibility Scotland to discuss its plans for its headquarters, based in the Woodside area of Kelvin. The charity has a period property of substantial size that is in need of significant improvement, and it sees retrofitting as an exciting opportunity to safeguard its home for future generations while making its workplace and service provision as energy efficient as possible. I look forward to supporting Visibility Scotland in its efforts to decarbonise.

I recently wrote to the Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants’ Rights regarding low-carbon initiatives and tenemental property. The transformation of tenemental properties to be lower-carbon buildings is fraught

with obstacles. The objection of one owner can act as an effective veto against the plans of the majority to take climate action. Much of the legislation that can be used by a majority to force minority interests to act in tenemental property issues is related to maintenance and insurance, so it fails to address transformative common works such as electric charging points and communal renewable heat and power systems. That relates to the owners of tenemental properties, but it indirectly impacts the quality of low-carbon housing for tenants. I understand that that may require primary legislation—for example, through changes to the Tenements (Scotland) Act 2004 and regulations. I look forward to the minister indicating whether legislative, regulatory or policy changes are in the offing to address those issues, as well as whether the new deal for tenants will include measures to require landlords to make their properties as energy efficient as possible.

I am mindful of the time, so I will jump to the end of my speech. Highlighting our successes on this journey to net zero not only should be welcomed but should be used to inspire greater change at a faster pace.

17:05

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): I thank the committee for securing the debate. Our homes are central to the zero-carbon vision of the future, but they also tell us stories about our past.

A number of years ago, when we started retrofitting our family home, we first discovered the hearth for the Victorian coal range. Then, the more that we progressed with uncovering the layers of the building, the more we could see its history and how the changing needs for more living space, for better sanitation and for electrification had shaped the way in which the house had been retrofitted many times over many decades, first by councils and latterly by private owners. The drive for decarbonisation is really just the latest form of modernisation, although it will probably be the most transformational since the arrival of electricity in our homes.

The aim of decarbonising Scotland’s 2.5 million homes when only 11 per cent of them currently have renewable or low-emission heating systems in place points to the scale of the challenge. Meanwhile, soaring electricity and gas prices, reflecting Westminster’s energy and taxation policies, are fuelling a cost-of-living crisis, with more than 30 per cent of households estimated to be in fuel poverty. We need to ensure that the delivery of energy-efficient housing prioritises fuel-poor homes, especially in our rural and island communities, in a way that leaves no one behind.

Programmes of Government grants and loans, energy supplier and landlord obligations, fuel pricing and regulation and area-based schemes will be critical to the delivery of the strategy. Local and community action also has a crucial role to play, and the local heat and energy efficiency strategy pilots have shown just how important the role of councils and communities will be in driving the strategy forward.

The development of the national public energy agency and the national infrastructure company, in the coming years, will be a groundbreaking step towards ensuring that councils are well equipped to take, and are leading on, the action that is required to decarbonise our homes. Local stakeholders must also be part of all stages of the design and delivery of area-based schemes and strategies, and councils must be allocated sufficient funding to deliver, too.

As we have heard today, there are real intricacies involved in delivering retrofitting plans on the ground, especially around the need to ensure that local installers and tradespeople are geared up to respond. The CITB has estimated that we need to train roughly 10 per cent of the current size of our workforce in energy efficiency by 2028 in order to deliver the vision for decarbonisation, and there is an immediate need to strengthen the skills of the existing workforce to fill labour gaps and to deliver at the pace and scale that are required.

The minister spoke earlier about certainty. I say to Miles Briggs that certainty is important for business because it drives investment, establishes the long-term trajectory and creates the market that, I think, will create jobs.

Of course, there are complexities around tenure, rurality and housing type, as we have heard. From examples of models of collective purchase and of heat as a service, we can learn how to simplify and accelerate the pace of retrofitting.

I am glad that the Scottish Government has signed a memorandum of understanding with the Danish Government, because there is much to learn from the international experience, but there is also much to learn from our communities. I am a big fan of the work that the HEAT Project does in Blairgowrie, working with individual householders on their retrofitting options and how they can get the grants and loans to deliver that in a cost-effective way.

The commitment to retrofit 1 million homes by 2030 is ambitious and complicated, but that should not stand in the way of action. It is our responsibility to deliver that vision in response to the climate emergency, to tackle increasing rates of fuel poverty and to improve our health and

wellbeing. That is our commitment to people and planet.

The Presiding Officer: Alex Rowley is the last speaker in the open debate.

17:09

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): This relatively short debate is on what is, for so many, a major issue. The level of fuel poverty in the country is unacceptable and the level of the Government's ambition to tackle it is equally unacceptable.

The debate is also topical. Costs are increasing and the UK price cap on energy bills, which prevents companies from immediately passing rising costs on to their customers, is due to change on 1 April. The industry regulator, the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets, is set to raise the cap dramatically. Currently, more than 15 million households across the UK are protected by the cap, so there is a very real cost-of-energy crisis heading our way.

Speakers have highlighted many concerns about the Government's approach, not least the lack of detail and the uncertainty about costs and support for people and households, as well as concern about costs being passed to public authorities and social providers of housing. I also find it concerning that there is talk of using technologies that have not yet been invented—that sounds a bit like wishful thinking.

The prospect is that we will have to have this debate again and again in the future, because we continue to build in the first instance properties that will need retrofitting in 10, 15, or 20 years' time. Obviously, this does not apply to existing housing stock, so the need for retrofitting is crucial. Why continue to fuel the problem by continuing to build properties that will need work done on them in the future to meet our energy or carbon emission targets?

Members may be aware that I am proposing a member's bill on introducing new minimum building standards for all new builds in Scotland. Part of the purpose of the bill is to end the need for future retrofitting of properties by building them to the absolute best energy efficiency standards right now. When we see energy prices skyrocketing, we can see why introducing such measures becomes so important. After all, the cheapest energy is always the energy that we do not use in the first place.

I know that the SNP-Green Government has said that it will not support the recommendation from Scotland's Climate Assembly, but I have to ask the Government whether it really thinks that it makes sense to continue to build homes that we

know will need retrofitting at some point down the line.

Patrick Harvie: Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Rowley: I have not got time, sorry.

We could take the necessary action right now and have Scotland leading the way in the future of housing across the world. The heat in buildings strategy had a £33 billion price tag, but only guaranteed £1.8 billion of funding. Scottish households are facing the very real possibility that the cost of improvements will fall on them. That is causing real concern, particularly in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis.

SFHA modelling suggests that it will cost social landlords around £2 billion—£7,000 per property—to deliver a relatively modest impact on fuel poverty, with only 41 per cent of properties achieving the targeted EPC B rating. That is why part of the Government strategy must surely be to ensure that all new builds in Scotland are built to the gold standard. Doing so now would be so much cheaper than retrofitting those properties in the years ahead. We must be more ambitious and very clear about how we intend to deliver on such a crucial issue.

The Presiding Officer: Katy Clark will make the first of the closing speeches for up to five minutes.

17:13

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): I am pleased to close the debate on behalf of Scottish Labour and to welcome the committee's work on an important issue.

The convener clearly highlighted the scale of the challenges that we have before us. One issue that she focused on is the important role of local government, particularly where councils that have their own housing stock. For example, North Ayrshire Council has installed solar panels on 500 council homes, with tenants keeping the energy savings. It has also built two sustainable demonstrator homes at Dickson Drive, Irvine, which have tested out the various technologies and, in particular, their financial benefits.

As has been highlighted in the debate, one of the big issues is where the money will come from. The backdrop is, of course, a decade of cuts in council spending. To do the work that is necessary on the required scale, we need a lot more detail from the Scottish Government about where the money will come from, so that the burden of investment does not fall on tenants' rents and on ordinary working people.

As has been said, the cost of house building is one of the issues that need to be addressed, as

does the cost to householders of retrofitting. The trend is that more people are living in older homes, so the only way to meet our climate targets is to retrofit the existing housing stock and, indeed, other buildings. The condition of much of Scotland's existing housing stock means that, in reality, many people are locked into fuel poverty. We know that poor housing conditions are associated with many illnesses and health conditions and that domestic housing stock is, of course, a significant source of carbon emissions. We need to revolutionise both the way in which we build houses—Alex Rowley referred to that—and what we do with our existing homes.

The STUC has estimated that the retrofitting of homes could create between 32,000 and 98,000 jobs in Scotland and that the retrofitting of other public and commercial buildings could create between 8,500 and 10,000 jobs. As well as addressing the climate issues that have been considered in the debate, such actions could also have massive social consequences.

I welcome the debate and the highlighting by many members across the political spectrum of the huge challenges that need to be addressed. I look forward to the minister's response and to the continuing debate to ensure that we meet the challenges that have been set out in the debate and that we do what needs to be done to retrofit and ensure that we meet our climate standards.

17:17

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am grateful for the opportunity to close the debate on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives and I pay tribute to the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee for bringing it to the chamber.

The importance and complexity of the issue have been reflected in the debate. There have been some very thoughtful contributions, but we are still only scratching the surface of the issue. The truth is that it is not possible to do full justice to the topic in one debate and I have no doubt that we will return to it on a number of occasions during this parliamentary session. Nevertheless, one thing is clear: the retrofitting of Scotland's 2.5 million homes will be an essential step on the journey to net zero by 2045. As we know, 13 per cent of Scotland's total greenhouse gas emissions and 30 per cent of Scotland's energy consumption are accounted for by Scotland's households and, as we saw in the climate change plan update, emissions for homes and non-domestic buildings in Scotland must fall by 68 per cent by 2030 to meet the target.

The heat in buildings strategy provides much-needed clarity on where the targets can be

achieved, but more details and information are required in other areas. For example, a workforce in excess of 16,000 will be required to support retrofitting by 2030. Although a workforce assessment project is due to be published this year, we know that training a workforce of that size will be a significant challenge. Years of underinvestment in many areas in which there are skills shortages have already resulted in serious problems. That was debated in the chamber only last week.

