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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 9 February 2022

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

Portfolio Question Time

Health and Social Care

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): 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 portfolio questions on health and social care. If a member wishes to request a supplementary question, they should press their request-to-speak button or type R in the chat function during the relevant question.

Free Personal Care (Frank's Law)

1. Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government how many people have received free personal care, under Frank's law, since it came into effect in 2019. (S6O-00724)

The Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care (Kevin Stewart): Collection of data on the implementation of free personal care for under-65s, in line with other non-Covid-19 data collections, was temporarily postponed due to the redirection of resources to the pandemic response. The Scottish Government restarted the collection of that data in August 2021 and it is scheduled to be published on 10 May this year.

Liz Smith: I know that the minister agrees that free personal care, as inspired by Amanda Kopel and Frank's law, should make a very substantial difference to under-65s across the country, but there is concern, notwithstanding the delay, that its implementation has been slow. I certainly have several constituents who are asking about it. We also know that the response to a freedom of information request to West Lothian health and social care partnership shows that from 2019 to the end of 2021 only four people aged under 65 had applied for and received that free personal care.

Notwithstanding the delay in the publication of the data, which will be forthcoming on 10 May, will the minister consider his position on the issue and will he agree with my colleague Miles Briggs's proposal to institute a national recovery group in partnership with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities?

Kevin Stewart: We are doing a number of things to ensure that we get this right. I join Ms Smith in paying tribute to Amanda Kopel. We need to pay close attention to the statistics that will be published in May to see how things are going across the country, to ensure that we are getting it right for under-65s.

We will continue to do all that we can to ensure that our intentions are implemented and that people get the care that they need and deserve. I am more than happy to continue to engage with Ms Smith, Mr Briggs and others on the issue. We need to get it right for people and I want to ensure that we do so.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Can the minister confirm that Scotland is the only nation in the United Kingdom to deliver free personal care and can he advise as to how many people in Scotland have benefited from that policy since it was first introduced?

Kevin Stewart: Scotland is the only nation in the UK to deliver free personal care. I am very proud of the moves that we have made to ensure that the policy is implemented. According to the most recent statistics available, which are for 2017-18, almost 80,000 people in Scotland benefited from free personal and nursing care over that period. That included more than 30,000 people in care homes and more than 47,000 people living in their own homes.

The number of people who receive free personal care at home has also been increasing. That reflects our policy of supporting people to live at home for as long as possible.

Paul O'Kane (West Scotland) (Lab): I will not be the only member in the chamber who has had constituents getting in touch about having their care packages cut or about delays in packages being put in place in the first place.

We know that the impact of those delays and cuts can be devastating. Does the minister accept that addressing the workforce shortages in social care is critical to fulfilling Frank's law and that one way in which those shortages could be addressed is by giving social care staff an immediate pay rise to £12 an hour, going up to £15 an hour?

Kevin Stewart: The Government is well aware of the improvement that is required in relation to the social care workforce. That is why we have announced and funded two pay rises in the past few months.

I recognise that there is more to do on that front. Fair work has to be at the heart of the agenda—and it will be, as part of the national care service. However, we cannot wait until the national care service comes into play. The cabinet secretary and I will continue to work with health and social

care partnerships and other bodies to do our level best for the workforce, who have done so much, both before and during the pandemic.

Button Batteries

2. Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what action it has taken to raise awareness of the potential risks to the health and wellbeing of children posed by button batteries. (S6O-00725)

The Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport (Maree Todd): Button batteries have been involved in truly tragic incidents of childhood injury and death. I was shocked by reports of the harrowing death over Christmas of young Hugh McMahon. My sympathies are with his family who, I understand, have close ties with Clare Adamson's constituency.

The Scottish Government supports organisations such as the Child Accident Prevention Trust and Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, which work tirelessly to publicise threats to children's health and wellbeing, including button batteries. We are engaging with them and other stakeholders to identify what more can be done on that important matter.

Clare Adamson: I thank the minister for her answer and her condolences, which I am sure are shared across the Parliament, for my young constituent, who died so tragically.

The cross-party group on accident prevention and safety awareness returns to the issue often. Within the past two years, we have had presentations on the issue, and our concern lies with the availability of fake goods online and in our shops, as well as the fact that few parents are aware of the risks that those goods pose. Will the minister undertake to work with the United Kingdom Government's new working group, under Paul Scully MP, who is engaged in the trading standards aspect? Will she also work with the CPG on how to raise awareness among parents and carers of that potentially fatal health issue?

Maree Todd: First, I acknowledge the work that Clare Adamson and the cross-party group that she convenes do to highlight the risks of button batteries. The regulation of product safety is reserved to the UK Government and Ms Adamson is correct that the UK minister, Paul Scully, recently proposed a working group to progress safety improvement in that area. That comes after another tragic death last May, which sadly seemed to foreshadow the death of Hugh McMahon. I give an absolute assurance that the Scottish Government will engage with the UK working group. Indeed, our officials have already had positive discussions with their counterparts in Mr

Scully's department around our eagerness to co-operate and help drive forward extensive work to tackle the risks. That eagerness to co-operate naturally extends to working with the cross-party group and any other partners in accident prevention.

National Health Service and Social Care Recruitment (Rural Areas)

3. Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to support NHS and social care recruitment in rural areas. (S6O-00726)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Humza Yousaf): Since 2016, we have supported the Scottish Rural Medicine Collaborative to develop recruitment and retention measures, investing more than £300,000 in 2020-21. To support the recruitment of general practitioners to rural practices, we have allocated £200,000 to fund relocation expenses and £400,000 for golden hellos. With the universities of Dundee and St Andrews, we have established a graduate entry medicine programme that focuses on remote and rural medicine and healthcare improvement. We are also in the scoping stage for the creation of a centre of excellence for rural and remote medicine and social care.

Alexander Burnett: In my constituency, the medical practices in Alford and Torphins—like many others across Scotland—have, unfortunately, been unable to recruit new GPs, so they have handed their contracts back to NHS Grampian.

I note the cabinet secretary's comments about funding for the Scottish Rural Medicine Collaborative in previous years. Will he commit to increasing funding for its rediscover the joy of general practice programme, which seeks to provide GPs with the opportunity to work in different parts of Scotland? Will he outline any other plans to incentivise uptake in recruitment in rural areas?

Humza Yousaf: Alexander Burnett has raised an exceptionally important point. I will explore an increase in funding, because he is right that the rediscover the joy programme is excellent. We will also look to see what more we can do with incentives. He knows that we have plans in place to increase the numbers of GPs in Scotland. He is absolutely right to say that distribution should be equitable, focused not just on the central belt but on our remote, rural and island communities. I will look at his suggestion and come back to him.

Foysoil Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): What steps is the Scottish Government taking to facilitate continued NHS and social care recruitment from European Union countries?

Humza Yousaf: I thank Foyso Choudhury for an exceptionally important question. That issue is important for the NHS and very important in social care. As he will have done, I have visited care homes in my constituency and, since Brexit, there is a noticeable absence of European workers, who have worked tirelessly in the social care sector to care for others. We are working with the United Kingdom Government on social care recruitment from overseas, including the EU. This morning, we had a good meeting with a number of ministerial colleagues across Government as part of the population task force to look at what more we can do for health and social care in relation to migration. That work is under way. We will do that work in Scotland where we can and work across the UK nations where we need to. There is no doubt that the impact of Brexit is being felt on the ground in the health and social care sector.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): We need a bit more urgency from the health secretary. In my constituency, the level of recruitment of health and social care workers is dire. Just this week, there are 36 advertised vacancies in social care and 176 vacancies in the NHS. Is that not the result of poor workforce planning and poor rates of pay in the social care sector?

Humza Yousaf: I do not agree. Since I have been health secretary, there have been two pay uplifts for adult social care workers. We are not waiting for international recruitment; I was simply answering Mr Choudhury's very good question. In October, when I spoke in the chamber about the £300 million winter package, Mr Rennie will have noted that recruiting more healthcare support workers, including in Fife, was a core component of that. There has been some recruitment in Fife and I am happy to provide him with further detail offline on that. However, I take his point. The number 1 issue that we are dealing with in relation to social care is workforce, workforce, workforce. I promise him that there is no lack of urgency from me, my colleague Kevin Stewart or the Government on the important issue that he has raised.

National Cancer Plan

4. Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the roll-out of its national cancer plan. (S6O-00727)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Humza Yousaf): The national cancer plan is tracked against key milestones and progress is regularly reported on to the national cancer recovery group. Overall, the plan is progressing well, notwithstanding the effects of the pandemic.

On our flagship actions, I can report that Scotland's first three early cancer diagnostic

centres are now live in NHS Ayrshire and Arran, NHS Dumfries and Galloway and NHS Fife. The preliminary data on the centres looks positive. We have 12 single-point-of-contact pilots that are trialling a person-centred approach to supporting patients throughout their cancer journey. The digital prehabilitation resource is in development, and is anticipated to go live with the nutrition and psychological wellbeing frameworks this spring. Lastly, the Scottish cancer network is established and supports our once-for-Scotland approach to cancer services.

Stephanie Callaghan: Will the cabinet secretary further advise how the detect cancer early programme and the national cancer screening programmes are being adapted to respond to the continuing health inequality gap?

Humza Yousaf: That is an exceptionally important question. I think that Stephanie Callaghan might have been at the debate that Jackie Baillie secured for world cancer day last week. It was an important debate, and a number of colleagues raised the issue of the cancer care gap and health inequalities. Although there is still work to do, diagnosis of lung cancer is one demonstration of how we are tackling the inequality. Our £44 million detect cancer early programme aims to increase the proportion of bowel, breast and lung cancers that are diagnosed at stage 1, while reducing health inequalities. Through that work, the proportion of lung cancers that are diagnosed at the earliest stage has increased by 45 per cent, and by 53 per cent in the most deprived areas of Scotland.

There is more work to do across the various cancer types, but reducing the inequality gap is key to the recovery of our cancer services.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I wonder whether I could push the cabinet secretary slightly further on that point. There is a shocking 20 percentage point gap in bowel cancer screening between the people in the most deprived areas and those in the least deprived areas. It is, indeed, a matter of great shame that the most deprived in our communities remain at greatest threat due to late cancer diagnosis. We already know that, since the start of the pandemic, almost 30,000 of our fellow Scots have died from cancer. I want to press the cabinet secretary on the issue. What urgent action is the Government taking to encourage the uptake of screening across all cancers in our most deprived communities?

Humza Yousaf: I agree with Jackie Baillie's characterisation that that is unacceptable. She was right to raise that issue in her members' business debate on world cancer day, and she is right to raise it again today.

Over 2021-22 and 2022-23, we have allocated £2 million to continue our cancer inequalities screening programme, to tackle inequalities and encourage those who are eligible to take up their invite to the cancer screening programme. That is in addition to the £5 million that we have invested over the previous five years. Following feedback, we will no longer ask for bids for individual projects, which are often small in scale. Instead, we have developed a blend of national-based approaches, which are complemented by local investment.

There is more to do, and we are investing in closing the inequalities gap—the cancer care gap—that Jackie Baillie and Stephanie Callaghan have spoken about. My number 1 priority is recovering our cancer services. Reducing the inequality gap is a key component of that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mercedes Villalba is joining us remotely.

Breast Cancer Services (NHS Tayside)

5. **Mercedes Villalba:** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on what steps it is taking to improve the provision of services for NHS Tayside breast cancer patients. (S6O-00728)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Humza Yousaf): Scottish Government officials are working closely with the human resources director and chief executive of NHS Tayside to support the board to take forward a rebuild plan for the recruitment of oncology consultants and specialist nursing and other support staff to deliver a local service. That will include options around international recruitment and training schemes, marketing strategies and campaigns, trainee placements and re-examining locum capacity. It is our priority to ensure that there is a locally delivered service for breast cancer patients in NHS Tayside.

Mercedes Villalba: Today, NHS Tayside revealed that unfilled vacancies mean that the health board will be left with no breast cancer oncology specialists. There seems to be a nationwide skills shortage. The minister mentioned looking at all options, including international recruitment and training. Will he outline what is being done to develop a long-term plan for training and recruitment for such specialists domestically?

Humza Yousaf: Ms Villalba raises a very important point. NHS Tayside has undertaken a number of recruitment rounds but has not been able to fill those posts. The situation is not unique to NHS Tayside; the member is right to suggest that the issue is broader than that. As I mentioned in my opening answer, we are looking at what we can do to ensure that we can recruit domestically

and internationally, what we can do in and around trainee placements and what we can do around locum capacity. Ultimately, I am asking my officials and others externally to give assistance in relation to what we can do to fill the gaps in the oncology workforce that we have not just in Tayside but across Scotland.

Although I have mentioned that there are issues across Scotland, they are, of course, most acutely felt in NHS Tayside. I say without equivocation that the situation in NHS Tayside's breast cancer service is simply not satisfactory and is therefore a priority for us to try to resolve.

Chronic Pain Clinic Waiting Times

6. **Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will meet its chronic pain clinic waiting time target during the current reporting quarter, 1 January to 31 March. (S6O-00729)

The Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport (Maree Todd): Public Health Scotland publishes waiting times for pain services from the data that is provided by health boards. In line with the reporting schedule, data for the quarter ending 31 March 2022 will be published in June. Although I cannot predict those figures, health boards have continued to make progress in restarting pain services during the pandemic. Waiting time figures for the quarter ending September 2021 show that almost 90 per cent of people who were referred to pain services were seen within the 18-week target. That is an improvement on the previous quarter, in which almost 80 per cent of people were seen within the target.

Sandesh Gulhane: In 2019, before the pandemic, some 3,000 patients were seen in a Scottish pain clinic each quarter. In quarter 3 of 2021, that number was around 1,900. The Government announced its £240,000 chronic pain winter support fund to enhance support for people with chronic pain, but we have yet to see a detailed plan on where the money will be spent and which patients will benefit. How much of that money has actually gone to health boards and other partners? Specifically what will the money be used for? How many additional patients, compared with quarter 3 of 2021, do you anticipate will be seen in pain clinics in quarters 1 and 2 of 2022 as a result of that initiative?

Maree Todd: Services are working extremely hard to tackle that issue, and there have been real impacts throughout the pandemic on people who are suffering chronic pain. I understand just how incredibly difficult it is to continue to suffer chronic pain. We are supporting health boards to take action to make every effort possible to remobilise

pain management services as quickly and safely as possible.

Owing to continued and expected pressures on pain services in the winter, it is a challenge to expect performance to improve over the next reporting period. In recognition of that challenge, we launched the chronic pain winter support fund, which has provided almost £240,000 of funding to a range of national and local projects that are intended to provide additional capacity and to support people with chronic pain across Scotland in the coming months.