We know that the worldwide labour market continues to undergo unprecedented changes. There is a shortage of skills in many areas. We also know that skills shortages will inevitably lead to certain parts of the country—rural and island communities, for example—having much more to deal with in the process.

The Scottish Federation of Housing Associations has warned that training will be required to ensure that retrofitting will take place and that accreditation has been available in Scotland only since October, which means that many companies are already well behind. Concerns have also been raised about the requirement for staff to reach Scottish vocational qualification level 6. Staff and companies will need to participate, and many rural companies have already decided not to go for the retrofitting market but have instead returned to fitting standard renovations.

The success of the heat in buildings strategy hinges on the ability of individuals to have their problems solved, but further clarity is still required. Home owners accept retrofitting, but it is not cost neutral. Regardless of the issues, there is an expectation that £33 billion in cost will need to be covered, but the Government has committed only £1.8 billion so far, so there is a massive gap.

Many members made strong speeches and I will reflect on them.

The LGHP Committee convener talked about the planning process and identified that, in many places, it might be an area of conflict. She was right to identify that planning could be a problem for the retrofit process.

My colleague Miles Briggs spoke about challenges and ambitions. There is nothing wrong with our ambition, but the challenge is in trying to meet it and to ensure that tenants and householders can achieve it. Energy bills are increasing and fuel poverty is already with us. That needs to be addressed.

Mark Griffin spoke about the cost of hitting the targets. It is important that there is money up front because if we do not have that, the targets will never be achieved. He also talked about how low-income households are at risk of being unable to

afford to address the challenges. District heating systems have had a mixed response.

Liam McArthur talked about funding—£12,000 per household on average—and also said that in, rural and island communities, the cost could be much higher. We have to identify the capacity needed to deliver and ensure that we have it.

Liam Kerr spoke about off-grid homes. Fuel poverty exists now. Electricity and heat pumps might not be the best way forward. Off-grid homes are a major concern and must be considered to ensure the sustainability of forward plans.

I thank all the organisations and individuals that gave us briefings on the topic. Retrofitting Scotland's homes will be a key element of reducing Scotland's carbon emissions. It will require a joint effort between local and central Government, so there will have to be a meeting of minds to ensure that local and central Government come up with the goods. Home owners and landlords will require it. As we heard, there are still a number of issues to overcome to achieve that.

Conservative members will continue to push the Government to show the momentum that is required to ensure that the issues are addressed. We do not want to miss the opportunities or the targets, but it is misleading to say that we can achieve everything in the timescales that we have because that is not the case. The money needs to be available and we need to ensure that we do not leave people behind. Communities and constituents deserve the support and, if we are to achieve the targets, we have to ensure that a mechanism is in place.

The Conservatives will continue to support measures, but will also ask questions, continue to ensure that they are answered and ensure that individuals and communities are given opportunities.

17:22

Patrick Harvie: I thank everyone who has taken part in the debate. There have been a number of areas of cross-party consensus. I hope that I misunderstood the last part of the previous speech, which at some points sounded like a call for slowing down—saying that we cannot deliver on the timescale to which we are committed. Of course, the timescale to which we are committed is designed to be consistent with the climate targets for which the entire Parliament has voted. I hope that the cross-party engagement that we have is about how we do that, not whether we do it and not whether we should slow down.

The committee should be commended for its work—not only its evidence session but the constructive correspondence that it has had with

me and other ministers—and for bringing the debate to the Parliament.

I will not have time to address every issue. That is partly because the topic is a cross-cutting matter, as several members mentioned. It deals with the remit of not only the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee but the NZET Committee. It also deals with social security and skills and includes health and equalities issues. The agenda covers an incredible breadth—not just my portfolio or the remit of a single committee—so I have no doubt that there will be many opportunities to continue to discuss the issues that I do not manage to cover in my closing speech.

I want to mention some of the issues that were raised by the main Opposition parties in opening the debate. Both Labour and the Conservatives emphasised some of the current issues around energy bills, fuel poverty and the cost of living—and they are absolutely right to raise those issues. If we were in a position in this Parliament of being able to debate tariffs, levies, VAT, the price cap or the idea of a windfall tax on fossil fuel companies to provide support for the transition, we would no doubt have a lively debate, and all parties would bring their ideas to the table. Those issues are of course decided at UK level—even the issue of rebalancing gas and electricity prices, which will be important and is a matter on which we pressed the UK Government. I hope that those members who do not agree that those powers should be exercised here will work with us to press the UK Government to take the action that is necessary.

Miles Briggs and Mark Griffin raised some issues, albeit from slightly different perspectives, around the experiences that people have had in the past of existing schemes that have replaced fossil fuel with zero emission heating or of energy efficiency measures. Miles Briggs mentioned social housing tenants who had been in touch with him to say that they had a bad experience. I am aware of some cases like that; I have also visited many people who say the opposite, and who have saved more than half of their heating bills and have reliable, controllable heat as a result of air-source heat pump-fuelled heating networks.

The point is that, whatever happens in what is a multidecade programme of work, we should avoid treating either the best or the worst individual experiences as a stereotype. Even fossil fuel heating systems and other forms of home improvement have involved good and bad practice. Mark Griffin talked about “cowboys” being active in the field. I should say—because nobody else has teased him yet—that it is traditional for members to say, “Thank you to the minister for providing advance sight advice of the statement,” and I return the compliment.

On the range of technologies that Mark Griffin mentioned, our emphasis is on what are known as low and no-regret measures. As I said in my opening speech, I recognise that many of those are less familiar in Scotland, but they are tried and tested technologies that have been used successfully in many other countries. The critical thing for replicating those other countries’ experience of using technologies well in Scotland is building the skills that are needed to design, deliver and maintain new systems to the highest standard, with emphasis on supporting those who are most in need. We agree on that—it was another theme in the speeches of Mark Griffin and others. Indeed, the warmer homes Scotland scheme has helped tens of thousands of households who are most in need, saving an average of £300 per annum per household. The successor scheme must continue to do that, as well as enabling the ambitious reduction roles that Scotland has set and helping those who are in hard-to-treat properties.

Liam McArthur: Will the minister take an intervention?

Patrick Harvie: That might be what Liam McArthur wants to raise.

Liam McArthur: I talked in my speech about the scale of the ambition regarding the skills development that will be required to scale up the operations for installations. There will still be a requirement to service existing boilers and so on. How will that capacity conundrum be met by the Government?

Patrick Harvie: Indeed. Many of the arguments that I made in my opening speech about giving certainty to the industry and to the supply chain to invest in acquiring and sharing skills will be critical. That is why a clear, bold approach to regulation will be important.

On regulation, several members, from both an urban perspective and a rural perspective, have raised the issue of buildings with mixed ownership, mixed tenure and mixed use, including Kaukab Stewart, my constituency MSP. I live in one of those mixed-tenure, mixed-owner, mixed-use pre-1919 tenement blocks in Kaukab Stewart’s constituency, and we are very aware of their particular challenges.

Miles Briggs: Will the member take an intervention?

Patrick Harvie: I would like to expand the point that I was making if I can.

The Presiding Officer: The minister is in his last 30 seconds.

Patrick Harvie: We are considering how those buildings will be incorporated into our approach to regulations. There might need to be differences in

relation to compliance periods or the trigger points that will be used.

We are establishing a short-life working group to look at the options for the regulatory approach to tenement buildings—that is, tenements in the broadest sense—and we will follow-up the recommendations of the Scottish Parliamentary working group on tenement maintenance. Also, the Scottish Law Commission will be undertaking a law reform project with a view to producing a draft tenement maintenance bill.

Presiding Officer, I recognise that I am over time. I have not managed to touch on every issue that I would have wished to. I am sure that this will not be the last opportunity to debate what is, as I have said, an extremely long-term agenda in the years and decades ahead. Once again, I thank the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee for bringing the debate to the chamber.

The Presiding Officer: I call Elena Whitham to wind up the debate on behalf of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. Ms Whitham, you have up to eight minutes.

17:30

Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): Before I start, I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests: I am still a councillor in East Ayrshire.

I am very pleased to be closing this extremely important debate on behalf of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. As the committee convener said at the beginning of the debate, we are just beginning our work on the retrofitting of housing for net zero. Therefore, the debate has been immensely constructive in helping us to shape what our next steps should be on the issue.

The debate has affirmed the huge challenge that is ahead of us in meeting the Scottish Government's ambitions for the retrofitting of housing for net zero. It has also emphasised the importance of meeting that challenge, and the significant contribution that reducing emissions from housing will make in meeting our overall net zero target.

Although we recognise the enormity of the challenges ahead of us, it is reassuring to hear from all parties today that we share a collective commitment to overcoming them.

We need to think in radical and innovative ways to meet the challenges. It has been great to hear today about the creative and innovative approaches that can be considered. As part of that, we need to think about delivering on retrofitting in a way that improves people's lives, that enables them to live in homes that are

conducive to better health and that does not push them into fuel poverty or exponentially increase rents.

The policy needs to be delivered in a manner that is consistent with a just transition. As a committee, and as a Parliament, we have a very important role to hold the Scottish Government to account and ensure that we are doing all that we can to deliver on the ambitions for retrofitting.

I turn to members' contributions. This is the first time that I have delivered a closing speech on behalf of a committee, so bear with me, folks. The minister was right to point out in his opening speech that retrofitting housing is an immense challenge, and that it needs to be done at scale and at pace. He was also right to mention that public awareness has been raised since COP26. However, we need to raise awareness further—we must do so in the immediate future.

The committee looks forward to scrutinising the legislation that the minister mentioned. There is a real need for careful scrutiny to ensure that the public understands why change is needed, how they can make changes and how they can fund them. It is vital that the green heat finance task force, which the minister mentioned, helps to drive innovation and unlock private investment to complement the public moneys that will be available.