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): The chronic pain services in NHS Lanarkshire have effectively been closed down for anyone who needs pain relief injections. I again draw the Government's attention to my constituent Liz Barrie, whose pain relief injection is overdue by three years. Liz, a former nurse and courageous advocate for chronic pain patients, fears that her mental health is being destroyed, and she is losing hope. Another constituent, disabled war veteran Matt Walton, has been waiting in agony for treatment since 2019. Will the minister work with me urgently to support Liz and Matt? Can she confirm that any patient who needs a vital pain relief injection will be offered a referral to another health board if their own board cannot cope with demand?

Maree Todd: First, let me reiterate that I absolutely appreciate how difficult it is to live with chronic pain, particularly during the pandemic. That is why we are taking action to support patients and ensure that health boards are making effort to remobilise pain clinics.

We specifically highlighted the remobilisation of pain services as a priority in our first national health service remobilisation plan in the summer of 2020. We further underpinned that specific and clear instruction to health boards with our recovery framework for pain management in September 2020. We provided advice for people with chronic pain during the pandemic, which highlighted relevant information on the matter of injections to assist them in their discussions with their clinicians and health board.

During the pandemic, we also explored whether alternative arrangements for specialist treatments such as injections could be implemented locally. Based on clinical advice and guidance from professional bodies, it was concluded that that would not be clinically safe in all circumstances.

We will continue to work with boards to restart the full range of services as they continue to emerge from the latest wave of the virus. As ever, I am more than happy to work with Monica Lennon to improve the situation for the constituents who she has mentioned.

Maternity and Neonatal Care

7. Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it plans to review and assess the pilots conducted as part of the strategy *The best start: five-year plan for maternity and neonatal care*. (S6O-00730)

The Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport (Maree Todd): We have established early adopters to lead the way and test a range of best start recommendations, including continuity of carer, the new model of neonatal intensive care and the national bereavement care pathways. The early adopters continue to develop, capture and review their practical experience of implementing recommendations, which has already informed the development of guidance and standards to share with the wider maternity and neonatal community. That will support planning as we prepare to remobilise implementation. The Scottish Government intends to evaluate best start, and it is working with Public Health Scotland to develop the approach.

Fiona Hyslop: I recently met a large group of midwives from NHS Lothian, including some with best start pilot experience. They have concerns about the pilot's measurement of continuity of care, the integrity of the results, the risk to post-natal continuity in the model and, importantly, the recruitment and retention of midwives. Will the minister take a close look at the issues arising from the pilots and be prepared to meet midwives and, indeed, mothers who have been involved, in order to ascertain the best way forward for continuity of maternity care, including the aim of reducing C-sections?

Maree Todd: The best start continuity of carer model provides relationship-based care and is a key feature of high-quality midwifery care. The early adopter boards, including NHS Lothian, were chosen to test implementation and capture the learning from that. Prior to the pandemic, the best start programme board, along with the Royal College of Midwives, undertook a deep dive into the implementation of the continuity of carer recommendations and the impact on the workforce. The findings were shared with the early adopter boards and have been fed into the next phase of implementation. That next phase will include the publication of an evaluation framework, which was developed by the early adopters, to support boards and measure continuity.

I look forward to meeting midwives and mothers to hear about their experiences of best start and to plan and continue that engagement as we remobilise the programme in the coming months. I am more than happy to meet Fiona Hyslop's constituents.

National Health Service Recovery Plan

8. Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the NHS recovery plan. (S6O-00731)

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

Craig Hoy: What does it tell us about the Scottish National Party Government's recovery plan that a recent survey by the Royal College of Nursing Scotland reveals that six in 10 nurses are considering quitting their jobs?

Humza Yousaf: We have a good record on NHS staffing. In fact, we have record numbers of staff in Scotland, and we also have the best-paid staff. In relation to nurses and qualified midwives, we have had a decade of consecutive growth. In Scotland, we have 95 general practitioners per 100,000 people, whereas, in England, where Craig Hoy's party is in charge, the figure is 78 per 100,000. We have a really good track record in Scotland, which is probably why his party has ripped off our NHS recovery plan.

Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): I have been contacted by a constituent whose son is nearly three and has complex needs. My constituent has been informed by NHS Lanarkshire that her son might have to wait for up to four years for an autism assessment. Does the cabinet secretary agree that that is unacceptable as we recover from the pandemic? What action can the Government take to support the health board to reduce waiting times?

Humza Yousaf: I say from the outset that that is not an acceptable wait. I do not know the details of the individual circumstances. I ask Ms Mackay to pass the details on to us, if she has consent to do so, and we will be happy to investigate them further.

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): The waiting list for orthopaedic surgery in Scotland has risen from 21,000 in March 2020 to 37,000 in January 2022. A patient who was added to the waiting list for hip replacement in January 2022 will wait between 18 months and three years for surgery, depending on the health board. Does the cabinet secretary agree that that is an unacceptable time to wait for treatment and that it is wrong that waiting times are determined by a postcode lottery? What urgent action will the Scottish Government take to address that?

Humza Yousaf: The impact of the pandemic has undoubtedly exacerbated some of those

waits. I am not suggesting that there were no challenges before the pandemic, but it would be incorrect and inaccurate not to recognise the real shock that the pandemic has caused. I know that Ms Duncan-Glancy will have looked at the NHS recovery plan, which goes into detail on our aim to increase capacity for elective procedures by 10 per cent in the period that the plan covers. Key to that will be the £400 million that we will invest in the creation of a network of national treatment centres, which will help us to get through some of the elective procedures so that people will not have to wait for the length of time that Ms Duncan-Glancy references.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes questions on health and social care. I will allow a brief pause before we move on to the next set of portfolio questions, to allow the front bench teams to change seats safely.

Social Justice, Housing and Local Government

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next portfolio is social justice, housing and local government. If a member wishes to ask a supplementary question, they should press their request-to-speak button or enter the letter R in the chat function during the relevant question.

Homelessness (Rates)

1. Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on homelessness rates in Scotland. (S6O-00732)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government (Shona Robison): Tackling and ending homelessness remains a critical priority for the Government, which is why we are investing £100 million between 2018 and 2026 to implement our ending homelessness together action plan, in partnership with local government.

The latest homelessness rates, which were published in June 2021, showed that, in 2020-21, the average rate of homeless households per 1,000 members of the population was 6.1. However, we know that the impact of the pandemic meant that the 2020-21 reporting year was unusual, which makes year-on-year comparisons of homelessness rates quite difficult.

Pam Gosal: Recently, I supported the Homeless Veterans Project to rehome a veteran named Andy. Veterans account for about a quarter of all rough sleepers. Like Andy, many veterans begin by living in unsustainable accommodation or temporary housing before ending up on the streets. Will the Scottish Government support veterans into safe and stable housing as quickly

as possible by working with local authorities to nominate armed forces lead officers within housing and homelessness services?

Shona Robison: Pam Gosal raises an important point. It is important that veterans are supported, and I know that local authorities are doing a lot of good work to do that. The rapid rehousing transition plans are critical in ensuring that people are moved into settled accommodation with the correct support. A number of veterans, but not all, require additional support, for all the reasons that we fully understand.

That approach is the best way to solve homelessness, and it will remain the Scottish Government's focus. If there is more that we can do by working with local authority partners, I am happy to investigate Pam Gosal's suggestions.

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): Although it is clear that the latest statistics show that there is still a lot of work to be done, does the cabinet secretary agree that the latest data also makes it clear that councils and front-line organisations have put in a remarkable amount of work and have minimised the immense damage that the pandemic could have caused to rough sleepers and those who are at risk of rough sleeping?

Shona Robison: Throughout the pandemic, local authorities and front-line organisations have worked tirelessly to ensure that rough sleepers and those who are at risk of rough sleeping can access accommodation and support. That includes the replacement of night shelters in Glasgow and Edinburgh with self-contained rapid rehousing welcome centres. I had the opportunity to visit the Glasgow centre a few weeks ago.

Councils and third sector organisations share our commitment to ensuring that everyone has a safe place to stay, and I thank them for the work that they have undertaken. The Scottish Government remains committed to working in partnership with them to end rough sleeping.

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary say why the homelessness prevention and strategy group, which she chairs, has met only once since the election, given the rate of homelessness? Does she feel that the group is getting the Government support that it needs to implement the next phase of the ending homelessness together action plan?

Shona Robison: The homelessness prevention and strategy group has a really important role to play, and it is getting on with its work between meetings. Coming together to check the progress of the work is the aim of the meetings.

Over the past few months, I have engaged with numerous key stakeholders who are working on

that agenda in the housing sector, so there is no lack of meetings. However, the most important points are the action from those meetings and our ensuring that progress is made to deliver the strategy to eradicate homelessness.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): Patience on the issue is running out. In 2012, the Government promised to eradicate homelessness within months; 10 years later, 7,500 children were found to be in temporary accommodation. When will the Government meet its promise to those children?

Shona Robison: It is clear from the feedback from stakeholders that we have the right plan in our homelessness strategy. It is not just me saying that—I am sure that they would tell Willie Rennie so if he wanted to contact them.

The member will be aware that eradicating homelessness is not an easy thing to do. The issue is complex, which is why we now have the rapid rehousing transition plans and housing first programme, which recognises that the issue is about not just bricks and mortar, but the wraparound services to deal with addiction, mental ill health and the other supports that people need.

We will get on with the delivery of the plan. We are making progress, and we will continue to work with our stakeholders and partners to keep doing so.

Homelessness (Support)

2. **David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what support it is giving to local authorities to help tackle homelessness. (S6O-00733)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government (Shona Robison): In 2022-23, £8 million of our £10 million ending homelessness together fund will go to local authorities to support rapid rehousing transition plans, which help move people as quickly as possible into settled accommodation. We will also provide local authorities with resource of £23.5 million for homelessness prevention and response measures.

Through the housing options hubs, we are supporting all local authorities to share learning and good practice, and we are engaging with a number of local authorities to address key issues such as aiding their compliance with the unsuitable accommodation order.

David Torrance: Does the cabinet secretary share my optimism that the example that Finland has set in its successful housing first programme has proved that, with its co-ordinated approach, Scotland is on the right track to prevent homelessness across the country?

Shona Robison: The Scottish Government is fully committed to supporting local authorities across the country to develop a housing first programme as part of their rapid rehousing transition plans, in which a key component is the prevention of homelessness.

We are aware that 27 local authorities have developed, or are in the process of developing, their housing first programme. More than 1,000 housing first tenancies have started across Scotland to date, and the Scottish Government is working with partners on a suite of tools to support the continued scaling up of housing first, because we know that that works.

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): Last year, Glasgow City Council was able to recover £8.8 million from the health mobilisation plan arrangement through its integration joint board, while Edinburgh was unable to recover the equivalent cost of £9.3 million. I have raised the issue with the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy, but I have not heard a response to date. First, should that financial anomaly be addressed? Secondly, does the Scottish Government intend to extend the tenant grant fund beyond March of this year?

Shona Robison: On the tenant grant fund, we will consider a range of measures to support the recovery from the pandemic in order to ensure that we sustain tenancies, avoid homelessness, and address the cost of living pressures that impact on families.

I will look into the issue around the health mobilisation plans and ensure that a response comes from either my office or that of the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy or the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care.

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): Last week, new figures were published that showed that Glasgow has seen a rise in homelessness of 27 per cent. Glasgow City Council is increasingly failing to close homelessness cases and people continue to go without basic necessities, such as warmth, shelter and a place to sleep. What is the Government doing to support Glasgow City Council to reduce homelessness, and does the cabinet secretary agree that cutting local authority budgets will damage those efforts?

Shona Robison: We do not want to see any increase in homelessness. I am sure that the member will be aware that Glasgow is the largest dispersal area in Scotland for asylum seekers, and some of those issues are impacting on the statistics. I would be happy to write to Pam Duncan-Glancy with a bit more information on that.

We work with all local authorities to make sure that their plans for addressing homelessness are

the right plans. The welcome centre that I mentioned earlier is a really good centre that provides high quality advice and assistance to people. It is trying to get people into settled accommodation as quickly as possible, and to reduce the use of temporary accommodation. There is always a lot to do, but that centre has worked hard, along with stakeholders and the third sector, to dramatically reduce the levels of rough sleeping. We cannot be complacent, however, and I am happy to write to Pam Duncan-Glancy with more specifics on what Glasgow is doing to tackle homelessness.

Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator

3. Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government when ministers last met with officials from the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator. (S6O-00734)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government (Shona Robison): I met the interim chair and the chief executive of the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator on 19 August 2021. I meet the OSCR chair and chief executive at least once a year, and my officials meet OSCR staff regularly.

Russell Findlay: Most of Scotland's 25,000 charities are honest and do incredible work. However, during the past two years, 105 have been subject to regulatory action. OSCR has published details of only five of those cases. In the interests of public confidence and transparency, will the minister urge the watchdog to show its teeth by routinely naming and shaming Scotland's charity rogues?

Shona Robison: The first thing to say is that OSCR is an independent regulator and registrar for, as the member said, more than 25,000 charities in Scotland, and it reports directly to the Scottish Parliament, not the Scottish Government. Such issues could be pursued through that route.

OSCR does a good job at overseeing and monitoring the charitable sector, but if I can give the member any more helpful information, I will write to him.

Vimes Boots Index

4. Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on calls by the anti-poverty campaigner Jack Monroe for policy makers to take a more comprehensive view of tracking the full cost of poverty, as highlighted by the Vimes boots index. (S6O-00735)

The Minister for Social Security and Local Government (Ben Macpherson): The Scottish Government commends Jack Monroe for bringing

this issue to the attention of the public and agrees that one inflation rate does not fit all.

Although the Vimes boots index does not yet exist, it is proposed that it should be designed to reflect the experience of inflation of those on the lowest incomes. I therefore welcome the work that the Office for National Statistics is doing to develop and enhance consumer price indices to help us to measure the impact on lower-income households, and to increase the range of products that are used to calculate inflation. The initiative complements the Government's existing work to monitor progress in reducing poverty and income inequality.

Karen Adam: The Vimes boots index sets out the socioeconomic unfairness faced by people who are on low incomes and in poverty. Living hand to mouth means buying cheaper products that do not last as long as more expensive, well made products. It is relatively more costly to be on a low income, and those who earn the least bear the biggest brunt of austerity. Will the minister commit to ensuring that we look holistically at the true cost of being on a low income in Scotland and outline how that can be done?

Ben Macpherson: As Karen Adam says, lower-income households spend a greater proportion of their income on essentials such as food and fuel, and they are disproportionately affected by the cost of living crisis. That is why we favour a cash-based approach to tackling poverty, so that low-income households can spend money where it makes the most sense for their household. More accurate measurement of consumer costs, as proposed by the Vimes boots index, and as being taken forward by the ONS, is a welcome step that will help us to better understand and address the impact on lower-income households.