Miles Briggs suggested that wall and floor insulation could be an early driver for change. That would give those in rural properties, which are difficult to retrofit, somewhere to start and something to focus on, given that there are huge numbers of people in poverty in rural settings.

Mark Griffin was also right to raise the issue of fuel poverty and how it can be exacerbated by inefficient homes. The reality for many home owners is that the costs of retrofitting will be prohibitive. Therefore, the no-detriment principle is key. I share his concerns regarding cowboy builders—we saw the effects of that in previous energy efficiency schemes.

Liam McArthur underlined the issue of rural and island fuel poverty and the vastly higher costs of retrofitting in those areas. We are potentially talking about more than £17,000 for each property. We need to understand how people will be able to fund that.

Paul McLennan outlined that to reduce fuel poverty in the long term, decarbonising homes with low carbon, fuel-efficient measures will be key. He also underlined the importance of the no-detriment principle and the need for all Governments to work collaboratively on the issue.

Liam Kerr spoke about the 70,000 off-grid homes, which is a huge issue. We have had to

deal with, and supply fuel pumps to, some of those in my council area. He mentioned the costs and difficulties in retrofitting such properties and spoke about how there is no one-size-fits-all approach to tackling the issue.

Fergus Ewing passionately raised the issue of his constituent who lives in a listed building—I live in one, too—and the associated issues, which the committee has already started to explore, with tensions between planning consent and retrofitting. He also raised the important issue of missing-share schemes. There are quite a lot of those schemes, including in my authority of East Ayrshire, and they will be important going forward.

Pauline McNeill reinforced the point that financial supports are required and raised concerns regarding a lack of consumer confidence in emerging and changing technologies. That is important, because consumers have to have confidence to go ahead with such big financial transactions.

Michelle Thomson pointed out, rightly, that it is an exponential challenge with a £33 billion price tag. She highlighted the need to upskill and support our small and medium-sized enterprises in order that they can help us to meet the challenge and underlined the skills shortage that we have to address, which many members talked about.

Meghan Gallacher discussed the desire to preserve our built heritage, which is important for so many of us, and how that can compete with retrofitting. Again, we need to find solutions for that.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): I am sure that Elena Whitham is aware of Built Environment Forum Scotland's tenement maintenance working group and its concerns about the pace at which legislation is being brought through, particularly with the capacity issues for the Scottish Law Commission. Looking at potential legislation is really problematic. Could we look at how we can accelerate that effort to get the legislation through as quickly as possible?

Elena Whitham: I agree with Paul Sweeney. The committee will have to be mindful of that and include it in our scrutiny work.

I have forgotten where I was. I knew that that was going to happen to me on my first time.

Kaukab Stewart highlighted that 96 per cent of her constituency is in tenemental period properties and the huge challenge that arises from that, as highlighted by her survey.

Mark Ruskell eloquently pointed out how his period property has been retrofitted numerous times over the years, as technology has advanced, but he recognised that the scale of retrofitting is a mountain in front of us.

The final contribution in the open debate, from Alex Rowley, reinforced the very real issue of the looming fuel cost crisis and the never-ending cycle of retrofitting, which was interesting coming straight after Mark Ruskell's contribution. The issue of building to a gold standard is something that the committee will have to focus on, but we have to recognise that, because technology emerges all the time, we will see continual retrofitting regardless of getting to a gold standard at the moment. That was a very interesting contribution.

I thank Parliament for the opportunity to have the debate. I hope that by the time we come back to consider the issue in the chamber again we will do so reflecting on real progress. I hope that we will see local and national strategies that offer clear pathways to the delivery of the retrofitting agenda; that funding is in place through a combination of sources to support that delivery; that people know how to access that funding; that the public understands what is required of them and why it is necessary; that we are delivering the retrofitting agenda in a way that is consistent with a just transition; and that there is a skilled workforce across Scotland that is able to deliver on the agenda, irrespective of where someone lives.

Finally, I hope that the conversations with the UK Government on the issue of VAT on retrofit work and electricity tariffs will have progressed, thereby removing the obstacles in the way of our ambitions for retrofitting.

Judicial Review and Courts Bill

17:38

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is consideration of a legislative consent motion. I call Keith Brown to move motion S6M-02801, on the Judicial Review and Courts Bill, United Kingdom legislation.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the relevant provisions of the Judicial Review and Courts Bill, introduced in the House of Commons on 21 July 2021, relating to the transfer and enforcement of orders imposed through online justice procedures in England and Wales to Scotland, so far as these matters fall within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament, should be considered by the UK Parliament.—[*Keith Brown*]

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

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

17:39

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motion S6M-02850, on committee membership.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that Ruth Maguire be appointed to replace Bill Kidd as a member of the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee.—[*George Adam*]

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

Decision Time

17:39

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

The first question is, that motion S6M-02801, in the name of Keith Brown, on the Judicial Review and Courts Bill, United Kingdom legislation, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the relevant provisions of the Judicial Review and Courts Bill, introduced in the House of Commons on 21 July 2021, relating to the transfer and enforcement of orders imposed through online justice procedures in England and Wales to Scotland, so far as these matters fall within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament, should be considered by the UK Parliament.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-02850, in the name of George Adam, on committee membership, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that Ruth Maguire be appointed to replace Bill Kidd as a member of the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee.

Scottish History in Schools

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-02164, in the name of Stuart McMillan, on Scottish history in schools. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes what it sees as the importance of Scotland's history being taught in schools; believes that learning about local history helps pupils engage with their area's heritage and could empower them to explore their family's history; notes the view that this work should include aspects of Scotland's past that its people are not proud of, particularly in relation to its role in the transatlantic slave trade; believes that pupils in the Greenock and Inverclyde constituency could learn about the Radical War of 1820, which saw the final battle take place in Greenock and left nine people killed and many wounded, aged eight to 65; appreciates the role of libraries and museums in assisting schools and families in exploring their history; welcomes reports that many teachers already carry out this work, aiming to ensure that lessons suit their pupils; acknowledges that learning about the history of other nations is important, but notes the view that this should be an aside to learning about Scotland's own history; commends the efforts of community groups, such as the 1820 Society and the Society of William Wallace, for helping keep stories about the nation's history alive, and notes calls encouraging MSPs to engage with community groups in their efforts to learn about and promote local history in their constituencies and regions.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Stuart McMillan, who is joining us online, to open the debate.

Ah, I see that he is in the chamber—excellent. You have around seven minutes, Mr McMillan.

17:42

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): Thank you, Presiding Officer.

I thank those members from all sides of the chamber who signed the motion to allow the debate to take place. I was asked to lodge a motion for debate by a constituent of mine, Gordon Bryce, from the 1820 Society. Late last night, I heard that Gordon had sadly passed away this week. I pay tribute to him, not only for his enthusiasm and passion for life but for his hard work in helping to educate more people about the 1820 insurrection. I know that he was certainly looking forward to the debate, and I dedicate my contribution to him.

Maya Angelou wrote:

"History, despite its wrenching pain
Cannot be unlived, but if faced
With courage, need not be lived again."

Anyone who argues for a sanitised version of the truth to suit their agenda is wrong. I do not

want our classrooms to be consumed by history lessons that tell only part of the story simply because the state says so. Historically, that is what has taken place, which is, in my opinion, one of the reasons why many of us will often have heard comments from others about their lack of appreciation or understanding of the history of Scotland, for good or bad.

I have always believed that having knowledge of the past is crucial for the present and for the future. Learning about world war two and the atrocities of the Nazi regime ensured my international outlook on life. Spending time with young Germans as part of a student exchange programme while I was a teenager, and studying in Dortmund while I was at university, gave me the opportunity to discuss and learn more about the present at that time, and the hopes and aspirations for the future, always with the backdrop of the sad recent past shaping the future. I admire the generations of German people who have faced up to and owned their past, and dedicated themselves to ensuring that history does not repeat itself.

Where does that leave Scotland? Recently, my youngest had a homework project entitled “Sir William Wallace—hero or traitor?” My first reaction was, of course, to say that he was a hero. Members can go to the Society of William Wallace website to learn more about him and the actions to commemorate him. However, for educational purposes, the proposed question was right. Why should we automatically consider the oft-written position on history as the only truth? After some further research, my daughter completed the project and came up with her own answer. I am pleased to say that she agreed with me on this occasion, which, I assure members, is not often the case.

My motion mentions the radical war of 1820. I first became aware of that part of our history when I was asked to pipe at a memorial in Paisley in 2004. There always seemed to be events about it in Paisley, Strathaven, Glasgow and elsewhere, but I had no knowledge of Inverclyde’s sad involvement in that part of our history. In speaking to people from Inverclyde about the radical war, I realised that it was a part of our history that was a very well-kept secret, not only in my area but in other parts of Scotland.

At the bottom of Bank Street in Greenock, there is now situated a monument to those citizens who died in the massacre in Cathcart Street on 8 April 1820. It lists the names of John McWhinnie, aged 65; Adam Glephane; aged 48; John Boyce; aged 33; Archibald Drummond; aged 20; James Kerr; aged 17; Archibald McKinnon, aged 17; William Lindsay; aged 15; and James McGilp, aged 8. Those individuals were shot indiscriminately by the

Port Glasgow militia volunteers, who were accompanying five Paisley weaver prisoners to the Greenock jail.

The radical war was never taught in our school, but I was certainly made aware of the events of Peterloo and Tolpuddle. Over many years, the 1820 Society has helped to keep that part of our history alive and to bring it to many more people. However, it should surely be part of our Scottish history that is taught in our schools to future generations. As George Orwell stated,

“The most effective way to destroy people is to deny and obliterate their own understanding of their history.”

Our history cannot be rewritten, but it should be told in all its fullness.

A further part of the motion centres on Scotland’s part in the transatlantic slave trade. The Parliament has agreed to examine how we acknowledge and talk about Scotland’s role in that trade and in the empire. Man’s subjugation of man is not glorious or positive, no matter how much wealth was generated. Across the country, there are examples of how that vile trade enriched the few.

My constituency was a global leader in the sugar industry, as well as having some involvement in tobacco and cotton. The sugar warehouses at James Watt dock were built long after the abolition of slavery, but it is clear that the profits that were made over many years in the sugar industry will have played a part in constructing that iconic building.

After members in the chamber voted to ensure that Scotland tells its story, I established a working group to consider the location of a national museum, as I believe that such a facility should be located in Greenock at the sugar warehouses. There are many reasons why that location is ideal, and I have not yet heard a sound reason why it should be established elsewhere or even become a network of smaller facilities.

If we, as a nation, genuinely want to tell our story in full, we must aim for a facility akin to the stand-alone International Slavery Museum in Liverpool. In this themed year of Scotland’s stories, situating such a museum in Greenock would be fitting. Having that type of facility to visit, and as an essential visit for all school pupils, would help current and future generations to fully understand and appreciate our past.

Another reason why I am so invested in that project is the letter that I received from a young constituent in 2020, in which they outlined their experience of the Scottish education system as a black pupil. I was given permission to share the letter with the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills at the time, and I have had dialogue with the

student since. I know that, across Scotland, there will be other young people of colour who have had a different school experience from white pupils, and—to be frank—that is rather sad. That is why I support a review of racial equality in our schools, so that teachers can be better equipped to talk about Scotland's history in its fullness. I believe that a national human rights museum would be instrumental in helping to educate people of all ages about Scotland's role in the slave trade and in the empire.

As the former slave and abolitionist Frederick Douglass stated,

"It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men."

I quote Douglass for a specific reason. He toured Britain and Ireland, and he spoke in Greenock on 10 April 1846 and on 23 January 1860. Why, then, is Scotland not ensuring that that part of our history is fully narrated to future generations?

Apart from a small land border, Scotland is surrounded by water. Where is the greater historical education about how Scotland's maritime past, including our involvement in assisting the Confederacy in the American civil war, generated wealth and inequality? That is why the Clyde Atlantic Trust and its campaign to help to educate both current and future generations about the Clyde's Atlantic history is a national story that needs to be told. The trust is also campaigning to create a museum, using immersive technology, to help to tell that story. Educationally, that would be fascinating, and hugely important in helping us to understand our trading past.

There are many more examples of our history that should be told in our curriculum, but I accept that we cannot tell them all. I do not consider the job of our educators to be easy in that regard, which is why I support the provision of further resources to support teachers in their task.

I end my speech with one further quote, which I believe is fitting for the debate. Again, it comes from Frederick Douglass, who said:

"The life of a nation is secure only while the nation is honest, truthful, and virtuous."

We have an opportunity to be honest, truthful and virtuous, and to help future generations. We owe it to them in memory of those who have gone before us.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: As I had not spotted that you were in the chamber, Mr McMillan, I thought that I would compensate you with a little extra time. However, the debate is heavily subscribed, so I would be grateful if members would try to stick—roughly—to the time limit for their speeches. On that basis, I call

Kenneth Gibson. You have around four minutes, Mr Gibson.

17:51

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I congratulate my colleague Stuart McMillan on bringing the debate to the chamber.

The teaching of history should be exciting and inspirational. The great French philosopher and historian Voltaire said:

"We look to Scotland for all our ideas of civilisation."

In the 18th century, European thinkers challenged old ideas about almost every aspect of life, arguing that the way forward was to use reason when seeking answers. Scotland truly was the Athens of the north. Pupils could do worse than read Arthur Herman's book, "How the Scots Invented the Modern World: The True Story of How Western Europe's Poorest Nation Created Our World and Everything in It", which examines the Scottish enlightenment's profound impact on intellectual thought around the globe.

If we are to build the confidence of our young people, the incredible achievements of our forebears should be discussed. In Ayrshire alone, we have Alexander Fleming, Henry Faulds and William Murdoch, who discovered penicillin, discovered fingerprinting and invented gas lighting, respectively. Stuart McMillan's Greenock had steam-engine inventor James Watt. It is sad that, 15 years into an Scottish National Party Government, the enlightenment, and Scottish invention and discovery, is not at the core of Scottish history teaching. What other nation would omit such astonishing contributions to humanity? The cringe remains.

In primary school, I was lucky to be taught by Miss Moncrieffe, whose passion for Scottish history brought to us the decisive Pictish victory over the Northumbrians at Nechtansmere in 685, Athelstaneford, the maid of Norway and the wars of independence. Miss Moncrieffe also focused on the slave trade, in particular the role of the tobacco lords, whose wealth was based in Virginia and the Caribbean plantations, where many Scots were overseers or were indentured, while vast numbers of Africans toiled in chattel slavery.

Secondary school was completely different. The 1970s history curriculum was dire—no Scottish history was taught at all. Claudius's successful Roman invasion of England and the resistance of Caractacus were covered, but without mention of Calgacus and Mons Graupius, Hadrian's wall and the Antonine wall, or the subsequent collapse of Roman Britain. The centuries in which the Anglo-Saxons overran and transformed much of Britain were completely ignored, as was the

establishment of Dalriada, which eventually grew into the kingdom of Scots. Alfred of Wessex burning the cakes prior to fighting the Vikings was followed by a leap of centuries to the life of a medieval English peasant—they ate a lot of herring, barley and onions while growing walnut and mulberry trees, apparently. There was no mention of their place in the feudal system, or of the frequent famines, pestilence, violence or grinding poverty that beset their lives. Henry VIII's closure of the monasteries was covered, but with no word of Scotland's own reformation.

We then jumped to spend three years learning the social history of England from 1815 to 1914. We covered Peterloo, the Poor Law Amendment Act, Catholic emancipation, the Chartists, the Tolpuddle martyrs, life in the dark satanic mills of northern England and so on—it was labour history, but without the industrial revolution, New Lanark, the Highland clearances or the potato famines in both Scotland and Ireland, which fundamentally shaped the Scotland of today.

Of the union of the Crowns and the union of the Parliaments, the Scottish enlightenment, the rise of Britain's empire and Scotland's role in it, our incredible contributions to humanity and Scotland's myriad pioneers in medicine, engineering, the sciences and exploration, there was nothing. It could have been worse—at St Gerard's in Govan, pupils would spend an entire year studying the history of Salisbury town, much to their bewilderment.

The snapshots of Scottish history that are now taught at national 5 and higher are much better than before, but they remain limited. Teachers select one of five topics from the wars of independence, Mary Queen of Scots and the reformation, the treaty of union, migration and empire, and the great war. It is desperately unambitious given the years of learning that are available throughout a pupil's school life.

Presiding Officer, history should start at the beginning and be honest—warts and all. How did we get here? Out of Africa to the earliest settlers' arrival in the wake of the last ice age to the great migrations of the Celtic tribes, the Roman invasion, the Anglo-Saxons and the Vikings. It should cover St Columba's arrival in 563 to spread Christianity, Kenneth MacAlpin's victory over Pictland and the slow unification of Scotland to more or less our present mainland boundaries in the 10th and 11th centuries, adding the Clyde and Hebridean islands in 1266 and the northern isles in 1472.

Especially now, the cataclysmic impact of the black death, which killed up to half of Scotland's population in 1350, should be studied. The perspective, impact and importance of the reformation, the union of the Crowns, the union of

the Parliaments, the industrial revolution, risings, the clearances, empire and the lives of kings, queens and everyone else should also be covered. Scottish history is exciting, but only if we make it so.

17:56

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I thank Stuart McMillan for his excellent opening speech, which covered the ground well. I very much enjoyed the breathless tour de force that we just heard from Mr Gibson, who summed up thousands of years of Scottish history in four minutes—well done.

I have a real interest in Scottish history. I remember when I was very young reading a battered copy of Walter Scott's "Tales of a Grandfather", which, despite being two centuries old, summed up early Scottish history well. It is a subject that I have read, studied, written about and lectured in, and I still receive small sums in royalties from a book that I wrote some years ago, which is still available on Amazon. It is an excellent read and I commend it to members.

Stuart McMillan raises some interesting points. It is important that the history that we teach in schools is set in an international context. Scottish history should be set in the context of British history, which should be set in the context of European and world history. I absolutely agree with the two speeches that we have heard so far; we need to start with our history and understand who we are as a people. We do not have enough of that in Scottish schools and in that respect I agree with Mr Gibson.

Aspects of Scottish history are taught well. We hear a lot about the wars of independence and the Highland clearances, but whole swathes are totally ignored. Stuart McMillan talked about the radical war of 1820 and Kenneth Gibson talked about the enlightenment. My passion is for the 17th century and the great struggle between the royalists, the covenanters and Oliver Cromwell that was the start of the modern world. That was when we settled the big questions about how we would be governed, what the relationship would be between king, Parliament and people and how people would be free to worship their god as they saw fit.

All those were settled in the course of the 17th and early 18th centuries, as was the relationship between England and Scotland, but none of that is taught in Scottish schools—it is completely ignored as a topic, but it is vital. If we are to have well-rounded pupils and people coming out of school with a proper understanding of their country and where it came from, we need to get that right.

I will make two other points, because time is short. When history is taught in schools, we need

to make sure that it is accurate. I was appalled to see a report recently about materials being used in Scottish schools that say that Winston Churchill sent tanks into George Square. Churchill did not send tanks into George Square, Presiding Officer. That is a myth that has been disproved by all the historians, but somehow it has ended up in teaching material in a Scottish school, and that is simply not good enough.

The further point that I make has been raised by Neil McLennan, who is a former president of the Scottish Association of the Teachers of History and one of our most authoritative voices in the area. He has raised concerns about the impact of politics on the teaching of history, particularly the impact of nationalism. In his view, there is a danger that it makes Scottish history too parochial and presents a sanitised version of Scottish history. The example that he gave was one that Stuart McMillan referred to: the teaching of slavery and the Atlantic slave trade whereby materials identify Liverpool and Bristol as ports that were used for the slave trade but do not mention any Scottish ports such as Glasgow or Greenock. In Neil McLennan's view, that is very unfortunate.