Hardship and Debt Support (Cost of Living)

5. Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government how it is supporting households that are facing hardship and debt as a result of the rising cost of living. (S6O-00736)

The Minister for Social Security and Local Government (Ben Macpherson): We are providing immediate support for households during the cost of living crisis, especially those on low incomes. Our £10 million fuel insecurity fund, which forms part of our overall £41 million winter support package, is helping people to deal with rising heating costs.

This year, we have provided £25 million to local authorities to tackle financial insecurity, alongside £7.4 million of investment in free debt advice. The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy

will set out further details on mitigating the cost-of-living crisis tomorrow.

Gillian Mackay: We have a Westminster Government that has not only put a cap on benefits, cut universal credit and put up national insurance, but locked people into years of rising energy bills and concern about how they will heat their homes. When David Cameron told his Government to "cut the green crap", it pulled the rug away from alternatives to gas. That decision has added £2.5 billion to our home energy bills.

Does the minister agree that green energy is the key to reducing our reliance on gas and cutting bills, and that we can build a greener Scotland only if we are given the full powers over energy policy?

Ben Macpherson: It is indeed the case that, up to this juncture, the United Kingdom Government has failed to deal effectively with the cost-of-living crisis, which is very serious for communities and families across Scotland and the UK, and for all our constituents. We urge it to use its powers—of course, it has wide-ranging financial powers that the Scottish Government does not have—to the greatest extent to do more for people in communities across Scotland and the UK.

The greater provision of renewable energy—which, while relevant to all of us, falls under another portfolio—has had a significant positive impact on the reliability of supply here in Scotland. As we continue to develop that capacity, that will be of benefit to not just the environment, but job creation and wider public good here in Scotland. I agree that we need to maximise the opportunities for renewable energy.

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): Research has shown that households that have prepayment meters often face additional challenges with fuel poverty. Has the Scottish Government spoken to energy companies about the replacement of prepayment meters? What support schemes are being developed, given that we know that that has an impact?

Ben Macpherson: The Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport, Michael Matheson, has engaged extensively with the energy sector on a regular basis, especially in recent weeks, when the cost of living crisis and increased energy costs have been particularly pertinent.

The Scottish Government has been engaging with the energy sector and supporting consumers, especially those on low incomes, not just in recent weeks, but for some time. For example, we have provided £65 million of direct financial support to around 500,000 households through our £130 pandemic support payment, which was paid by the end of October 2021. In addition, we are

committed to doubling the Scottish child payment from April onwards; we have invested in bridging payments; we continue to invest in the Scottish welfare fund; and we have provided our £40 million winter support fund, among many other initiatives.

We will continue to do all that we can. Mr Briggs raises an important point, which the Government will continue to consider with a view to helping families as much as possible at this time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will take another supplementary, this time from Evelyn Tweed, who joins us remotely.

Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP): While the Scottish Government has introduced game-changing policies such as the Scottish child payment, that progress is being undermined by a cost of living crisis that is being ignored by the Tories at Westminster. Does the minister agree that, while the Scottish National Party Government is using all the powers that are available to it to support hard-pressed households, it is the UK Government that holds the key powers to make a difference?

Ben Macpherson: As I have emphasised, so far, the UK Government has, unfortunately, failed to fully get to grips with the cost of living crisis and has not used the many powers that are reserved to it to support people in need. We continue to urge it to do so.

We, in the Scottish Government, will continue to use all the powers that are available to us to help hard-pressed households. For example, as was published earlier this week, we have supported 530,000 households with a £130 pandemic payment. In addition, we have our £41 million winter support package, which is helping people struggling with costs. We also have a range of benefits, including our five family benefits, one of which is the Scottish child payment, which we will double in April.

Homelessness (Lifting of Eviction Ban)

6. **Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it anticipates that the lifting of the eviction ban, in place during the Covid-19 pandemic, will result in increased homelessness. (S6O-00737)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government (Shona Robison): The rental eviction ban was a temporary public health measure that ended on 9 August 2021, when the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Restrictions and Requirements) (Local Levels) (Scotland) Regulations were revoked. That reflected advances made against the pandemic.

Since then, data from the first-tier tribunal has not shown any significant increases in repossession action compared to pre-pandemic levels. Existing measures such as the private landlord pre-action protocols, tribunal discretion and the £10 million tenant grant fund are helping to sustain tenancies and prevent homelessness. Where evictions are unavoidable, we have strong homelessness legislation in place to support people.

Jackie Baillie: New figures from the Scottish Government show that homelessness among private renters soared by more than one third between 2020 and 2021, which I suspect was due in part to the lifting of the eviction ban. We warned the Government that that was likely to be a consequence. The Government is set to close the tenant grant fund scheme for struggling tenants at the end of March, despite the escalating cost-of-living crisis. Will the cabinet secretary say whether there are plans to extend the scheme and whether there are specific proposals to tackle the drastic rise in homelessness in the private rented sector?

Shona Robison: As Jackie Baillie will be aware, the action taken at the time in the form of the eviction ban was based around the public health guidance at that time. Once that changed, we could not impose a measure that was based on public health guidance, because it would not have been sustainable. I think that it would not have been sustainable in the courts either.

So, what can we do? As I mentioned in my earlier response to Miles Briggs, we will look at what further measures can be taken. The tenant grant fund is helping people in the here and now, and local authorities are working hard to ensure that those in both the private and the social rented sectors who are struggling with arrears and who are at risk of homelessness are being helped through that. We also have discretionary housing payments of £80 million, which are also helping people who need support with housing costs.

As a Government, we are looking at what more we can do around the cost-of-living crisis. Kate Forbes will make further announcements about support for families tomorrow. We will continue to look at what more we can do across portfolios to support people through the coming weeks and months, because we know the pressures that families will be under.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Willie Coffey has a brief supplementary question. He joins us remotely.

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): The emergency measures on evictions were clearly effective during the height of the pandemic. However, does the cabinet secretary agree that the longer-term structural changes that

are currently under way in the prevention of homelessness—[Inaudible.]—to ensure a fair—[Inaudible.]—system—[Inaudible.]—Scotland?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that Mr Coffey's sound was not great. Did the cabinet secretary get enough of it?

Shona Robison: I got the gist.

We have the here and now, in which we have to support families, particularly with the cost-of-living pressures. However, we also need to make the changes that need to be made over the medium and long terms. Our goal is to make sure that everyone has access to a safe, warm, affordable, high-quality and energy-efficient home that meets their needs. Taking further steps to improve accessibility, affordability and standards across the rented sector, and preventing homelessness from happening in the first place, will help us to achieve that vision. The new proposals that are out for consultation build on the strong housing rights that already exist in Scotland and include proposed new duties on landlords and public bodies and the implementation of a national system of rent controls.

Children in Temporary Accommodation

7. **Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to ensure that children living in temporary accommodation have access to permanent homes. (S6O-00738)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government (Shona Robison): Although it can provide an important safety net, temporary accommodation must be of good quality, and time spent there should be as short as possible, especially for families with children.

The number of households in temporary accommodation is too high, despite the efforts of councils, charities and other partners. The Scottish Government is supporting local authorities with £53.5 million between 2018 and 2024 to implement their rapid rehousing transition plans and housing first approaches. Those measures support councils to reduce the overall need for temporary accommodation as well as the length of time that is spent in temporary accommodation.

Sarah Boyack: I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of members' interests.

We have a housing crisis, with Zoopla reporting on its site today that the average rent in Edinburgh has risen to £974 a month. Only 14 per cent of Edinburgh's homes are available for social rent, compared to the national average of 23 per cent, and Scottish Government grant funding for homes covers only a fraction of the build costs. Will the Scottish Government commit to investing in

Edinburgh, to bring the number of social rented homes here closer to the national average?

Shona Robison: I am well aware of the particular issues in Edinburgh, in both the rented sector and the owner-occupied sector. The housing situation here is not necessarily replicated in other parts of Scotland. We recognise the situation, and I have had a number of discussions with local leaders about it.

Our support for City of Edinburgh Council over the past 15 years or so has amounted to more than £0.5 billion in grant support from this Government, which has contributed to the delivery of more than 13,000 affordable homes. City of Edinburgh Council will receive a further £233.8 million in funding for good-quality, affordable housing across the capital over this parliamentary session, which is an increase of £32.4 million, or 16 per cent, on the previous five years.

We are also supporting Edinburgh's response to homelessness, with £3.3 million for prevention. We have given it more than £871,000 for rapid rehousing, as well as funding of £563,000 under the winter plan for social protection. We have also supported its delivery of a rapid rehousing welcome centre in Edinburgh.

I know that there is more to do in Edinburgh, and we are supporting City of Edinburgh Council, along with other local authorities. If there are innovative measures that City of Edinburgh wants us to consider, we will be happy to do that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 8 was not lodged.

That concludes portfolio questions on social justice, housing and local government. There will be a short pause to allow the front-bench teams to change safely before the next item of business.

ScotRail

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a statement by Jenny Gilruth on ScotRail: a new beginning. The minister will take questions at the end of her statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:59

The Minister for Transport (Jenny Gilruth): Almost a year ago, on 17 March 2021, the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Michael Matheson, advised Parliament that, at the conclusion of the current franchise, ScotRail services would be provided within the public sector by the operator of last resort: an arm's-length company owned and controlled by the Scottish Government. The current franchising system was clearly no longer fit for purpose.

At that time, there was considerable uncertainty arising from the on-going Covid pandemic and continuing delays to the publication of the UK Government's white paper on rail reform. A detailed assessment of the options that were available for ScotRail was undertaken and it was decided that it would not be appropriate to award another franchise agreement to any party at this time.

Today, I can confirm that the transition of ScotRail into Scottish Government control will take place on 1 April 2022. Although that is good news, it is clear that much work still needs to be done, in a collaborative way, to ensure the long-term sustainability of rail operations in Scotland, to best meet the needs of the people whom we represent.

The pandemic has changed the way in which people travel. Its impact on travel patterns has been substantial. At one point, revenue in passenger services dropped to less than 10 per cent of pre-pandemic levels. That means that the rail industry must adapt to reflect customer need. That is particularly important as we strive to achieve our ambitious decarbonisation and net zero targets.

It is worth lifting our heads on that point. For countries in the European Union, the largest decrease in the number of rail passengers was in Ireland, where numbers dropped by 74 per cent during the pandemic compared with the fourth quarter of 2019—a fall of 9.5 million passengers. In Greece, the reduction was 68 per cent, or 3.8 million passengers, and in Italy the reduction was 61 per cent, or 144 million passengers. In Great Britain, passenger use remains far lower than it was before the pandemic, with 248 million journeys this quarter, which is just over half the

448 million journeys that were made at the end of 2019 and the start of 2020.

Although it is good that nearly half of our rail passengers have returned to ScotRail services, it is clear that travel patterns, purchasing habits and passenger demands are very different from those that existed pre-pandemic. People are now more likely to travel for leisure. The shift to hybrid working will change that to some degree, but it is likely that more people will continue to work from home for at least part of the week, now and in future. Weekends, rather than the weekday commuter periods, are now the busiest times for rail travel.

The travelling public are voting with their feet. We need to ensure that the railways reflect that direction of travel. We need to deliver rail services at the times when and in the ways in which people want to use them. Our publicly owned ScotRail will put passengers' needs and interests at the heart of all that it does.

Bringing train operators into public control is not new. Indeed, the United Kingdom and Welsh Governments have found themselves in similar positions, with three train operating companies in England and one in Wales now under public sector control.

Change is also not new in relation to rail operations in Scotland. We have seen the benefits that change can bring in the freight sector, where new ways have been found to ensure the viability of operations as freight customer demands have changed. Environmentally sustainable movements of groceries for major retailers have replaced coal travelling to power stations. In Scotland, rail freight volumes are already returning to pre-pandemic levels.

Despite those examples of positive change, it is understandable that any change can cause uncertainty and concern. That is why, today, I want to kick-start a national conversation about what our new beginning for ScotRail should look like—an affordable, sustainable, customer-focused rail passenger service in Scotland in a post-pandemic world.

Just last week, I heard colleagues from Opposition benches raise concerns about passenger services post 1 April. They raised concerns about timetables, ticket offices, rail fares and terms and conditions for staff. I also heard many positive comments from members about the opportunities that the transition into Scottish Government ownership presents.

I told Parliament last week that I would listen. To that end, at the core of this statement to Parliament today is an invitation to all members who have a genuine interest in the future of ScotRail to get involved and to work with me to

shape the change that needs to happen. I am happy to meet representatives of all parties, and my private office has already extended an invitation to Opposition spokespeople.

Change will happen on 1 April, so my invitation to all members today is this: let us have a conversation about that change and let us work together to influence how it happens. After all, we all want a railway that delivers for our constituents.

As I mentioned last week, our rail staff have a vital role to play in shaping and delivering a successful future railway for Scotland. As so many of our essential workers did, ScotRail staff—and, indeed, all our rail workers—went above and beyond throughout the pandemic. We will always be grateful to them for all that they did to keep our rail services running during these challenging past two years.

I make clear today that we want to take ScotRail's staff with us on this journey into Scottish Government ownership. That is why this invitation is also extended to the rail unions. As members might recall from last week, I will meet the trade unions tomorrow afternoon. We know that the unions are passionate about the industry, as is evident from their report "A Vision for Scotland's Railways". Through open and frank discussion, we can work together to harness their aspirations for the future. I look forward to tomorrow's conversations.

There was much discussion about the vision for Scotland's railways last week in the chamber. Let me be absolutely clear: our vision for rail is of a thriving industry that meets the needs of passengers and is sustainable in the long term. To meet our climate change targets and our aim of reducing car kilometres by 20 per cent by 2030, we need Scotland's railways. An efficient, effective, productive and profitable railway is critical to our mission zero ambition for transport. We want ScotRail to deliver the rail services that the people of Scotland, and the generations yet to come, need and deserve.

There is no doubt that the immediate future for rail services is challenging. That means that we need to do all that we can in the short and medium terms to encourage more people to travel by rail, while also delivering rail services more efficiently. We provided around £1 billion of support throughout the pandemic, including more than £550 million of additional funding for the ScotRail and Caledonian Sleeper franchises via the current emergency measures agreements, to ensure the sustainability of Scotland's rail services, give security of employment for rail staff and cover necessary operating costs.

However, we have to be pragmatic. That level of funding is not sustainable in the longer term, nor is

it desirable. Success for Scotland's rail services in the future includes ensuring that they deliver public value and generate increased revenue. This Government is investing significantly in decarbonising our rail services. In the past 10 years, we have invested around £1 billion in 441km of track electrification and associated infrastructure improvements, directly benefiting more than 35 million passenger journeys across Scotland each year.

Prior to the onset of the pandemic, more than 75 per cent of passenger journeys on ScotRail were being made on net zero-emission trains. We want to exceed that through our investment in decarbonisation. A successful demand-focused railway has a huge part to play in delivering a truly integrated decarbonised transport system for Scotland. However, to be truly integrated, rail needs to play a much bigger part in the overall transport system than it does at present. That is the future that we want the new ScotRail to help to deliver.

We also want it to be an exemplar public sector company. Its culture will be founded on fair work, and it will be expected to embed the fair work framework and fair work first into its policies, processes and practices. The new company will, like most other public sector arm's-length operations, benefit from the public sector pay policy.

There has been much discussion around no compulsory redundancies as part of the engagement with trade unions in advance of staff transferring on 1 April. As I said last week, I recognise that a new body such as ScotRail Trains Ltd will not have an existing agreement on no compulsory redundancies in place, but I expect there to be negotiations on that as part of the public sector pay policy discussions, which are crucial to the change that is needed.

The new beginning for ScotRail will be built on strong foundations. This Government invested at record levels to improve connectivity and increase the number of trains across Scotland's network. Since 2009, we have reconnected 14 communities to the rail network through reversal of the Beeching cuts, and, in the next three years, Reston, East Linton, Dalcross, Cameron Bridge and Leven will follow.

As part of strategic transport projects review 2, further strategic projects are planned in the next 20 years, including electrification of the Glasgow Central to Barrhead and East Kilbride routes, which are the most advanced, and the Borders and Fife lines are being developed as a priority. Electrification will encourage more freight off the roads and on to rail.

All our investment in passenger services seeks to encourage more people to choose to travel by train, and to enjoy doing so. However, to do that, people need to feel safe to return to public transport. Let us be clear that some of those issues do not relate to the Covid pandemic. It is important that everyone—passengers and workers—feel safe in our stations and travelling on our railways. That is why I fully understand the concerns that have been raised around the ticket office consultation, for example.

However, safety is not just about what happens on station platforms. Passengers should be able to make end-to-end journeys without being fearful and without the threat of intimidation, verbal and physical abuse or violence. Antisocial behaviour on any part of our rail infrastructure, but particularly on trains and in stations, is unacceptable. For some years, the Scottish Government has worked with our policing and industry partners to reduce such behaviour and crime on Scotland's railways. That has included addressing alcohol-related incidents not only with a greater officer presence in hot spots and at key times, but also with direct measures to reduce alcohol consumption on trains. We have supplemented the previous ban on alcohol consumption on trains at night with a blanket ban during the pandemic. That ban is being kept under review.

ScotRail and the British Transport Police meet regularly to discuss the impacts of antisocial behaviour and abuse against passengers and staff. Although British Transport Police officers cannot travel on all services, they target potentially problematic services as part of their regular measures to drive down crime on our railways.

I met ScotRail only yesterday afternoon and I heard more about the travel safe team, which was launched in October last year. The team members were recruited from across ScotRail and bring with them a wealth of experience working in front-line, customer-facing roles in our stations and on our trains. That is the sort of public-facing initiative that we should be encouraging, because we know that when staff are deployed in teams, even just their presence can act as a deterrent, helping to keep the public safe.

Much was said last week, as I mentioned, in relation to potential ticket office closures but particularly about women's safety in train stations. I want to be very clear that I take the issue of women's safety on public transport extremely seriously. However, that is not just about our station platforms or ticket offices—it is about the walk to the station; it is about the journey on the train home; it is about making sure that you do not catch the last train to Fife because it is full of drunk men who will squeeze in beside you, despite the

fact that you are surrounded by empty seats and are sitting quietly with your headphones on, and who, when you get up the gumption to move seats, as the woman across the aisle from you has done, will shout at you for daring to escape. "I'm only having a laugh," he says as he shunts his leg against yours and you hope that he does not follow with his friend when you move away.

Let me say to those on the Opposition benches, but particularly to the male Opposition members who last week wanted to tell me about women's safety on our trains—I know all about it. I have been there. It is a systemic problem and it is not just about our ticket offices; it is about all the places on our public transport networks where women are scared to go because of men's behaviour.

As we look to the vision for Scotland's new railway, we have many choices to make, but I want our railways to be safe places for women to travel. We need to identify, as a Government, where it is that women feel unsafe on our public transport systems and then identify how we are going to fix it. To that end, I am announcing that we will be consulting with women and women's organisations across the country to better understand their experiences and therefore how we can improve our public transport system to make it safer and more enjoyable for them to use.

There will be wider partners involved in that work. I will seek to engage with the British Transport Police, for example, which has recently launched a campaign against sexual harassment. That follows data that was commissioned by YouGov during the pandemic, which showed that over half of women in London had been subjected to unwanted sexual behaviour while travelling on public transport—I repeat: over half. Crucially, it will also include the rail unions and employees, because I know that it matters to staff, too.

Scotland's new railway might look exactly the same in a few weeks' time—the trains will still be branded with ScotRail's logo—but we need a sea change in the vision to propel us forward. It will be sustainable, efficient and responsive to the needs of the public. It will be a system that looks after our rail workers and that invests in their skills and talents.

Today, I have set out the inclusive approach that, as transport minister, I intend to take to that end. I will work with parties across the chamber in this endeavour, because getting public ownership of our trains right is important to the people of this country. Encouraging the people of Scotland to choose to travel locally and further afield by train—for work, training, education, leisure and social activities—is vital to Scotland's future. It will help to transform our economy, deliver on our net zero

ambitions and create a fairer, greener Scotland for all.

That is our vision for rail—a vision that I hope that members across the chamber will want to play their part in shaping, through a national conversation.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The minister will now take questions on the issues raised in her statement. I intend to allow 30 minutes or so, after which we will need to move to the next item of business.

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): I thank the minister for advance sight of her statement and for the generous tone in which she delivered it.

The statement described a “new beginning” for ScotRail, but the only thing that is new is that ScotRail is coming under new ownership. There has not been a vision since the year when Michael Matheson announced it. Jenny Gilruth is new to the job, so it is not her fault, but it sounds as though she wants us to help her to create that vision. In the spirit in which she delivered her statement, I am more than happy to help her with that, and to join her in genuine cross-party talks. However, if we are going to get that right, I gently suggest that those talks need to be regular discussions—not just the occasional half an hour. I agree with her that we all want the same thing, so we need to join up across the chamber.

She made the mistake of mentioning East Kilbride. If she wants to have a look at the plans for the East Kilbride line, she will discover that, yes, it is going to be electrified, but she will also find that the plans to dual that line for its entire length have been scrapped. Her predecessor offered cross-party talks to discuss the matter further, so she might want to take that forward.

In the time that I have left, I ask the minister for her view on fares. If we want to get people back on trains, the vision will need to include lower fares. What is her view on that?

What is the minister's view on there being no compulsory redundancies? Does she think that that is a good thing or not? Does she want to get train services back to pre-pandemic levels or does she not?

Jenny Gilruth: Mr Simpson covered a number of points in his questions, which I will address in turn.

I welcome his reception of my offer to other parties, particularly his party. On the specific question about regular meetings, I am more than happy to commit to that. I see the vision for us moving forward into public ownership as being part of the whole Parliament's responsibility. It is my responsibility as transport minister, but I want

other parties to play a part in the process and to feel that they have had an opportunity to contribute and, at times, to critique, because that is their role.

On the specific question about the East Kilbride line, I appreciate that my predecessor gave Mr Simpson an assurance on that point. I am more than happy to meet Mr Simpson and others on the specifics regarding dualling of the line. He will appreciate that I am not sighted on the detail of that decision, but I am more than happy to sit down with him to discuss it.

With regard to fares and the recent fare increases, Graham Simpson raised a challenging point for the Government about the sustainability of public transport. Despite the fares increase, our fares in Scotland are still 20 per cent lower than fares across the rest of the UK. I do not think that that is an answer for us going forward, but it is a statement of fact. We need to facilitate people getting back on to our trains. Part of that conversation is happening through, for example, our fair fares review, to which the previous transport minister committed. It also gives us an opportunity to look at how we might join up, across the public transport network, journeys that are not currently joined up.

Mr Simpson asked a question about no compulsory redundancies. I will meet the unions tomorrow on that very matter. I do not want to prejudge the outcome of that meeting, but I cannot imagine that that is something that the Government would ever seek to take forward as we bring a company into public ownership. I gave a steer on that in last week's debate; I hope that that gives him some reassurance, but I want to speak to the unions about the matter. There are a number of other issues that we will need to unpack in the course of that meeting, and I will be happy to discuss that in further detail with Mr Simpson when we meet to discuss the specific matter of the East Kilbride line.

Graham Simpson also asked about a return to pre-pandemic service levels. Of course, I would love to wave a wand and get rid of the pandemic, but I got the train from Markinch to Edinburgh this morning at 8 o'clock and it was not even half full. When I was getting that train two years ago, there was standing room only. Something has changed in how people use public transport: they are scared to return to using public transport because of the pandemic. I hope that we are now getting to a better place and that the First Minister's update to Parliament yesterday gives people more confidence, as we move forward.

However, as a Government, we need to work on our messaging, in order to encourage people back to public transport, so that they can use it safely

and support public ownership of Scotland's trains—their being back in Scotland's hands.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We have a bit of time in hand, but we will need slightly more succinct questions and answers.

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): I thank the minister for advance sight of her statement.

If this is to be a new beginning for ScotRail, there must be a new direction from Government and a new ambition for the future, but the starting point for the new ScotRail is cuts of 250 daily services, 50,000 fewer seats on trains and the biggest fares hike in a decade, as we face a climate emergency. I welcome the minister's having said that she is in listening mode, but the test will be of what the minister does, not just of what she says.

Scottish Labour is prepared to work with the minister before 1 April, but we are not prepared to work with her to cut services or to cut people's jobs. Will the minister confirm that she supports plans to cut overall services by 10 per cent from pre-pandemic levels?

She will be aware of Unite the union's home safe campaign and passenger and rail unions' concerns about safety and accessibility on the railway. Has there been an equality impact assessment of ticket office closures?

The Scottish Government expects ScotRail, under public control, to adopt the general public sector pay policy. Why is the Government insisting that the policy will apply to that part of the public sector, but not to others?

The minister has said that the new operator will be founded on fair work. Why will the Scottish Government not categorically rule out compulsory redundancies?

The purpose of bringing ScotRail back into public hands was to better serve the travelling public. That is why the Scottish Government's actions must match its rhetoric. It is regrettable that, at the moment, they do not.

Jenny Gilruth: I thank Mr Bibby for his questions. As Mr Simpson did, he touched on a number of matters. I appreciate that time is short.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We have a bit of time in hand.

Jenny Gilruth: Okay. I will try to address some of Neil Bibby's points. He talked about cuts to services, but I think that it is pragmatic to reflect on where we are with passenger rail use—how many folk are actually using the trains—at the moment. As I said in my answer to Graham Simpson, I take the train regularly; people are not using the trains as they were two years ago. We need to take

cognisance of where we are with local use of our trains.

Do I want us to restore passenger services to what they were? We would have to have a sea change in how many folk are using the train in order for us to go back to those levels. I guess that the proposition, in that case, is that we run empty trains. I am not sure whether that is Labour's position. I am keen to speak to the unions about the matter.

Mr Bibby will know that there was an announcement from ScotRail last week about restoration, to December levels, of a number of services. He will appreciate that there were a number of challenges, due to omicron and driver absences, that led to the introduction of a temporary timetable from the end of last year. That will end on 14 February, next week.

I accept that there are challenges. That links neatly to my response to Mr Simpson on customer behaviour: folk are scared to return to public transport because of the pandemic. Government can help with that with some of the messaging, but, if people are not using the trains, there is a question to be asked about the sustainability of running empty trains.

Mr Bibby also asked about cuts to jobs. I put on the record that there is absolutely no proposal from the Scottish Government to cut jobs. We talked about that in response to the ticket office consultation last week. I want to make it very clear that that is not part of the proposal.

On safety and accessibility, Mr Bibby asked about an equalities impact assessment. The ticket office consultation was carried out by Transport Focus, which is an independent watchdog. It carried out a diversity impact assessment, which is a live document pending the final report. Transport Focus looked at reducing the number of ticket office closures from 13 to three, and it looked at passenger assist, which is the system that allows folk who are travelling to pre-book help in getting on trains.

Mr Bibby also asked about fair work practices. Again, I covered that to an extent in my response to Mr Simpson. I am keen to work with the unions on the matter, and we absolutely expect fair work principles and fair work first to be instilled in the organisation. I want to speak to the rail unions to get a steer from them about where they are on the issue. I did not want to prejudge the outcome of those conversations in my statement.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: About 15 members wish to ask questions and we have about 20 minutes in which to accommodate them. I hope that everybody who is participating will bear that in mind.

Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP): I welcome the update and the decision to take ScotRail into public ownership and control. What difference will passengers and staff notice at the point of transfer, and how does the Scottish Government intend to ensure that the new rail company delivers on strategic priorities, including fair work and net zero?

Jenny Gilruth: ScotRail will come into Scottish Government control on 1 April, which is 51 days away. At the point of transfer, we expect services to continue as normal; it will be business as usual for passengers and staff. It is important that we give reassurance and familiarity to passengers in the short term, as we build back from the pandemic. Thereafter, ScotRail will introduce in a measured manner initiatives to address the issues that have been identified through the national conversation, which I alluded to in my statement.

Arrangements for the formal transfer of staff from Abellio ScotRail to ScotRail Trains Ltd have begun; staff will transfer with their current terms and conditions. We have also committed to application of the public sector pay policy to staff of ScotRail Trains Ltd from 1 April, with the caveat that any deals that have already been agreed for 2022-23 will be honoured.

Scottish Rail Holdings is, of course, accountable to Scottish ministers. It will, on behalf of ministers, oversee delivery of services by ScotRail Trains Ltd. That robust holding company governance model will ensure that the Scottish Government's strategic priorities, which include fair work and net zero, are delivered.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): What are the total projected costs of nationalising ScotRail? When will the minister publish the forecast accounts and final accounts?

Jenny Gilruth: I thank Liam Kerr for his question on finance. The measure is being funded from the rail services in Scotland allocated RDEL—resource departmental expenditure limits—budget. There is budget provision of £2.5 million in 2021-22 for that workstream. We anticipate that the full budget provision will be spent on delivery of the workstream, which is in line with actual expenditure so far.

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): Rail, of course, is not a fully devolved matter. Does the minister anticipate that causing challenges for the new public sector rail service? What more can be done to make the case for full devolution of all powers and resources for rail to Scotland?

Jenny Gilruth: It is hugely important that we consider that the Scottish Rail Holdings approach is in line with where we are constitutionally currently. The member is absolutely right. I would

love to see the full devolution of railway powers to this Parliament, to allow us to have full control over our nationalised infrastructure. Unfortunately, we are not there yet. I hope that that happens in the not-too-distant future.