In 2011, the Royal Society of Edinburgh called for a review of history teaching in schools to address some of those concerns and some of those that we have heard in tonight's debate. The Scottish Government of that time rejected that call. I think that it is now time for that issue to be revisited.

Already in this debate we have heard different perspectives and concerns about the way in which history is being taught. It is time for a full refresh of history qualifications and revision of the curriculum for excellence to make sure that our young people who are leaving school get a proper grounding in the history of their country, and to make sure that that history is accurate, fair, and balanced.

18:00

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): First, I thank my colleague Stuart McMillan for bringing the debate to the chamber. From the number of speakers who are lined up, it is clear how important it is for the subject to be debated.

I did not like history when I was at school, and pretty much everything I now know about Scottish history I have learned during the decades since I left school. I learned more about the battle of Hastings and Oliver Cromwell than I did about the battle of Bannockburn and the Highland clearances. I have tried to analyse why I found the subject boring, and I can only conclude that it was because I had no interest in learning a timeline of dates of battles—the battle of Hastings springs to mind—nor the succession of the royal family. To

be honest, I still have no interest in those things. I realise that my generation learned little or no Scottish history—the history of my own nation.

What I have learned since my school days, however, I find fascinating. Scotland has a rich, enlightened history that I could never find boring. These days, I lap up the fascinating histories of countries all over the world.

I am aware that history as it is taught throughout schools in Scotland now is more relevant, but no nation should allow the erasing of its history. It was erased in the curriculum, and I find that shocking.

Erasing women from our history was also common, and it is only now gradually beginning to get better. We did learn about a handful of our great Scottish inventors, such as Alexander Fleming and John Logie Baird, but I would love to have known about Elsie Inglis, Jane Haining, the Edinburgh seven, Victoria Drummond, and so many more women pioneers to whom Scotland is indebted.

I would also like to have known about the part that Scotland played in the slave trade, burning witches, the clan wars and the clearances. Those are just some of the historical events in which we hardly covered ourselves in glory, and they should have been taught.

Those stories were not told, and therein lies the problem. Young people deserve to see the full picture of their nation's historical past. As Stuart McMillan's motion acknowledges, it is just as important for children to know about the history of their local areas as it is for them to know about the history of Scotland the nation.

Huntershill house in Bishopbriggs in my constituency of Strathkelvin and Bearsden was the birthplace of Scotland's father of democracy, Thomas Muir. Sadly, the house has been sold off to a developer and left to rot, to the shame of our local council. Thomas Muir was a towering figure in Scottish history, yet I learned nothing of him at school. The local campaign group, Friends of Thomas Muir, does great work in my constituency in promoting his memory today. I believe that his legacy is now taught in schools in East Dunbartonshire, but too many people of my generation will be completely unaware of that incredible man.

I welcome any move that will educate our young people about Scotland's history, warts and all. Without knowing where we have been, we do not know where we are now, and how far we have come. I thank the many teachers, community groups, and museums throughout Scotland that recognise that and are dedicated to educating our youngsters on their history.

Finally, I thank Stuart McMillan again for securing this important debate.

18:03

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): First, I extend my thanks to Stuart McMillan for securing the debate and echo his condolences to his constituent. It is a great shame that he was not able to listen to the discussion here in the chamber.

I am reminded of what Cicero said about history, which is:

“We study history not to be clever in another time, but to be wise always.”

I find myself standing in some opposition to what I have heard today. I almost sought to intervene on Murdo Fraser to ask what we should drop from the curriculum if we are to fit it all in. Curriculum for excellence was drafted with thought when it came to history, or “the past” within social studies, as it is described in CFE.

I want to talk about the curriculum for excellence benchmarks and what teachers look for when they seek an assurance that a young person is sufficiently knowledgeable in an area to be able to move on. At the third level, which is the start of high school for most children, four of the 11 aspects that a teacher needs to see have to be about a specifically Scottish area of history, but at the fourth level it is only one out of 16.

I want to consider why that is the case. To do that, we need to turn to article 29 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, on the right to an education and what it means to be educated. Article 29 says that education should build young people’s respect for other people and the world around them. In particular, young people should learn respect for “human rights and ... freedoms”, “the child’s parents” and the

“cultural identity, language and values”

of countries, including their own. If young people take only a microscopic view of Scottish history, they will fail to understand why we are where we are today and they will fail to appreciate the global history that has informed the position that we are in today.

Kenneth Gibson: My focus is on Scottish history, which I absolutely accept—as I think that all members do—must be taught in the context of British, European and world history. It is about covering the Scottish aspect of that in greater depth, warts and all, and getting it right, as other members said.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can give you the time back, Mr Whitfield.

Martin Whitfield: I am grateful, Presiding Officer.

I am grateful for the intervention, because it concerns me that, whenever history is discussed, people talk about it from their own point of view, when the role of our teachers is to inspire our young people to consider history in their own right.

In primary school, children find out about their own history by tracing the ancestry of families and developing a wider understanding of what has happened in the context of their school and community. I had the privilege to teach in Prestonpans, where we taught the Jacobite uprising because of the battle of Prestonpans. That was important to the young people, not just because they lived there but because it gave them a wider understanding of history.

That brings me back to the point that I was going to make to Murdo Fraser. What are we going to miss out as we guide young people? Curriculum for excellence seeks to teach the skills that a young person needs if they are to be able to analyse a situation and bring their own opinion to it. How those skills should be taught should rightly rest with the teacher, with the pupils and what interests them, and with the school and community. For the young people of Prestonpans, it might be that the battle of Prestonpans is a way of learning about primary and secondary evidence and analysing why an event about which people have diametrically opposing views happened.

Time is tight, so I will conclude. There is concern about politicians influencing the history that is taught in schools. I urge us to take a step back: let us trust the teachers in Scotland and, more important, let us trust our young people to say what they want to learn, so that we can teach them the skills to be the great historians that they need to be if they are to understand where we are today.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Siobhian Brown, who joins us remotely.

18:08

Siobhian Brown (Ayr) (SNP): I thank Stuart McMillan for securing the debate.

I grew up in Australia. Although Australia has an interesting, albeit shorter, history, I have always been fascinated by the long and detailed tapestry that is the history of the country that I now call home, Scotland.

When my constituency, Ayr, is mentioned, people initially picture Robbie Burns, Scotland’s most famous son, and rightly so, but there is so much more to my constituency.

Before I talk about the importance of local history, I want to take members back to the classroom. When I talk to friends and family who went to school here, they often say how much they hated history as a subject—Rona Mackay alluded to her experience in that regard. However, history is much more than royalty, dates, places and acts of Parliament. It is people—ordinary people like you and me. It is our ancestors, our cultural identity, our sense of place and who we are.

Let us take a trip to Ayr, to talk about a subject that fascinates most children: witches and witch trials. You might think that you must instead transport yourself to Salem, but you should stay where you are. Did you know about the Ayr witch trials? While 20 women were tried and found guilty in the Boston town, women and children were being persecuted in Ayr—as 4,000 of them were across Scotland—because of religious intolerance and mass hysteria. Children who are learning those stories can read the names that are still present in Ayr town: Bell, Campbell, Cunningham, McCall, Sloan, Thomson, Wilson and Young.

That is how history can captivate. How much more interested will a child be when they see that they or their relatives have similar names, and realise that it could have been them if they had lived in those days? In order to capture the interest of the young, we must bring history home and make it local. After that, it is much easier for children to learn about national and world events

I move on to Prestwick, which was the first home of the open golf championship in 1860. It is Scotland's oldest baronial borough, which dates back more than 1,000 years. There are connections with King James VI and to Robert the Bruce, who is said to have drunk the water there—if you ask any school pupil in Prestwick, I am sure that they would be able to tell you.

When people picture Troon, they tend to picture its rich golfing history. However, they should take a trip to Crosbie church—which has been on that site since 1229, in one form or another—where they will find tales of Scottish kings and the assassination of James V's illegitimate son.

With advancements in technology, we can immerse ourselves in history from anywhere in the world, at the click of a button. We have wonderful Facebook pages such as "Remembering Auld Ayr", which was set up by Richard Devine and now has close to 24,000 followers worldwide. Richard and the team who run the page have a deep knowledge of, and passion for, Ayr local history. They also deliver local historical tours, telling stories that are personal to the town, and they have up to 60 people attending each tour. I would love to see our local schools connect with those groups to learn more about local history—the

types of things that are never found in school textbooks.

There are also dark times in local history. Indeed, my colleague included in his motion the importance of educating ourselves on

"Scotland's ... role in the transatlantic slave trade."

Our children should be encouraged to be proud of the good, and to reflect on and learn from the darker periods.

We cannot forget our own political history. In 1315, Robert the Bruce convened the first meeting of the Scottish Parliament in the church of St John the Baptist in Ayr. Let us teach our children more Scottish history, and teach them local history; take them to the places that are steeped in it; and, most importantly, tell them stories about their ancestors. We will all become history one day, so the stories and teachings must continue.

18:13

Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): I congratulate Stuart McMillan on bringing this important debate to the chamber.

There are many arguments for teaching more Scottish history in our schools—as we have heard, its potential to empower young people is chief among them. However, I come at the debate from a particular angle. At the outset, I should say that things are certainly getting better, and give teachers credit for that. However, until very recently, Scots have often learned so little about their own country's history that the situation could be—and has been—described as profoundly abnormal.

I remember a survey from a few years ago which found that only around half of Scots had, to take one example, ever heard of the declaration of Arbroath. That is not normal. It is not readily possible to imagine a Norway where no one had heard of the Eidsvoll constitution, or a France in which not a soul had heard of the Bastille. Kenneth Gibson's account of what was not taught in secondary school history, neither to his generation nor to mine, explains a lot.