I very much welcome Ms Dunbar's points on how we can work with the public on bringing forward a system that will work for the people of Scotland and passengers' experience of Scotland's railways.

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): It is a shame that the minister was not in listening mode last week, when she endorsed the biggest hike in rail fares in a decade and voted for 250 fewer train services a week. If she really is listening, will she scrap the current flawed consultation on ticket office cuts? We do not yet know what passenger numbers will return to.

Furthermore, the information in the consultation document is incorrect. For example, it claims that Lockerbie station, which is in my region, will no longer open at 7.30 but will open at 7.00. Anyone who uses the station knows that it has opened at 6.50 for years. How can we trust a consultation on future opening hours when ScotRail does not even seem to know what the current opening hours are?

Jenny Gilruth: Colin Smyth raises a number of important points. I think that I was actually in listening mode last week, to reflect. Will I scrap the consultation? I cannot scrap something retrospectively. The consultation closed on 2 February, so it is done.

Transport Focus—I mentioned that it is the independent watchdog for transport users in my answer to Neil Bibby—is collating responses and it will also provide its view on the consultation process. I am told that the timescale for that is two weeks, after which the matter will come to me for decision.

I cannot retrospectively scrap the consultation, but I give the member my undertaking that I will look into the specifics of the issues that he has mentioned. Some of what he has highlighted in the chamber gives me some cause for concern, so I would be keen to understand a bit more about that.

On the rationale behind the consultation—we talked about some of this in the chamber last week—this is about the behavioural shift of people not going into ticket offices and buying tickets in the same way they might have done in the past. ScotRail's response to that was to consult and look at how people are buying their tickets. The last time that a review was carried out was in 1992. I hope that Colin Smyth will understand the need and rationale for the review.

On how the review was conducted, and on whether mistakes were made, I reassure the member that I will be looking closely at the detail of the report when it makes its way to me in a couple of weeks' time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Natalie Don joins us remotely. She will be followed by Beatrice Wishart. *[Interruption.]* If you could just pause, Ms Don. There seems to be something wrong with your audio. If you begin again, perhaps the issue will have resolved itself. *[Interruption.]*

I am afraid that the issue has not resolved itself. I will go to Beatrice Wishart next and come back to you afterwards, Ms Don. I hope that our information technology colleagues will have sorted out the problems by then.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): Some 50 days before taking on the running of the railways and more than two years since the decision was taken, it is only now that the Government is starting to think what to do with the railways. However, I welcome the engagement that the minister says will take place.

The minister wants to achieve carbon emission reduction targets. Does she support the call by the Scottish Liberal Democrats to expand the current rail card scheme that provides a third off travel to the model that is used in London and the south-east, in which more people benefit from cheaper rail travel, which would then encourage more people on to trains and off the roads?

Jenny Gilruth: First of all, I think that it is 31 days, but forgive me if I am wrong, Presiding Officer—I might need to correct the record on that point.

Beatrice Wishart spoke to the tone of my statement today. I very much want to work with political parties on this matter, and I hope that she and others will take up that invitation to engage in this work, because it is important that we get it right.

On expanding the railcard, Beatrice Wishart spoke about a specific example that the Liberal Democrats support. I do not know whether that is with reference to the under-22s scheme; I know that she made a point about that last week, and I would be more than happy to look at the detail of it. My view would be that we need to look at the detail of the costings involved.

I cannot give Beatrice Wishart a specific answer on that, but she is absolutely right on the general point about facilitating people to get back on to trains and buses and back into using public transport. We have a challenge on our hands in the Government, and I am not shying away from that. People are scared to go back to using public transport. A lot of people are still working at home,

or they are taking a hybrid approach to employment, and that has also had an impact on footfall. We need to be alive to that. There is a job for the Government to do to support the public transport infrastructure that we have. I would be more than happy to speak to Beatrice Wishart on the specifics of the proposal that she raises. She will understand that I am not sighted on the details of the financials around it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I understand that we do not yet have Natalie Don's audio, so I call Stuart McMillan.

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): The minister spoke about the changes to travel patterns. What steps will the new ScotRail Ltd take to encourage people to make both short and long journeys by rail while also ensuring that rail is affordable for people to use more frequently?

Jenny Gilruth: It is absolutely important that people are encouraged to use rail and the infrastructure that is on their doorstep. One way in which we can do that is through our conversations with local authorities. In my statement, I spoke about the importance of working with partners such as the British Transport Police, Network Rail and local authorities to ensure that people are encouraged to go back to using public transport.

I very much welcome Stuart McMillan's question. He is right that there has been a reduction in the number of longer journeys that people are taking. Prior to the pandemic, people tended to take longer journeys, and they tended to use public transport to travel to work. That has now changed. We now see the public using rail, for example, at the weekends and for leisure purposes. They do not tend to travel to work during the week on the train or on buses in the way they did before the pandemic arose. That means that our approach as a Government to encouraging people back on to public transport needs to be nuanced. We also have to make sure that people feel safe to do it. I spoke to some of the challenges around that, which do not relate just to the pandemic.

Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con): I welcome the minister's comments that the Scottish Government intends to consult women and women's groups on public transport. However, with reports of harassment on transport increasing compared with pre-pandemic levels, can the minister advise how many people have been charged and prosecuted over the past year, and can she say what immediate measures the Scottish Government is putting in place to protect women's safety on public transport?

Jenny Gilruth: Tess White raises some very important points. She asks a specific question

about, I think, the number of convictions. I do not have that detail in front of me, but I am more than happy to speak to justice colleagues and share that information with her office.

On the immediate things that we will be doing, I have committed today, as transport minister, to consult women's groups on women's experiences of public transport. We know that that is an issue. I see Jamie Greene at the back of the chamber, and I know that he was referencing data in the newspaper yesterday or the day before about LGBT people's experiences on public transport—*[Interruption.]* Sorry, I apologise—I have prejudged his question. It is important that we look at marginalised groups and their experiences of public transport, because, if they are less likely to use public transport, we need to encourage them back into using our railways and our buses. It is hugely important.

On the specifics, I am interested in the working group that is being drawn together by British Transport Police Chief Superintendent Gill Murray, which will have representation from other modes of transport. That group's intention will be to identify and agree a joint strategy to tackle a wide range of antisocial behaviour issues on various Scottish transport networks. I very much look forward to meeting the chief superintendent in the coming months and working closely with her on those significant issues. I am not sure whether I have also mentioned that Network Rail has a similar campaign in that space. It is about having the variety of partners that we have on the railway meet together to agree on a way forward to protect vulnerable groups—a matter that Tess White rightly highlighted in her question.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): The Greens strongly agree with the minister that a people's ScotRail must be rooted in the experiences of passengers and of course the dedicated women and men who work on our railways. Just last week, damaging timetable changes in Perth and Fife were scrapped by ScotRail after hundreds of my constituents campaigned for change. How can we harness the energy and enthusiasm of those passengers to help to co-design services now and in the future to meet their needs and to increase patronage?

Jenny Gilruth: The May 2022 timetable, which initially proposed to add, I think, 100 extra services compared to December of last year, will now, following consultation and feedback from ScotRail customers and businesses, add nearly 150 services. That consultation provided an opportunity for ScotRail customers and businesses to help to shape a reliable and responsive timetable. It is the starting point for rebuilding Scotland's railway following the Covid pandemic and ensuring that it is fit for purpose.

The member spoke about co-design. ScotRail currently has a stakeholder group that it uses to consult members of the public. There is a proposal that the stakeholder group will also move on 1 April. It is a hugely important forum where vulnerable groups, for example, and members of the public can have their views listened to and can give feedback on consultations that ScotRail undertakes. For example, ScotRail used the stakeholder group when it was framing the design for the ticket office consultation and the timetable consultation.

I hope that that gives Mark Ruskell reassurance that some of the structures are already in place, and I very much expect them to migrate over on 1 April.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): The minister mentioned passengers, freight, the unions, decarbonisation and safety for passengers. Does she have one overriding aim for the railways?

Jenny Gilruth: I am not sure that I can pick one, although I thank John Mason for his question. We need an efficient, reliable and sustainable railway service for all of Scotland. I was struck by some of the comments that were made in the chamber last week, after the statement on our vision for ScotRail services, when members asked whether we were just going to keep things ticking over as usual. We need a rethink, which is why I framed today's statement in that space. That means that I want to work with partners and political parties in the chamber.

We also need to ensure that we have a railway service that encourages passengers back on to our trains. We need to recognise the challenges in that respect. I have given the example of women in particular, but it is not just about women. People are fearful of using our trains, for a variety of reasons. Some examples in relation to disability were highlighted to me in the context of, I think, the ticket office consultation. As a Government, we need to take cognisance of that to help us move forward on 1 April.

I hope that that gives John Mason an idea of my vision. I am interested in speaking to other political parties on the issue. Of course, tomorrow's meeting with the trade unions will help to give me more of a flavour of their position and what steps they want the Government to take as we move forward together in partnership on 1 April.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am pleased to announce the delayed arrival of Natalie Don, who joins us remotely.

Natalie Don (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP): Thank you, Presiding Officer—third time lucky.

I appreciate the concerns that the unions might have about how the public sector pay policy could have an impact on pay increases this year, but will the minister provide more information on the potential additional benefits that the public sector pay policy will have for rail workers, as we bring Scotland's railway into public ownership?

Jenny Gilruth: The public sector pay policy sets out the parameters for pay increases, staff pay remits and senior appointments, and it applies to the Scottish Government's core directorates and its associated departments. The policy maintains our distinctive Scottish approach to public sector pay, and it continues our focus on sustainability, reducing inequalities and promoting wellbeing. It underlines our commitment to tackling poverty, with specific measures to address low pay, including the introduction of a Scottish public sector wage floor.

To summarise the key benefits, they are to invest in our public sector workforce, which delivers top-class person-centred services for all; to provide a distinctive and progressive pay policy that is fair, affordable and sustainable and that delivers value for money in exchange for workforce flexibilities; and to reflect real-life circumstances, protect those on lower incomes, continue the journey towards pay restoration for the lowest paid, and recognise recruitment and retention concerns.

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): I, too, welcome the Scottish Government's announcement that it will consult women on their safety on public transport. Last week, the Scottish Women's Convention and Inclusion Scotland wrote to the First Minister expressing "grave concerns" about the proposals to close three station booking offices completely and cut hours in 117 further stations.

In a recent survey, 45 per cent of women transport workers said that they had prevented the sexual harassment of passengers in the past five years. Does the minister agree that cutting staff in train stations will deter women from using the railways? Will she agree to a full debate in the Parliament on women's safety on public transport?

Jenny Gilruth: Yes, I will agree to that, because the subject is hugely important. I have today set out some of my thinking about the challenge. Last week, women's safety on public transport was kind of tacked on to the end of a lot of heat about other political debates, and the issue is too important for that.

Katy Clark mentioned cuts to staff. I put it on the record again that there are no proposals from the Scottish Government to cut any staff numbers. I am alive to challenges in the ticket office consultation, particularly on women's safety, and I

have mentioned some of the factors. I hope that Katy Clark accepts that we also need to think more broadly about women's experience of public transport—that is about not just our ticket offices, but standing on platforms, walking to the train station and getting home from the train station late at night, when it is dark.

We need to identify lots of parts of women's experiences of the public transport system that do not relate just to ticket office closures, but Katy Clark raises important points, and I would be more than happy to debate the subject in Government time. I announced today that I am commissioning research into women's experiences of public transport, because we need to get the data. I cited specifics of women's experiences of the public transport system in London, which were compelling, and I talked about the actions that British Transport Police is taking. I hope that that reassures Katy Clark about the seriousness with which I judge the issue.

I answered specific points about the ticket office consultation in response to Colin Smyth. When it comes to me in two weeks' time, I will look at the detail and at women's safety on public transport, which is so important, as Katy Clark has highlighted.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): There has been a shift, post-Covid, from a commuting business model to a balance of commuting and tourism and leisure travel. Will the Scottish Government consider investigating the provision of integrated ticketing that offers discounted access to tourism destinations? On the Borders railway, that could include the National Mining Museum, the great tapestry of Scotland and Abbotsford. Co-ordination with the management of those places might increase travel on the railway.

Jenny Gilruth: Christine Grahame raises a number of important points. I think that I was meant to visit the great tapestry of Scotland with her in my previous role; perhaps we will get there one day. I have certainly been to the National Mining Museum.

Christine Grahame makes a valid point about how we join up a public transport system with local tourism opportunities. She will know my interest in that, as I am the constituency MSP for Mid Fife and Glenrothes, where, next year, Leven's railway will come back after 50 years. In Fife, we have great tourism opportunities on our doorstep and I will be keen to explore this locally.

On Christine Grahame's point about integrated travel, the fair fares review, which the previous transport minister commissioned, will give us data and understanding about how we might deliver that. I am keen to explore that, because she is

right that we have moved away from being a society that uses public transport primarily to commute to work and become one that uses it for leisure and tourism opportunities. The Government therefore needs to think about how we integrate our public transport ticketing to reflect the modal shift.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Despite the earlier spoiler, I call Jamie Greene.

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): Thank goodness—I thought for a second that the minister was going to steal my thunder. I will raise an important issue. In the past five years, 676 instances of hate crime have been reported on our trains, and a third of them were directed towards those in the LGBT community, although it is not just them who have been affected—incidents have targeted people on the basis of race, religion and disability.

I think that we agree that we all have the right to use public transport safely. What dialogue will the Government have with all groups, including minority groups in society, to ensure that they have full access to public transport, irrespective of their status? What action will the minister take to ensure that her justice partners in the Government are sure to charge and prosecute those who perpetrate hate crime against those who are most marginalised and most at risk of such attacks?

Jenny Gilruth: I apologise for pre-empting Jamie Greene's question earlier. He raises a really important point, and I have seen some of the coverage that he has received in the press on the issue of the LGBT community's experiences of public transport. He also raises the matters of race, religion and disability. It is right that those groups, which are often vulnerable anyway, feel safe on public transport, and the Government has a responsibility there.

I have spoken about my concerns about women's experiences of public transport in particular. It is important that the Government takes an intersectional approach and recognises the minority groups about which Jamie Greene has spoken.

The member asked how I might engage with those groups. In my statement, I set out some of my plans for a national conversation. That endeavour is about speaking not just to political parties, but to trade unions, charities and third sector organisations.

The member mentioned the natural links with the justice portfolio, and I am keen to meet justice officials on that specific issue. Tess White asked about the prosecution of crimes that are committed on public transport. Those statistics sit with justice, and I am keen to meet the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans to ensure a

joined-up approach to delivering our vision for Scotland's railways and ensuring that we protect the most vulnerable, as Jamie Greene has highlighted.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am conscious that we are over time, but I will call the remaining two members who wish to ask a question.

Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): I am concerned about staffing at stations and accessibility for disabled people. At some stations, lifts are not turned on when the station is not staffed. That limits the ability for disabled people to travel when they want, which many of us take for granted. Can the minister confirm that any changes will be discussed with disabled people's organisations and that they will not adversely impact the accessibility of the network?

Jenny Gilruth: I confess that Gillian Mackay's specific point on access to lifts in train stations has not been raised with me previously. I expect ScotRail to consult with disability organisations, if it has not already done so. That I spoke to equality officers in the course of the disability impact assessment that ScotRail undertook for the ticket office consultation might answer her question.

I will follow up with ScotRail on Gillian Mackay's specific point on the importance of consulting with disability organisations, as she has raised an important point about accessibility and lifts in our train stations.

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): No rail improvements for the north-east of Scotland were mentioned today, and no mention was made of re-laying the Formartine to Buchan line or of the promised 20-minute reduction in journey times between Aberdeen and the central belt. Have those projects hit the buffers?

Jenny Gilruth: I am sorry if Douglas Lumsden missed the memo from today's statement. I am here to work with members of the Opposition, not to argue with them.

The member has raised several issues about services in the north-east. I have set out some of the restorations of services that we have seen under ScotRail. The reasons why ScotRail services had to be decreased are, first, the Omicron variant over the Christmas period and, secondly, passengers not using trains in the same way that they were before the pandemic. In my response to Christine Grahame, I set out the examples of tourism and leisure and the reasons why people might not be using the train.

The other challenge that the Government faces now is ensuring that people feel safe. I hope that that answer reassures the member that we take those issues seriously, and I hope that he will join his colleague Graham Simpson in the positive

spirit of engagement and collaboration that we saw in his response at the start of today's statement.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before things boil over, we will move to the next item of business.

Coronavirus (Discretionary Compensation for Self-isolation) (Scotland) Bill: Stage 3

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-03080, in the name of John Swinney, on the Coronavirus (Discretionary Compensation for Self-isolation) (Scotland) Bill.

As members will be aware, at this point in the proceedings, I am required under standing orders to decide whether, in my view, any provision of the bill relates to a protected subject matter—that is, whether it modifies the electoral system and franchise for Scottish parliamentary elections. In my view, no provision of the Coronavirus (Discretionary Compensation for Self-isolation) (Scotland) Bill relates to a protected subject matter, so the bill does not require a supermajority to pass at stage 3.

I invite any member who wishes to participate in the debate to press their request-to-speak button, and I call the cabinet secretary to speak to and move the motion.

15:50

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney): I am pleased to open the final debate on the Coronavirus (Discretionary Compensation for Self-isolation) (Scotland) Bill.

I am grateful to members of Parliament for a constructive and considered stage 1 debate. The COVID-19 Recovery Committee dealt with the bill at stage 2, at which point the Scottish Government lodged three amendments, which addressed all the points raised by the committee and other members and stakeholders at stage 1. No non-Government amendments were lodged at either stage 2 or stage 3.

The first amendment that was lodged at stage 2 introduced a requirement for the Scottish ministers to consult health boards before making regulations that would either prolong the modifications that the bill makes to the Public Health etc (Scotland) Act 2008 or expire them early. The amendment also included a requirement to consult

“such other persons as the Scottish Ministers consider appropriate”

to ensure that important health stakeholders and others with a relevant interest are also informed and able to offer views.

The second, related amendment provided that the consultation obligation does not apply when regulations prolonging the modifications are made urgently, using the made affirmative procedure.

The third amendment related to giving reasons for urgency and using the made affirmative procedure.

In any circumstance in which the modifications to the 2008 act are extended, the Scottish ministers will lay a statement of reasons explaining why we need to keep the modifications in place for a longer period. That requirement was in the bill at introduction.

My third amendment at stage 2 introduced a requirement that, should the made affirmative procedure be used, an explanation of why that procedure was used be included in the statement of reasons. That addresses a number of the points that were raised by various members during stage 1 about ensuring that there is sufficient scrutiny of the regulation-making provisions in the bill. The Government acknowledges the importance of appropriate and detailed scrutiny of all legislation involved in handling a pandemic of the nature and circumstances that we have faced.

The amendments also address the suggestion of the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee that health boards should be consulted before the provisions in the bill are extended or expired early. The Law Society of Scotland also suggested that an explanation for urgent regulations be provided, which has also been addressed.

In the stage 1 debate, various members raised concerns about the availability and, indeed, awareness of self-isolation support. There has been significant take-up of support for isolation. According to the most recent data available, the Scottish Government has processed 63,527 successful applications, each resulting in a £500 payment, through the self-isolation support grant. Self-isolation support services have been used 192,974 times since the start of the pandemic. Support has been promoted to the public in various ways, such as in televised briefings, in Parliament and in public campaigns. There is also comprehensive advice on self-isolation and the support available on the Scottish Government website. I have personal experience of receiving text messages from the local authority as a contact of someone who tested positive. There is direct use of technology so that we can ensure that individuals are aware of the importance of access to self-isolation support grants.

We have also undertaken significant research into compliance with self-isolation guidance, and we are keeping the messaging around availability of self-isolation support under review. Should we need to expand or raise public awareness of the support, we will not hesitate to do so, as we recognise the importance of self-isolation support in interrupting the circulation of the virus.

As I set out in the stage 1 debate, the bill prolongs the modification to the Public Health etc (Scotland) Act 2008 that was made by the United Kingdom Coronavirus Act 2020. The 2008 act places an obligation on health boards to compensate people who are notified to isolate as a result of their having an infectious disease. That obligation was changed by the UK act to become a discretionary power. The bill prolongs that change, with respect to Covid-19 isolation only, until October 2022. The Scottish ministers are given a power to extend that change for a longer period by regulations, which would require an affirmative vote of this Parliament, or to expire the provisions early.

The Scottish ministers would have to consult health boards prior to making regulations to change the expiry date, and if an extension of the change was required, they would have to set out their reasons for making it in a statement laid before Parliament. If there were urgent or emergency circumstances that required the change to be extended, the Scottish ministers could extend it by regulations under the made affirmative procedure, setting out the reasons for that urgency to Parliament.

I invite members to consider what would happen if Parliament were not to pass the bill today. It may be a short and technical bill, but it is nevertheless one with important consequences. Should the bill not be passed, the 2008 act duty would be reinstated by virtue of the expiry of the UK Coronavirus Act 2020. Every person who was asked to self-isolate would be able to claim full compensation for that isolation period. Even if case numbers were to reduce, that would come at a significant cost to health boards.

It is clear that the 2008 act was never intended to provide financial support to the very large numbers of people who have been, and continue to be, asked to isolate because of Covid-19. The Scottish Government's indicative analysis demonstrates that that could cost as much as £320 million a year. At a time when significant resources have been put into our pandemic response, that would not be an efficient use of public funds.

In addition, at a time when they are trying to reduce the backlogs in care that have been caused by the pandemic, health boards would have to find the staff and resources to process applications for compensation.

I am grateful to Parliament for its consideration of the bill. As a result of that consideration, the Scottish Government submitted amendments that improved the bill. If Parliament passes the bill today, we can make sure that health boards are protected from significant financial and administrative burdens, and can focus on

providing essential care. As that is such a vital part of our work as we build our recovery from Covid, I hope that Parliament will feel able to support the bill.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that the Coronavirus (Discretionary Compensation for Self-isolation) (Scotland) Bill be passed.

15:57

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I place on record my thanks to the COVID-19 Recovery Committee, those who gave evidence, the bill team and the Deputy First Minister for getting us to this stage.

Scottish Labour will support the bill at stage 3. As I said during the stage 1 debate, I understand and agree with the need for the bill. It is important that legislation is passed to ensure that help continues to go to the people who are most in need of it. I understand that failing to continue with the temporary modifications could have crippling financial implications for our health boards at a time when they are already struggling. There is a great deal of cross-party consensus on the need for the bill.

Scottish Labour's reasoned amendment is about ensuring that the self-isolation grant is at an appropriate level to support people, given what we know about the cost of living crisis.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Could the member explain the figure referred to in her amendment? The £500 would be 50 hours at £10 an hour.

Jackie Baillie: If Mr Mason will let me develop the point, he will see where we got the calculations from.

Scottish Labour's reasoned amendment is a recognition that the financial implications of the pandemic have been devastating for families and businesses, and that having to self-isolate instead of going to work and earning a salary would have been a very difficult and worrying prospect for many people, not least those who have a family to support. That is even more the case in the context of the worst cost of living crisis in my memory. That is why the self-isolation support grants are welcome and very much needed if people are to comply with the stay-at-home rules.

However, it is no good having the grants if they are not getting into the pockets of those who need them the most. The latest figures show that fewer than half the people who applied for the grant were successful in their applications.

During the stage 1 debate, MSPs across the chamber told their own stories of people who had

been in touch to say that they were unaware that the grants existed, or that the process for applying was lengthy and complicated, with many feeling that they had no choice but to abandon their applications.

I acknowledge the Deputy First Minister's comments about public awareness, but we should do as much as we can to better advertise the details and eligibility criteria to ensure that as many people as possible get the help that they need.

In addition to the fact that the grants do not always get into the pockets of everyone who is eligible, worryingly, even when grants are paid out, there is not always as much financial help as there could be. The grant is currently capped at £500, which means that workers who usually work full time on the national living wage would come out of a 10-day self-isolation period out of pocket, despite their being successful in their grant application. Scottish Labour believes that there should be an increase in the amount paid out through the self-isolation grant so that it at least matches the living wage of £9.50 per hour from April. That will ensure that people who are low paid are not left worse off because they followed the rules. I hope that the Deputy First Minister will accept the amendment and recognise that the request to review the amount is not unreasonable.

Only last week in the chamber, we all agreed that we are living in the midst of a cost of living crisis of an unprecedented scale. We know all too well that energy prices are skyrocketing. People will be paying £700 more for their energy, at a time when Shell and BP announced eye-watering profits that equate to a profit of £44,710 every single minute.

The cost of the weekly food shop is going up, inflation is rising, interest rates are going up and national insurance will increase by 10 per cent in April. It is undoubtedly the case that, whether we like it or not, the value of the self-isolation grant is being eroded. The £500 grant was agreed almost two years ago. Although it was and remains undoubtedly helpful, given what we now know about household expenses increasing exponentially, we should act to reflect those new realities.

The self-isolation grant provides the incentive that is needed for people to stay at home and protect public health when they are infected with Covid-19. It is our job to ensure that no one is left at a financial disadvantage, especially when they are acting in the public interest. I note that the United Kingdom Government appears to be set to scrap self-isolation. I would be grateful for the Deputy First Minister's view on that, and on the implications for the Scottish Government's approach.

I will also raise a practical problem with implementation. At stage 1, I spoke about the delays that my constituents experienced in receiving funds—one waited as long as 11 weeks to receive the funds that they needed immediately to avoid financial hardship. I understand that local authorities make the payments, and I thank all those who are working so hard to process the grants. However, they did not have adequate resources to respond quickly, especially when significant numbers of applications came in.

In my local area of West Dunbartonshire, a total of £718,500 was paid out between October 2020 and November 2021. However, more than half of that was paid out to successful applicants in October 2021 alone. There was a clear backlog in applications. For the future, it is critical to ensure that local authorities build in that surge capacity.

I reiterate my support for the bill, and ask the Deputy First Minister and the chamber to support the very reasonable amendment in my name to make sure that grant payments keep pace with the cost of living.

I move amendment S6M-03080.1, to insert at end:

“, and, in so doing, calls on the Scottish Government to review the amount paid in the self-isolation grant to ensure that it at least matches the National Living Wage.”

16:03

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I remind members of my entry in the register of members' interests, which states that I am a member of the Law Society of Scotland.

This is the final point in the legislative process for what has been an uncontroversial—at least, so far—if important piece of legislation. Like others, I put on record my thanks to all those who assisted in the legislative process, particularly the clerks and advisers to the COVID-19 Recovery Committee, all those who gave evidence to the committee in relation to our scrutiny of the bill, and the Scottish Government for its co-operation in relation to the way that the bill was handled at stage 2.

As we have heard, the bill is necessary because without it there will be a substantial burden on the public purse. Under the Public Health etc (Scotland) Act 2008, there is a duty on health boards to provide compensation to any person who has been quarantined because of an infectious disease. A global pandemic such as Covid-19 was not in anticipation when that law was passed, and given the large numbers who have had to self-isolate following Covid infection, there would be a substantial financial burden if the measures in the 2008 act continued to apply. The bill before us is estimated to save £380 million in

the financial year 2021-22, and it is therefore important to protecting national health service resources.

In the stage 1 debate a few weeks ago, I outlined some of the evidence that the COVID-19 Recovery Committee heard on access to the self-isolation support grant. There were concerns that there was not enough publicity around how the grant could be accessed, and there was concern among some applicants that their benefits might be affected if they were to apply for it. In her speech, Jackie Baillie referenced other issues about people facing substantial delays in accessing the sums that are required. Those are on-going issues, but we hope that, with the incidence of Covid swiftly reducing and, with it, the need for self-isolation, there will be less demand for the support grant in future months and those issues will no longer be so prevalent.

Jackie Baillie introduced a reasoned amendment to the motion, proposing that the sums paid should match the national living wage of £9.50. I have some sympathy for the position that she outlined; I think that she made a reasonable case. I am concerned, however, about the timing of the introduction of the measure—in the final debate on the bill. Jackie Baillie should have raised the issue in the stage 1 debate, or she could have lodged an amendment at stage 2. She did neither, and I am curious as to why. No doubt she will explain why she has left it until the very last moment to raise this important topic.

Jackie Baillie: I am sure that the member would agree that, as the cost of living crisis is laid bare, it is absolutely right for us to consider and keep under review the amount that is paid in the self-isolation grant. He would recognise that the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets' lifting of the energy price cap by £700 is a new and significant thing that we should take into consideration.

Murdo Fraser: I hear what Jackie Baillie says. Of course, she could have introduced an amendment at stage 3 to implement the change, instead of lodging a reasoned amendment to the motion.

I listened with great interest to Jackie Baillie's explanation of costings. Mr Mason intervened to seek some clarity on that, but I am not sure that we quite got an answer to that particular question. Perhaps if Jackie Baillie is contributing later, she might take us through her calculations in more detail on how much the proposal might cost.

John Mason: I was doing some calculations on a bit of paper myself. I reckon that, if someone was self-isolating for 10 days, with two days for a weekend, they would otherwise have been working on eight days. That is 56 hours, so they

would get £560 under Jackie Baillie's scheme, instead of £500.

Murdo Fraser: Mr Mason is, of course, an accountant. I bow to his mastery of the figures at such short notice. I am sure that Ms Baillie will have the chance to respond to that in due course.