Why is Scotland such an outlier? Until very recently, the teaching of Scottish history, Scottish literature or Scottish geography has relied almost entirely on the enthusiasm of individual teachers. There was, in the past, simply no official expectation that children and young people in Scotland would need learn anything very much about Scotland.

Perhaps some of the blame for that lies in the way that we have ceased to think of history—both the bits that we like and the bits that make us shudder at ourselves—as a story, yet there is no

shortage of stories of either kind in Scotland, from the ancient houses at Skara Brae to the art of the Picts, from the statutes of Iona to the battle of Largs, from James II of Scotland blowing himself up with his own cannon in Roxburgh to the growth of a school in every parish, or in most parishes, to the sorry and financially interlinked stories of the slave trade and the Highland clearances.

Ultimately, we should teach this stuff, not just because it might promote the development of any particular skill or create any particular economic benefit, but because it is interesting and it makes people think. The evidence from schools around Scotland is that young people find it interesting, too, and that it inspires them in all sorts of other areas of the curriculum. We should teach it because, without some of this information, young Scots will find it impossible to locate themselves in Scotland's story.

I must counter Mr Whitfield. None of that is a case for teaching less world history, so I hope that we will have no more complaints to that effect in the Parliament, condemning school trips to Bannockburn.

Let us get past the anxiety that some people seem to have that teaching young Scots about their country is a political act. It isn't. However, not teaching them about it—many of us were barely taught about it in secondary school—most certainly is a political act.

In 2011, I faced perhaps the most hostile crowd that I have ever faced in this place when I proposed—successfully—that young Scots doing higher English should have to learn about at least one Scottish writer. That was an idea that a number of members seemed to regard as a sign that the barbarians were not so much at the gates as melting the gates down and making them into weapons of mass destruction.

I believe—I certainly hope that this is the case—that we are getting beyond all the anxiety about teaching about Scotland in schools. It is entirely reasonable for any country to know its history, good and bad, and not to be afraid to do so.

I support the motion.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Despite the commendable efforts of all the speakers so far to stick to their time limits, I am conscious of the number of members who still want to contribute to the debate, so I am minded to accept a motion without notice, under rule 8.14.3, to extend the debate by up to 30 minutes. I ask Stuart McMillan to move such a motion.

Motion moved,

That, under Rule 8.14.3, the debate be extended by up to 30 minutes.—[*Stuart McMillan*]

Motion agreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Stephen Kerr.

18:17

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I presume that that does not mean that I can speak for up to 30 minutes; I am sure that you will correct me.

I have really enjoyed the debate, and I commend Stuart McMillan, not just for securing the debate but for giving a really fine speech to open it and for setting a balanced tone for the discussion.

I would like to talk about my love of history. I love history, and the reason for that is that inspirational teachers imbued me with a love of history. It is true that there are probably not enough classroom hours to cover the curriculum that was outlined by Kenny Gibson, but it is possible to inspire young people to leave a classroom with a desire to know more by doing their own research. I think that that was part of what Martin Whitfield was saying in his speech, which I also enjoyed greatly.

I have to say that my love of history is entirely amateur, unlike that of my colleague Murdo Fraser. He is a professional, because he receives royalties from his book, which is apparently available on Amazon. Do you want me to repeat that gratuitous advertisement, Mr Fraser?

As a number of members have pointed out, when we celebrate Scotland's history, we must be careful not to examine it solely through the lenses of nostalgia or ideology. That is particularly true when it comes to teaching history in schools. We must encourage pupils to have a broad and critical understanding of our history as they study history, and to ask the searching and difficult questions about our past. We must emphasise the importance of creating as accurate a picture as possible, based on bona fide research and historical evidence. Sadly, I fear that the way in which history is sometimes taught in our schools does not live up to that standard.

I want to return to the theme that my colleague Murdo Fraser mentioned earlier and to quote the same source—the senior lecturer Neil McLennan.

The Minister for Higher Education and Further Education, Youth Employment and Training (Jamie Hepburn): Can Stephen Kerr name a specific school about which he has such concerns?

Stephen Kerr: No. It would be wholly improper of me to entertain such a question in this debating chamber.

Nationalist nostalgia and ideology are increasingly seeping into the curriculum, which is creating a one-sided and inaccurate representation of our shared history. I mentioned that I will quote Neil McLennan, who is senior lecturer and director of leadership programmes at the University of Aberdeen. Murdo Fraser has already cited the example of the slave trade. Neil McLennan has said:

“if you read guidance from the SQA ... the curriculum gives examples of slave ports like Liverpool and Bristol, but the slave trade wasn’t solely centred on England”.

He asked for Glasgow to be inserted.

Kenneth Gibson: When I was in secondary school, we never got one hour of Scottish history, so the teaching was bound to be focused on Bristol, Liverpool and the slave trade. In fact, we did not get the slave trade in secondary school but, as I said in my speech, we got the tobacco lords and the slave trade when I was at primary school 50 years ago.

Stephen Kerr: With the greatest respect, I think that we are about the same vintage, so I will not say anything insulting. However, I am talking about the current curriculum, not the one that Kenneth Gibson and I probably went through.

Neil McLennan asked for Glasgow to be inserted, but that has not happened. In the newspaper article in *The Herald on Sunday*, McLennan is reported to have said:

“Is it because the system is so bureaucratic even minor reforms are too hard to do? That’s very worrying if so. Is it because of power balances? That those in coveted positions don’t fancy those changes? Or is it because of an underbelly of parochialism linked to nationalism where those changes are unpalatable?”

Stuart McMillan: I am quite sure that Mr Kerr heard my opening contribution. I could not have been any stronger about what we need to do in respect of the transatlantic slave trade. I read the article that Mr Kerr has read, but I am sure that he would acknowledge that there was no narrow nationalism or imperialism—none of that nonsense—in my contribution to this debate and how I set out the debate. It is about having education and history so that we can educate present and future generations in order that they know what Scotland was like in the past, warts and all.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can give Stephen Kerr most of that time back.

Stephen Kerr: Thank you very much, Presiding Officer.

This is not the first time that Stuart McMillan and I have had such an exchange in the chamber. I recognise and accept that what I am saying is not necessarily representative of the feelings of every

nationalist, let alone every member of the SNP in the chamber. However, there is a fear within the nationalist movement that presenting a more accurate representation of Scotland’s history will create a negative narrative. Some even go as far as to describe that as “talking Scotland down”. I am sorry, but I am sure that Stuart McMillan and I agree that that is plain nonsense.

Stuart McMillan: Will the member take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You should be very brief, please.

Stuart McMillan: I am not arguing for a more accurate version of history; I am simply arguing for an accurate version of history.

Stephen Kerr: I take that point entirely, and I am not ascribing those views to any particular member in the chamber tonight.

I am way over time, and I can tell that I will wear the Presiding Officer’s patience even thinner, so I will conclude.

We have a proud history, but not a perfect one. We should take pride from our many achievements as Scots, but we should also learn from our mistakes. That will not only present a more accurate picture of Scotland’s past; it will aid us in our aim to develop Scotland in the present for the better.

18:24

Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): I, too, congratulate Stuart McMillan on securing the debate.

It is extremely poignant to be discussing the teaching of Scottish history in our schools when we have just lost the foremost historian, Professor Ted Cowan, who was a popular and influential champion of Scots history. I met him in connection with some of the many times that he took to television to spread the word beyond the academic sphere. For many of us, Ted’s tracing of the origins of the American declaration of independence back to the declaration of Arbroath in 1320 was fascinating and inspiring. It is fitting that we pay tribute to him in this debate about the importance of understanding Scotland’s past in order to shape its present and future.

Prior to being elected to serve Argyll and Bute, I managed the Museum of Islay Life. I should declare an interest here, as I remain a trustee. Stuart McMillan’s motion emphasises the importance of local museums in revealing the continuity of shared values and culture that our communities enjoy and that make every community unique and special—as my colleague Siobhian Brown touched upon.

Let me open the doors of the Museum of Islay Life and reveal some of its treasures. They are treasures of Islay, but they also provide the wider links that Martin Whitfield discussed in his speech.

First, there is a 12,000-year-old flint tool made shortly after the last ice age by Mesolithic hunter-gatherers. They were Islay's first inhabitants and comprised just one of many waves of immigrants who have made Islay, and Scotland, what it is today.

Then we come to the illicit still. Today, we pay taxes on the whisky that we make on Islay, but the island's vastly successful whisky industry has its roots in an ancient skill that was imported from Ireland and honed over centuries by entrepreneurs and innovators—a continuity of culture that has a profound impact on Islay's economy. Today, we export whisky but, sadly, Islay once exported people. Poverty and clearance made sure of that. Emigrants flooded abroad and those islanders who remained had kinfolk in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and America.

We then come to a century-old, hand-sewn stars and stripes. Islay folk did not just serve in world war one; that conflict came to Islay's shores in 1918 with the wreck of two troopships and the loss of hundreds of young American soldiers and their British crews. The people of Islay behaved with great courage to rescue men from the sea. They gathered the bodies of the dead and buried them with respect. Four local women sat up all night sewing a stars and stripes to honour the dead before the first mass funeral. That flag, gifted to an American President, now belongs to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC—but, as it is so much part of the history of Islay, it has been displayed in the island's own museum since 2018.

That year, I worked with the fantastic primary and secondary schoolteachers and children there to bring that story alive. As Martin Whitfield has discussed, the curriculum for excellence, the evidence, the stories and the contradictions were all brought into those lessons. It was clear that we needed to show how their community was part of one of the great events of world history. Their island is not just a dot on the map, but a community with a unique and valuable take on the world, past and present. All communities are like that.