I will move on to other matters. When we took evidence, the Law Society of Scotland raised one issue in relation to the bill. It asked that a statement of reasons be provided by the Scottish Government when making regulations under section 3. I referred to that in the stage 1 debate and it was covered in the committee's report. The point was accepted by the Scottish Government, and an amendment was lodged by the cabinet secretary at stage 2 to implement the change, which was a welcome concession by the Scottish Government.

Deputy—sorry, Presiding Officer. You have appeared—I was about to demote you.

There is very little more to say about the bill. We look forward to its becoming law in due course. I suspect that the next piece of Covid-19 legislation that will come before us—the Coronavirus (Recovery and Reform) (Scotland) Bill—might not enjoy such a smooth and uncontroversial parliamentary passage as the one that is before us just now, but that is a matter for another day. In the meantime, we are pleased to support the bill at stage 3.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): We move to the open debate.

16:09

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak, Presiding Officer. I fear that there will be a bit of repetition from the stage 1 debate, given that little has changed in the time since then. Stage 2 amendments were minimal, as the Deputy First Minister said, and were completely accepted by all members of the COVID-19 Recovery Committee, including me.

However, despite the general consensus on the bill and the lack of controversy, I argue that this is an important bill and not just a technical one, as some members have suggested. If we do not pass the bill, the NHS will face additional costs of some £360 million, which is a substantial amount, and it is clear that other services will suffer.

The background to the bill was explained at stage 1 and has been explained again today. The bill deals with Covid-19; it does not provide for the blanket modification of the 2008 act that was the approach of the United Kingdom legislation that we are replacing. Therefore, if someone has to self-isolate because of an infectious disease other

than Covid, they will become entitled to the full compensation regime.

An issue that I mentioned previously but which I think is worth repeating is the difference between the number of people who said that they followed the self-isolation rules and the number who self-isolated properly when they were told to do so. It is reckoned that 94 per cent claimed to have followed the rules, but when that was studied in more detail it was found that only 74 per cent actually did so. In particular, the Government's detailed literature review indicated that there were lower rates of compliance among men, people in younger age groups, key workers, people from poorer backgrounds and people who had a dependent child in the household. The reviewers said:

"Rates of compliance are heavily influenced by financial constraints and depend on income support, job protection and support with accommodation. The economic risks of self-isolating are often perceived as more significant than risks to health, particularly for people from more disadvantaged backgrounds."

One factor in that regard is almost certainly the availability and level of compensation. For many people on low incomes, being off work for even a few days is a serious step, and some employers are more supportive than others.

Some people did not know about the compensation that was available, as Jackie Baillie and others said, while others thought that it would impact on their benefits. Some people found it difficult to access compensation and appear to have been knocked back without the reasons for that being made clear.

The level of compensation needs to be carefully considered. The Labour amendment touches on that, although the level of compensation is not part of the bill. As I said during an intervention, I think that £500 is a reasonable amount, equating to 50 hours at £10 per hour or 35 hours at £14 per hour, and I understand that the Labour amendment would mean roughly £560 for many people. If that is the case, I can certainly live with the approach that Labour proposes.

However, households' essential weekly expenditure varies considerably. For future pandemics, a Government might want to look at tailoring support according to need, although we know from experience over the past two years that the more targeted the support is to be, the longer it takes to design the system and make the payments.

The Law Society had pointed out that there was no definition of "emergency", and said that the Government should be proactive in setting out why regulations need to be made urgently, so I am

glad that the Government took that point on at stage 2 and lodged an appropriate amendment.

Overall, I am happy to support the bill. Full compensation for everyone in the country who has suffered loss because of self-isolation or other aspects of the pandemic has not been and is not affordable or possible, so a more limited and targeted support scheme has been required. The bill seeks to continue that approach.

16:13

Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of members' interests, which states that I am a practising NHS general practitioner.

The past two years have been incredibly difficult for our country. Covid has been the most challenging test that many of us have experienced when it comes to our public services, our economy and our way of life. At times, it has been all consuming and we have all questioned whether a full return to normality would ever be possible.

However, the situation that we face today is, in all likelihood, the most optimistic since the pandemic began. More than 3.3 million Scots have received their booster jab, and, although the dominant omicron variant is more transmissible, it is proving to be less severe than other strains of the virus. I am sure that all members are pleased and relieved that the Scottish Government forecasts of the likely impact of omicron were way off the mark when set against the reality that we have today.

As we seek to set a strategy that goes beyond Covid, it is timely and important that we start to deal with some of the legislative details that have underpinned our country's response.

The Coronavirus Act 2020 lets health boards decide whether people who are self-isolating because of Covid-19 receive compensation and allows health boards to pay compensation for other reasons. As we know, that provision expires in March 2022. The Coronavirus Act 2020 will apply until 31 October 2022 and the bill allows for the Scottish Government to reduce or extend that period if required.

The Scottish Conservatives are comfortable with the bill. It provides sufficient flexibility for the Government to act if required while putting down a marker that we are moving beyond Covid. I look forward to the Scottish Government presenting its strategy for living with Covid, which I hope we will be able to see before March.

As members may be aware, the Scottish Conservatives have already published our plan as part of the cross-party consultation strategy. We seek a progressive and ambitious change in

direction, to move away from blanket legal restrictions and instead use public health advice to protect vulnerable groups. Just as the bill provides health boards and the Government with a level of flexibility, I believe that we should be open minded and have a rethink about whether we are handling Covid correctly.

That is essential, because restrictions are not without costs. We must balance restrictions against the impact on people's livelihoods and mental and physical health. We must also think about the signals that we give to people and businesses. To pass a law that retains the power for Government to shut down schools and businesses, release prisoners early and force further lockdowns without any scrutiny sends the wrong signal to society and investors. Those who know how corporate investment decisions are taken will understand that that is plain wrong.

If the Green Party members in the Government are true to their principles, they will also find such a law objectionable. Some might even say that this is the thin end of an over-controlling Government's door wedge. It is certainly not the kind of law that I would expect to see in the 21st century.

I congratulate John Swinney and the members of the COVID-19 Recovery Committee on steering the bill, which the Scottish Conservatives will support, through Parliament.

16:16

Paul O'Kane (West Scotland) (Lab): Since March 2020, many have made sacrifices in exchange for the protection of our national health service and our fellow citizens. Taking action such as self-isolating and following the rules has undoubtedly saved lives. However, as well as being a public health crisis, Covid has contributed to an unprecedented economic crisis that is making people choose between heating their home and putting food on the table.

As the immediate threats to public health begin to abate, we must not forget about people on the lowest incomes who, as is too often the case, are suffering the greatest impact. As I heard time and again in the early days of the pandemic, we may all be in the same storm, but we are not always in the same boat. That is why the Scottish Labour Party broadly supports the bill, but we must ensure that it addresses wider issues of inequality and the hardships that are faced by low-paid workers, our creative sector, women, unpaid carers and disabled people.

People in low-income households are already struggling to make ends meet so, without sufficient Government support, having to choose between continuing to work or self-isolating without any income may cause them to forgo public health

advice. The bill is vital in order to combat that in its widest sense. As we heard from Jackie Baillie, Scottish Labour's reasoned amendment calls on the Government to increase the self-isolation support grant to ensure that it at least matches the national living wage, which will rise to £9.50 in April. Matching the national living wage will ensure that support for those who are required to self-isolate is directed to those who need it the most. In doing that, we can ensure that those who are living on the margins do not have to choose between making ends meet and protecting other people.

I am sure that colleagues across the chamber will agree that the national living wage is the bare minimum that Scots should receive. I urge the cabinet secretary to ensure that there is equal access to the grant, so that we can protect as many people as possible. As colleagues have noted, there is a disparity across local authorities in access to that vital support. The rates of approval for self-isolation support grants are as low as 32 per cent and 35 per cent in Moray and North Lanarkshire respectively, whereas in Dumfries and Galloway and Dundee they are above 70 per cent.

It is concerning that the extent of available support is guided by something of a postcode lottery, which demonstrates the need for clear and standardised guidance for local authorities, which are tasked with delivering those grants.

I hope that the cabinet secretary will look into that further and perhaps say something about it in his closing speech, because it is vital that money is getting into people's pockets, no matter where in Scotland they live.

I hope that the cabinet secretary will work towards finding resolutions to the issues that people are experiencing in relation to self-isolation support grant applications—issues that have been raised by me and by other colleagues in the chamber. As long as we continue to call on the Scottish public to do their part in containing the spread of the virus, we, in this Parliament, must also do our part in safeguarding them from falling through the gap and into more financial distress.

16:20

Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): As has been noted by others, the Public Health etc (Scotland) Act 2008 was written long before the Covid pandemic and was not intended to meet the challenges that we have faced over the past two years. The bill therefore serves an essential purpose as it will protect health boards from facing unaffordable self-isolation payments when they are already under immense pressure, and the

Scottish Greens will be pleased to support it at decision time.

As I did in my speech at stage 1, I emphasise the importance of ensuring that sufficient self-isolation support is in place, while recognising that the 2008 act is not the appropriate vehicle for that. In my stage 1 speech, I highlighted concerns raised by Shetland Islands Council about the targeted nature of the support provided by the self-isolation support grant. Its response to the COVID-19 Recovery Committee's call for views highlighted the socioeconomic impact that a failure to review the existing self-isolation support grant scheme would have on people on lower incomes or people in areas with a higher cost of living.

That is an important point. We are two years into the pandemic and the cost of living is rising. Soaring energy prices, the cut to universal credit and the rise in national insurance are creating a perfect storm, and there will be severe consequences for people across Scotland. Many people and their families are not in the financial position that they were in in March 2020. Although I recognise that the 2008 act is not the appropriate means of providing financial support for those who are self-isolating, support must be on-going and should be reviewed regularly to ensure that it continues to be adequate.

We must recognise that, as rising costs hit people's incomes, it will become harder and harder for them to self-isolate without support. The Scottish Greens have consistently called for comprehensive financial and practical support for people who are self-isolating. We are clear that there are financial and practical barriers to self-isolation, and that addressing those will help to boost compliance. That need will become more pressing as the cost of living crisis continues to unfold.

Jackie Baillie: Gillian Mackay said that it was appropriate, given the cost of living crisis, to regularly review the amount paid. Does that mean that she will be supporting our reasoned amendment at decision time?

Gillian Mackay: I thought that that would be Jackie Baillie's question. Yes, I will be supporting the amendment.

Alongside ensuring that adequate support is available, we must also publicise it, so that people know what they are entitled to. As I highlighted during the stage 1 debate, the Scottish Women's Convention said in its submission:

"Of ... the women we spoke to, none of them had successfully accessed the Self-Isolation Support Grant or the Local Self-Isolation Assistance Service."

Many women said that they had not heard of the scheme, and those who had heard of it did not think that they would be eligible. They also said:

“the application process can be daunting and confusing.”

That must be addressed urgently so that people can access the support that they are entitled to.

We know that the bill is a starting point. It aims to address a very specific issue and further pandemic-related legislation is undoubtedly needed. Like many other countries, we were unprepared for a global pandemic. We did not have appropriate legislation in place to help us to respond to that unprecedented situation. We must learn from this experience and ensure that we are better prepared in future. The Law Society of Scotland has recommended revision of

“the whole vista of emergency legislation”

as well as

“a law for emergencies ... that ... is flexible enough to meet every contingency.”—[*Official Report, COVID-19 Recovery Committee*, 2 December 2021; c 10.]

That is important work, which the Parliament must undertake. As hard as it may be to look to the next pandemic, given that we are still facing daily challenges related to Covid, we must take the learning from the past two years and ensure that we are better able to respond in future—wherever possible, without the need for emergency legislation.

Once again, I thank the public for self-isolating and for all the sacrifices that they have made to keep others safe.

The Presiding Officer: I call Siobhian Brown, who is the last speaker in the open debate.

16:24

Siobhian Brown (Ayr) (SNP): As convener of the COVID-19 Recovery Committee, I thank my fellow committee members and our highly professional clerking team for their work as we considered and scrutinised this bill through its different stages.

As we know, when the Public Health etc (Scotland) Act 2008 was introduced, the global Covid crisis, which we have been battling since March 2020, was not a consideration. The 2008 act simply put a duty on health boards to compensate any employee who was asked to isolate or quarantine. Given the magnitude of the pandemic and the need for so many to self-isolate at different stages, in response to different variants, it would not be reasonable to expect health boards to financially compensate workers throughout the crisis. The Coronavirus (Discretionary Compensation for Self-isolation) (Scotland) Bill allows payment to those who need it most, if they need to self-isolate. Workers should not experience financial hardship as a result of doing the right thing.

In the stage 1 debate, there was general broad support across the Parliament for the principles of the bill to be extended. The debate highlighted a number of key considerations, one of which was the level of scrutiny that is afforded when the made affirmative procedure is used. Other issues that were highlighted were awareness of the support that is available for self-isolation and the recognition of the importance of consulting health boards before implementing the measures that are set out in the bill.

The COVID-19 Recovery Committee made a recommendation in paragraph 68 of its stage 1 report that the Scottish Government should

“produce a statement of reasons”

when making emergency regulations.

The Scottish Government responded positively to that recommendation and, at stage 2, brought forward amendment 3, which improves the Scottish Government’s accountability under the bill. We thank the Scottish ministers for making that improvement to the bill—I note that the Law Society of Scotland also commended that amendment.

Our committee took evidence from the Scottish Women’s Convention, which sent out a consultation to more than 4,000 women. Only 100 women responded, and none of them had successfully accessed a self-isolation grant or local self-isolation assistance services. Those figures were from the very early days of the payment; I am aware that there has been an improvement in promoting the self-isolation grant, and most people who receive a positive test result on their mobile phone are quickly sent a link to apply for the self-isolation grant. I appreciate that not everybody has a mobile phone, and there will be groups that are difficult to access. The committee also urged the Government to consider how best to increase public awareness of the support that is available to people who are asked to self-isolate.

I am pleased that the Scottish Government’s response confirmed that those issues will be kept under regular review and that it will continue to review its public communications on self-isolation support. I welcome the fact that the Scottish Government has listened and considered the issues that were raised at stage 1, and I welcome its amendments 1 to 3 at stage 2 last week.

I believe that, as we emerge from the pandemic, reform is needed to the 2008 act to ensure that permanent support is in place in the event of another pandemic. No country worldwide has had a solid, foolproof, mistake-free guidebook on how to get a country through a pandemic, so lessons must be learned and measures put in place, in

order that we are never again in the position in which the world found itself in March 2020.

I will support the bill at stage 3, as the Scottish Government continues to put measures in place to support people who need to self-isolate but not financially burden our health boards, while we continue to navigate our way out of the pandemic.