My constituency is blessed with many great local museums, including those at Lismore, Luing, Seil, Auchindrain and Kilmartin—there are just too many to mention, and they all have their unique stories to tell. As Stuart McMillan said, this is Scotland's year of story-telling, a fitting time to celebrate the stories that have come down to us from our past and that enrich and inform the lives that we lead today.

Ted Cowan was a storyteller. As a professor and teacher, he inspired generations of Scots historians. As a writer and charismatic broadcaster, he informed and enthralled a much wider audience. There is still much that Ted Cowan would have wanted to be done, and the motion addresses that.

Scottish history is certainly not all glorious and good, but it made us who we are, led us to where we are now and guides us towards where we are heading.

18:28

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I, too, thank Stuart McMillan for securing the debate, which has been fascinating, and I have enjoyed hearing the speeches from across the chamber. I extend my condolences to Gordon Bryce's friends and family; I am sure that he would have enjoyed tonight so much.

I thank Jenni Minto for evoking a wonderful holiday that I had in Islay last summer, when I was able to visit the Museum of Islay Life. I know that Ms Minto was instrumental in getting the museum set up and that she worked on it over the years, so I thank her for my enjoyment of her history in Islay.

History is so important in understanding the culture of our country. That includes telling history in its full, often challenging, truth, and from the perspective of all. It means acknowledging injustice to women, to children and to ethnic minorities and the impact on the conquered as well as on the conqueror.

Not for the first time in the chamber, I turn to my visit to the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Winnipeg in 2017. It was a profound experience. The museum is a national and international destination and centre of learning where people from all round the world can engage in discussion about, and commit to taking action against, hate and oppression.

I took two aspects from my visit to the museum. The first is educational engagement and the way in which the museum works with young people. That is demonstrated by one of the exhibits: a real court experience that young people can have when they take on the role of jury members, hear real evidence and reach conclusions. They then hear the true-life verdict and the arguments of the lawyers and judges involved. They examine the actual ruling and their understanding of it.

The second aspect, which is perhaps more important, is bearing honest witness to the past and what colonialism has meant for Canada. That included recognising the injustice towards First Nations people and the history of the damage of, in particular, forced adoption into a culture and

religion. We are still uncovering the truth of that, as shown by the recent demonstrations of anger. Indeed, some of the monuments that I visited in Winnipeg were recently vandalised by people as more of the truth of that history came out.

All nations are having to deal with and examine colonialism. I do not know how to square the circle at all. Ted Cowan would have views on that. Tom Devine spoke about the National Library of Scotland sanitising some of the colonial language as an

“anachronism by imposing the values, and in this case the terminology and language of the present, on the past of two centuries or more ago”.

Kenneth Gibson: The British empire is a fascinating part of our history but surely most of the people in Scotland and those who left Scotland at the time were themselves suffering from desperate poverty, living on subsistence farms or working in mines and mills, for instance. They were not necessarily part of any oppression of other peoples and suffered desperately for much of their lives. That is an important aspect to recall.

Clare Adamson: To go back to my initial thoughts, that is why we must acknowledge the injustice to women, children and ethnic minorities—those who suffered under the regimes of the past. We have to learn from those events, so I thank Mr Gibson for raising that.

The museum in Canada also tells the story of the genocides of the world, including the Holodomor in the Ukraine, which the UK Government has shamefully yet to recognise as a genocide. What a laser focus that history puts on the current crisis on the Ukrainian border. That is why history is important.

Education and bearing honest witness to those principles have influenced my work with North Lanarkshire councillors Danish Ashraf and Agnes Magowan, who presented a motion to North Lanarkshire Council asking for education to include an honest look at the colonial history of our country. I was delighted when the council agreed to that motion and embraced the Black Lives Matter message. That is why the curriculum is important.

Whether we are talking about Skara Brae or Maeshowe, looking at Roman history—I have a Roman bathhouse in Strathclyde park in my constituency—or considering the wars of independence, the reformation and the covenanters through to our modern history, in which we can celebrate the Glasgow girls’ success in preventing dawn raids on asylum seekers and achieving the right to further and higher education in our country, we must ensure that our pupils are fully informed, educated in analysis and reflection and confident in their own view of history so that

their actions will lead to a better future through their understanding of our past.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I assure members that the repeated references to Skara Brae have not gone unnoticed in the chair.

18:34

Foysoil Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): I thank Stuart McMillan for bringing the issue to the chamber for debate. I very much appreciate that the motion acknowledges the growing number of people who believe that the teaching of history should include an honest representation of the more shameful aspects of Scotland’s past, such as its involvement in the transatlantic slave trade.

I should start by emphasising why it is so important to include that in the teaching of Scottish history. It is not an attempt to talk down the country, as some critics in the wider national media would have us believe. It has two clear constructive purposes: first, to allow students to understand the horrors of the past with a view to ensuring that they are never to be repeated; and secondly, to ensure that students develop a realistic appraisal of how far we have come as a nation and as a society, and how far we still have to go.

A proper teaching of those aspects of our history gives context to the on-going struggle for racial justice, both here and around the world. Scottish history lessons must also find a place for the voice of Joseph Knight, a former slave and domestic servant whose successful court case in Edinburgh in 1777 was founded on the principle that

“No man is ... the property of another”.

Our history lessons must also find a place for the voices of the Quaker women in Edinburgh who spoke up against slavery, supporting abolitionist Frederick Douglass in his speaking tour in the 1840s and carving his campaign message on the side of Arthur’s Seat in Holyrood park, not so far from where the Scottish Parliament sits today.

Changing our approach will allow students to understand why that struggle proceeds at different speeds from one place to another; to see how its legacy affects people of different backgrounds and experiences in different ways; and, perhaps most importantly, to understand how the moves towards racial justice, from abolition onwards, have strengthened us. We are better off as a society when everybody’s human dignity is respected.

I highlight and applaud the measures that were recently implemented in Wales that seek to ensure a good grounding in black, Asian and minority ethnic studies for every student. That encompasses the study of history, identity and

culture. The history component includes teaching on the involvement of Wales in slavery and colonialism. Although there are differences in the educational frameworks between our respective countries, I do not see any reason why Scotland could not aspire to that kind of approach.

I believe that we should move towards that and that the teaching of Scottish history would be more comprehensive and inclusive for it. I know that that view is shared by colleagues across the chamber. I would welcome an assurance from the minister, in concluding the debate, that we can all work together on taking forward those issues.

18:38

Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): I, too, congratulate Stuart McMillan on securing the debate. I believe that to live in Scotland is to live in history. History is the story of us, had we been born a wee bit earlier. Teaching Scottish history in schools helps us to understand Scotland's place in the world, showing how past decisions still influence and shape our choices today.

To illustrate Scotland's living history, there is no better place to start than my constituency of Uddingston and Bellshill, which was the birthplace of the Scottish trade unionist and supporter of home rule James Keir Hardie. That proud legacy has shaped my politics and still links my community to those fiercely progressive views today, more than 100 years after his death.

Scotland has forged a formidable history, with an influence and legacy that reaches well beyond our shores, from noble clansmen and powerful monarchs to enlightenment philosophers and world-famous engineers and scientists. We are a nation that survived and thrived on the kindness and hospitality of our neighbours and kinfolk, yet we are also a nation that experienced the shocking abuse of traditional hospitality that led to the dreadful massacre at Glencoe in 1692.

Our history is at once global and indigenous, with a mix of kinship and conflict. History in schools allows our young people to explore the associations between the local, the national and the global. Our lives and our histories are also shaped by a sense of place, and I applaud history teachers who have taken learning from the classroom into the local community by forging innovative links with local organisations, including museums and historical societies. It takes partnership to deliver a truly inclusive curriculum, and forging and strengthening those partnerships lifts history teaching beyond textbooks. It has the potential to elicit new and important information about who we are and where we come from.

I also commend the efforts of organisations in my constituency that are working to that end, including Hamilton Mausoleum Trust, the Low Parks museum, Bothwell castle and the Lanarkshire Family History Society. Another good example is the wonderful online multimedia archive Colourful Heritage. Its work with local schools has uncovered the heritage stories of Muslim and south Asian immigrants to Scotland. It also includes a fascinating account of the provenance and set-up of the New Stevenston mosque in my constituency, which work was led by long-time resident of Holytown Ghulam Saqlain Siddiquie.

Earlier, I said that to live in Scotland is to live in history. For me, and as others have mentioned, that includes ensuring teaching of our nation's darkest historical moments, particularly our significant involvement in the abhorrent transatlantic slave trade, as well as Scotland's part in the often brutal legacy of the British empire. It is clear that without such knowledge we cannot fully understand our country's place in the world and why we live the way we do today.

History will always be a source of debate over whose stories to tell, which is how it should be. However, schools and local historians need to be in it together, working towards an understanding of not only history at large but diverse traditions and communities that have never been properly recognised and remembered.

Learning through history, specifically local history, has immense potential to help to meet the aims of Scotland's curriculum for excellence. As we strive to develop the four fundamental curriculum capacities that we want to see in our children—successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors—the key is exercising flexibility to keep learning meaningful, accessible and enjoyable.

Let us bring the gripping narratives of Scotland's past alive to makes sense of our world today and inspire the next generation of Scots to become the responsible and ethical leaders of tomorrow, locally, nationally and globally.

18:42

Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): I thank Stuart McMillan for securing the debate and all my colleagues for their contributions on a subject that is of great interest to me—not least because of my previous employment as a teacher who taught a little of the subjects that have been mentioned.

When learning about history at school, in England as much as in Scotland, I was curious about and a bit disappointed by the lack of content

regarding events and significant figures in black and minority ethnic heritage and culture. Although we have made some progress in diversifying our curriculum, we still have a way to go to make sure that we can all see ourselves in our shared histories and herstories. I certainly did not.

Teachers have the privilege of inspiring curiosity to ask not only the questions “When?” and “Where?”, but “Who?” and “Why?”. Primary schooling is well placed to not only consider dates and timelines, but to bring to life the stories of people and communities in relatable, creative and compelling ways. I have certainly tried to do that over the years.

The flexibility of curriculum for excellence will always lead to debates about the syllabus. However, we must promote gathering of evidence, questioning of sources, and analysis and understanding of implications and impacts. We must learn the lessons of the past to inform our tomorrows.

Of course, the past is not alright or, indeed, all white. Black Lives Matter has certainly brought into sharp focus the need to recognise that education is the route to tackling prejudice and to building a more just understanding of society. The role of key individuals and organisations is instrumental in that.

The Coalition for Racial Equalities and Rights has been at the forefront of supporting black history month and developing materials that help teachers to plan inclusive history lessons, and its work should be recognised. Black history month helps us to recognise people who have pioneered civil rights and tackled racial discrimination. Telling stories about “Who?” enables learners to explore the “Why?” of attitudes and cultures of the past, in order to inform our futures.

The Minister for Equalities and Older People, Christina McKelvie, said that

“It is important that we recognise Scotland’s role in these painful parts of history, to ensure we learn from the mistakes and atrocities of the past”

and that we make sure that they are not repeated.

Kenneth Gibson: Would you accept an intervention?

Kaukab Stewart: I will take an intervention.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Kenneth Gibson, please speak through the chair.

Kenneth Gibson: I apologise, Presiding Officer.

Does Ms Stewart agree that focus on the transatlantic slave trade should help to educate people about modern slavery in the world today? According to the United Nations, there are 40 million people in modern slavery, including 20

million in the Indian subcontinent, one in five people in Mauritania and many in the middle east. Would that help to create a greater focus among nations, including Scotland, on dealing with that particular issue of the modern age, as well as looking to what happened in previous centuries?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can give you the time back.

Kaukab Stewart: I accept what Kenny Gibson said, but it is unfortunate that maybe, in the past, our debates have not been robust enough for us to learn the lessons from previous slave trades, in order to allow a greater focus on modern slavery.

Faith communities have played significant roles, too. The Scottish Jewish Heritage Centre, which is based in Garnethill, is the first purpose-built synagogue in Scotland. It is a beautiful category A listed building in the heart of Glasgow, which is now open to learners, and not just from Glasgow—people from Skara Brae and Islay are welcome to come, as well. The centre tells the stories of real people, going back more than 200 years.

Based in Glasgow, the Colourful Heritage centre also provides an excellent online resource that highlights histories and stories, primarily of south Asians and Muslims in Scotland. I will share a wee example. In 1911, the Glasgow Indian Union was established to represent seamen who worked in the Govan area. That was actually before the red Clydesiders were established. There was a vibrant lascar community in Anderston in my Kelvin constituency. That is a fascinating contextualised part of local history to add to current debates about race and equality.

The examples that I give have been driven from the experiences and efforts of our black and minority ethnic individuals and groups, but it is encouraging to see that work being addressed more widely.

In collaboration with race equality stakeholders, Museums Galleries Scotland now recognises and represents a more accurate portrayal of Scotland’s colonial and slavery history. Lucy Casot, the chief executive officer of Museums Galleries Scotland, said:

“The Black Lives Matter movement has highlighted the critical need to understand and act on the racial injustice and colonialism that is still prevalent today.”

I welcome the Scottish Government’s support for that collaboration, but I also ask for an update on how that is going.

Of course, the Colston four—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please conclude around now, Ms Stewart.

Kaukab Stewart: I will jump to the end of my speech.

Voltaire, who is often quoted—including by Kenneth Gibson—said:

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

That was said at a certain time in history, and we need to make sure that we live up to that—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Stewart, you need to conclude now.

Kaukab Stewart: I look forward, in an independent Scotland of the future, to reflecting on the lessons that have been learned from the past to ensure a more just and equal society that acknowledges the contributions of and reflects all of its citizens.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Stewart. I cannot accept another motion without notice, so I call on the minister to conclude the debate, for about seven minutes. I will give him a little longer if he can weave in a reference to Skara Brae.

18:49

The Minister for Higher Education and Further Education, Youth Employment and Training (Jamie Hepburn): I have never had the chance visit Skara Brae or the museum on Islay, so I look forward to visiting both, in due course.

This has been a really important and enjoyable debate. It has been very wide ranging, but because I have only up to seven minutes—as the Presiding Officer correctly reminded me—I will not be able to cover every point that has been made. However, I will endeavour to respond to as much of the debate as I can.

I thank Stuart McMillan for lodging the motion and bringing the debate to the chamber, and I join him in conveying condolences to all those who knew Gordon Bryce.

I start with a fundamental premise, on which I think we all agree. Learning the context of Scottish history is an essential part of the experience in our schools. Many members have reflected—as they often do, and as I often hear—on their own experiences at school and the fact that they did not learn enough about Scotland’s history. I was fortunate in that regard, because I was taught some of the history of our country when I was at school. The subject matter—I am sure that Martin Whitfield will be delighted to know—sparked and generated such an interest in me that I went on to study history at the University of Glasgow. I tell Murdo Fraser, with regret, that his book was not, at that juncture, on the list of suggested texts. I do not know whether it is there now; my experience of higher education is falling into the historical realm.

Having mentioned the University of Glasgow, I join Jenni Minto in mentioning my sadness at the passing of Ted Cowan. He was one of my lecturers when I was at university, and was a great and passionate proponent of Scotland’s history. We have lost, in the shape of Ted Cowan, a great champion of our history.

I return to young people’s experiences of learning Scottish history at school. I understand why members would reflect on their own experiences, but with regard to the current experience, I highlight that Scottish history is, in fact, a mandatory element of our national education. There is a wealth of resources to enable children to start learning about our country’s history at the earliest stages of their education, and Scottish history is a core component of history subject matter right through to the senior phase.

I will respond to some comments from members. As I said, I will not be able to respond to them all, but a number of comments should rightly receive a response. Stuart McMillan and a number of other members, including Stephanie Callaghan, rightly spoke of Scotland’s links to the historical slave trade. In particular, Stuart McMillan mentioned the establishment of a museum about slavery in Scotland. We have an expert group, that is led by Geoff Palmer, that is considering the matter and what form any such museum might take. The scope of a museum, and whether a physical museum will be recommended, will become clear when the group’s recommendations are delivered later this year. Nevertheless, I know that Stuart McMillan will continue to champion Greenock as a location for such a museum; I would expect him to do no less.

I have to say that I was not surprised to hear the comments from Murdo Fraser, given that he took to Twitter to respond to the issue that he highlighted today—notwithstanding, of course, his great passion for Scottish’s history, which would be the other reason why he wanted to speak today. He mentioned the resource that Education Scotland published on red Clydeside. I recognise that there was an inaccuracy in that resource. There is a method by which people can report that; Education Scotland will reflect on it and make changes where necessary.

However, I do not want anyone to have the sense that Education Scotland or any part of the education establishment is wilfully and deliberately misleading our young people with some form of political agenda. I reassure Murdo Fraser and Stephen Kerr, who also expressed concern, that Education Scotland works in partnership with the University of Glasgow to produce resources across the humanities curriculum. I think that we

can rely on their professionalism. When a mistake is identified, of course we expect it to be rectified.

Murdo Fraser: Will the minister give way?

Jamie Hepburn: That will depend on how much latitude I have.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can give you the time back, minister. There is certainly latitude for you to take an intervention.

Murdo Fraser: I am very grateful to the minister for giving way. I welcome the reassurance that he has given, but will he address my concluding point? Is a proper review of teaching of history needed? Having listened to the entire debate, the minister will know that members have, from different perspectives, expressed the concern that aspects of history are not being properly addressed in the curriculum. Is it not now time to follow the advice of the Royal Society of Edinburgh and conduct a review?

Jamie Hepburn: I suspect that all of us have taken part in the debate because we have a passion for Scotland's history. It would be great if we could teach the entire breadth of the historical experience of Scotland, although I note Mr Whitfield's point about our curriculum having been designed to imbue and stimulate interest in, and to spark a passion for, studying the subject in its wider sense. We cannot pretend that there is no limit to how much can be taught in the specific context of the school environment.

I will pick up on the point that was made in relation to Professor McLennan's reported remarks. I reiterate that our curriculum is not subject to political direction. The Scottish Qualifications Authority is preparing for consultation of, and engagement with, history teachers on the opportunities for teaching non-European and diverse perspectives in our history courses. That engagement will take place with relevant professionals. Account can, of course, be taken of Professor McLennan's concerns that neither Glasgow or Greenock is mentioned as a slave port, but I respectfully suggest that the idea that that is part of some political plot seems to be a bit overstated, so I hope that we can place the issue in its proper context.

Presiding Officer, I have probably extended your latitude as much as I can. I have not even been able to talk about the history of my constituency, which I very much regret. I hope that I will be able to do so at another juncture.

Our curriculum will continue to focus on the historical, social, geographic, economic and political changes that have shaped Scotland.

Kenneth Gibson: Will the minister give way?

Jamie Hepburn: I will see whether the Presiding Officer will let me give way.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have a very generous seven minutes.

Kenneth Gibson: It has been said that we need to talk about some of the negative aspects of Scottish history. That is important, because it should be warts and all; slavery is an important part of our history. However, why are we also not teaching positive aspects of our history and contribution to the world, such as the enlightenment?

Jamie Hepburn: I had hoped to be able to respond to Mr Gibson's point, so his intervention has enabled me to do so. It is not the case that such aspects do not form part of the subject matter. In our schools, young people can elect to study, for example, the enlightenment as a topic as part of the Scottish studies award. I certainly encourage them to do so because—going back to my experience—I studied the topic at university, and it is not without some contention and debate about its place in the historical context.

We will continue to ensure that Scotland's history is taught to young people and that it is placed in a wider global context, so that we ensure that the past informs recognition, understanding and valuing of the diversity and complexity of the modern world and modern Scotland.

Meeting closed at 18:59.

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