16:28

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): In closing the debate for Scottish Labour, and in expressing our support for the principles and intentions of the bill, I encourage Parliament to support Scottish Labour's reasoned amendment, which Jackie Baillie set out and put correctly in the context of the cost of living crisis. I also note the mathematics that went on in the chamber while we did that. I thank Mr Mason for that, and I thank the Greens for clarifying that they will support that reasoned amendment.

As we have all said, the Covid-19 pandemic has had implications that we could never have imagined 22 months ago, when the initial restrictions were introduced. As a result, it requires an unprecedented response, which must be targeted at those who have been hardest hit and those who are most vulnerable, as we continue to move forward from the pandemic. Everybody has recognised that point.

We know how important self-isolation has been during the pandemic. It has served to stop the spread of the virus and to protect the most vulnerable, and, ultimately, it has saved many lives. However, we also know that there are significant downsides from a health perspective, such as the impact that isolation can have on an individual's mental health, and from an economic viewpoint for the thousands of Scots for whom working from home is simply not an option. The loss of income that comes with self-isolation can be, and has been, devastating for many individuals and their families.

In cases where isolation has been as long as 10 days, for some, that has represented 10 days without pay, followed by real worry and concern about whether they will be able to put food on the table and serious difficulty in paying bills. Those worries have only increased amidst the cost of living crisis.

The pandemic has had impacts that go far beyond public health: it has impacted people's lives, it has left them out of pocket and it has brought further uncertainty to those who were already struggling to get by. As we have all spoken about in the chamber, the self-isolation compensation payment is absolutely required to assist those individuals. It has been valuable to hear everyone come together on that point.

Indeed, if the Parliament backs Scottish Labour's amendment, we can not only agree to the bill but make a commitment to delivering a payment that matches the national living wage for those who have lost income due to self-isolation. That will reduce the likelihood of that compensation payment still equating to a loss for those individuals. That is an important point.

However, as was mentioned by my colleague Jackie Baillie and others during the stage 1 debate and again at other stages, it is crucial that those payments are made in a timely fashion and that they get to people's pockets straight away. It is welcome that the Scottish Government is supporting the extension of provision for Covid-19 self-isolation, as we know only too well the crippling financial impact that not doing so would have on our health boards, which are already under significant pressure due to the demands that have been placed on them by the pandemic.

While our thanks go to all those who are helping with the processing of payments, in many cases, people cannot wait lengthy periods of time to receive them. As has been mentioned, the experience has been mixed. We heard from Paul O'Kane that some local authorities seem to have done better than others in processing the payments. It is important that we get those payments to people as timeously as we can.

That brings me to another concern that was raised at stage 1 regarding public awareness of the compensation fund and its uptake among low-income families and other population groups.

It is important that we get that information out to people—I acknowledge that the Deputy First Minister referred to that point. He also said that significant uptake has continued and that the Government will continue to push the message and ensure that it gets the promotional material out there. We must use targeted social media messaging and other methods to do that. Only by doing so will we make the choice to self-isolate more comfortable for those who might have feared previously that self-isolating would lead to significant financial difficulty.

I reiterate my party's support for the bill, and I encourage members to vote in favour of the reasoned amendment in the name of Jackie Baillie, which will ensure that the payment does not fall short for individuals, and that, importantly, it meets the national living wage.

It is right that we introduce this separate legislation to help the most impacted during the most unpredictable of times. People should not be punished for following the rules and keeping themselves and others safe.

We will continue to hold the Scottish Government to account in its delivery of the

legislation and ensure that it supports those who have suffered financially due to self-isolation, that it increases uptake and that it offers support to those who are processing payments.

I thank all members who have spoken in the debate. I hope that we will pass the bill.

16:34

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I am happy to close the stage 3 debate on the Coronavirus (Discretionary Compensation for Self-isolation) (Scotland) Bill on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives.

As has been mentioned by other members, the legislation, although important, has largely been uncontroversial as it has passed through its various stages. Presiding Officer, you will be pleased to hear that I do not intend to take up much of the chamber's time.

John Swinney: Hear, hear.

Brian Whittle: Thank you. That was a welcome intervention from the cabinet secretary.

I put on record my thanks to all those who have helped with the process, particularly the clerks and advisers on the COVID-19 Recovery Committee and those who gave evidence to the committee at stage 1.

As Murdo Fraser pointed out, without the bill, the financial implication for health boards would have been significant—some estimated it to be £380 million in 2021-22—because they have a duty under the Public Health etc (Scotland) Act 2008 to compensate those who have had to quarantine because of an infectious disease. The law was not set up to deal with a global pandemic such as the one that we have been living with over the past two years, as the cabinet secretary highlighted in his opening remarks.

At stage 1, there was concern about the publicity of and access to the self-isolation support grant. We heard in committee of instances in which those who should have been eligible for the grant did not realise that they were eligible. I noted at the time the cabinet secretary's recognition of that issue, and he suggested that the Scottish Government would look at ways of ensuring that the grant reaches those it is targeted to help.

I also note that the Law Society of Scotland's request that a statement of reasons be provided by the Scottish Government when it makes regulations under section 3 of the bill was accepted by the cabinet secretary at stage 2.

Jackie Baillie's late amendment gave us something to consider, although I must say that it is rather unusual for an amendment to be lodged and accepted for consideration at this late stage of

the bill when it has not even been discussed and scrutinised at stage 2.

Jackie Baillie: I am sure that the member recognises that that is entirely in the gift of the Presiding Officer. I am sure that he does not intend to challenge her ruling. Would he also like to reflect on the fact that it would be inappropriate to amend the bill itself? A reasoned amendment provides more flexibility. My amendment is not prescriptive; it asks the Scottish Government to carry out a review.

I hope that Brian Whittle and his party will not be alone and might just find it in their hearts to pass the reasoned amendment.

Brian Whittle: We are a very reasoned party, as Jackie Baillie is well aware. Of course, I would never criticise the Presiding Officer—I would never do that. However, I suggest to Jackie Baillie that she could have raised the matter at stage 1 or stage 2. The issue for me is that introducing the amendment at stage 3 does not allow appropriate parliamentary time to properly scrutinise its implications, which makes it difficult for us to consider. I do not think that that is the way to create good legislation.

I want to highlight Sandesh Gulhane's contribution, in which he discussed living with Covid, which is an issue that the COVID-19 Recovery Committee has wrestled with. One of the key points in his speech was that restrictions are not without cost and there is a need to balance restrictions against the impact that they have on people's livelihoods and on their mental and physical health. One of the most interesting things that he mentioned was the signals that we give to people and to businesses. He said that passing a law that retains the power for Government to shut down schools and businesses, release prisoners early and force another lockdown without any scrutiny sends the wrong signal.

As Murdo Fraser has suggested, the Coronavirus (Recovery and Reform) (Scotland) Bill might not be afforded the same easy passage as the Coronavirus (Discretionary Compensation for Self-isolation) (Scotland) Bill. That said, the Scottish Conservatives will support the bill today, and we look forward to its becoming law.

16:38

John Swinney: I am delighted to have the opportunity to close the debate. I will address the one and only discordant issue first, before I get on to my usual generous way of drawing such matters to a close.

The discordant note is the Conservatives' persistent line of argument warning me of the troublesome journey of the Coronavirus (Recovery

and Reform) (Scotland) Bill, which is before Parliament. Of course, that is not the subject of today's debate, so I hope that the Presiding Officer will allow me one moment to continue. I always follow the direction of the Presiding Officer, unlike Mr Whittle.

One of the issues—the point was made by the convener of the COVID-19 Recovery Committee, Siobhian Brown, and Mr Mason has made it repeatedly in earlier debates—is that we must have a statute book that is appropriate to deal with the circumstances that we face. Siobhian Brown made the point that, in 2020, we did not have a statute book that was capable of allowing us to take the measures that we had to take to address the impact of the pandemic. We did not have the power to undertake the closure of educational facilities that was required in March 2020—that is beyond dispute.

The point of the legislation that I am bringing to Parliament is to enable Parliament to have a statute book that is fit for purpose when there are utterly exceptional circumstances. I hope that the Conservative members will engage constructively on that point. This is, perhaps, the start of either the constructive engagement or the dogged opposition of the Conservative Party.

Brian Whittle: In a reasonable way, I gently suggest to the cabinet secretary that the issue that we have with the upcoming legislation is the fact that, as we exit the other side of Covid, what is going on the statute books is not reasonable, and it is not outwith the Government's ability to bring emergency legislation back into Parliament if it is needed. We do not need it on the statute books any more.

John Swinney: That is an issue that we will have to chew over in the bill process—whether we should have a statute book that can deal with emergencies. The Conservatives could quite easily muster up an argument to say, “Oh my goodness, you have been sitting in government for 15 years and have not yet got the statute book ready for emergency situations.” They could put forward that argument, and I would not put it past them to do so. We will leave that argument there and come back to pursue it on another, unhappy day.

In relation to the bill, I welcome the comments that colleagues have made. A number of colleagues have made points about the importance of ensuring that the self-isolation grant is available to people who require it. I have put on record the steps that we have taken to improve awareness of it. We will continue to do that, because it is vital that individuals receive the support that is necessary.

Jackie Baillie asked me about the United Kingdom Government's decisions—well, not even decisions, but statements that were made by the Prime Minister earlier today about the removal of any requirement for self-isolation. I will just say to her that I have no clinical advice that would suggest to me that that is a good idea on the timescale that is presented. I shall leave it to Jackie Baillie to judge whether that announcement at Prime Minister's questions had anything to do with clinical judgment or whether it had more to do with the survivability in office of the current Prime Minister. I think that that is no way to take decisions on an important question of that type.

Moving on to the debate, I confirm that the Government will support the reasoned amendment that Jackie Baillie has moved. However, I want to say a couple of things about it.

First, the Government's approach to self-isolation support has been very mindful of the importance of ensuring that the self-isolation support grant delivers the national living wage. Obviously, we are putting a different obligation on people for the duration of self-isolation now than we did at earlier stages of the pandemic. The requirement today would be for individuals to self-isolate for seven days and then, with satisfactory clearance from lateral flow tests, to return to work. With £500, they would receive a sum of money that is in excess of the national living wage. That is obviously different from where we started. I accept the terms of the amendment, which asks the Government to review the amount that is paid. We will do that. Our objective is to ensure that that amount at least matches the national living wage, and that has been our position throughout the pandemic.

My second point about the reasoned amendment is that I hope that I do not find myself in the situation, which only a handful of us in Parliament will recall—Liz Smith will recall it—that occurred on the occasion of my first budget to the Parliament, in 2007 or 2008, when I accepted a reasoned amendment from the Labour Party at the conclusion of the stage 3 debate and the Labour Party proceeded to vote against the budget and its reasoned amendment. A few of us have been here long enough to remember that; my dear friend Christine Grahame was here, and she remembers it as well. I hope that I do not find myself in that situation at decision time and find that, after I have generously accepted the reasoned amendment, the Labour Party does the unthinkable on me and does not support the bill.

This is a very practical bill. It is designed to protect the finances of our health boards but also to put in place the support that is required by members of the public who we ask to self-isolate. I

invite Parliament to support the bill, along with the reasoned amendment at decision time.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate.

Members' Expenses Scheme

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-03100, in the name of Maggie Chapman, on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, entitled "Reimbursement of Members' Expenses Scheme—Local Offices".

16:45

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): I will give members a brief explanation of the motion. The reimbursement of members' expenses scheme requires that regional members for a party in any region share an office. In this session, circumstances have arisen whereby some regional members have chosen not to have a local office, which has impacted on the ability of the remaining regional members from that party to secure a local office within their pooled office-cost provision limits.

At our meeting on 2 December last year, the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body considered options around supporting regional members who find themselves in such circumstances through no choice of their own. We agreed that the calculations for the allocation of office-cost provision for regional members would remain as they are. However, where a regional member or members find themselves with reduced funds due to a decision of one or more members not to participate, a recalculation process would be introduced and the scheme amended accordingly.

Changes to the reimbursement of the members' expenses scheme require agreement by Parliament. Therefore, on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, I move,

That the Parliament, in exercise of the powers conferred by sections 81(2) and (5)(b) and 83(5) of the Scotland Act 1998, determines that the Reimbursement of Members' Expenses Scheme, which was agreed to by resolution of the Parliament on 2 March 2021, be amended to:

(a) in paragraph 4.3.5, delete "the" where it appears at the beginning of the fourth line and delete "members concerned" in that same line and insert instead "those members who establish a local parliamentary office";

(b) delete "When" at the beginning of paragraph 4.3.6 and insert instead "Subject to paragraphs 4.3.9 and 4.3.10, when";

(c) insert after paragraph 4.3.8:

"4.3.9 Where one or more regional members, returned from a registered political party's regional list, do not establish and run a local office the limit of entitlement to office cost provision of those members remaining who do establish and run a local office, in the circumstances set out in paragraphs 4.3.4 to 4.3.7, will be recalculated as though the member or members who do not establish an office had not been returned on that registered political party's regional list.

Number of Regional Members originally returned on regional list

2
3
4
3
4
4

Number of Members not establishing a local office

1
1
1
2
2
3

Number of Regional Members recalculations subsequently based on

1
2
3
1
2
1

4.3.10 Should a member, who has previously not established a local office, decide at any subsequent point to establish a local office then all of those members returned from a registered political party's regional list who establish a local office will require to share a local office as set out in paragraphs 4.3.4 to 4.3.7 and those members' entitlement to office cost provision will be recalculated in accordance with paragraph 4.3.9 from the point of establishing that shared office.”;

(d) renumber paragraphs currently numbered as 4.3.9 to 4.3.13 to paragraphs 4.3.11 to 4.3.15 and amend any references to those paragraphs to take account of the number change accordingly; and

(e) insert after paragraph 4.4.1:

“4.4.2 The above calculation will be based on the number of members originally returned on the regional list for the political party, taking no account of any change made to calculations for those members who do establish and run a local office as set out in paragraphs 4.3.9 and 4.3.10.”

Standing Order Rule Changes

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-03030, in the name of Martin Whitfield on behalf of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee, entitled “Standing Order Rule Changes—Committee Name and Remit and Miscellaneous Changes”.

16:46

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak to the motion, which is in my and Bob Doris's names. For members who have been unable to digest the third report this year of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee, let me give a short synopsis as to why supporting the motion would be beneficial. To draw on the Deputy First Minister's speech earlier, I say that we need standing orders that are fit for purpose.

The committee's report proposes an extension to temporary rule 4, which relates to the remit of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee, as well as a number of other miscellaneous changes. The remit of the previous committee was altered in session 5, and that would naturally have come to an end, if not for the extension. We were approached by the convener of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee to ask for the extension to be continued throughout session 6 so that, in principle, the committee can mirror the appropriate minister and cabinet secretary, as is its duty and obligation. We propose a temporary change for the remaining period of this session so that the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee can properly carry out its work and scrutinise the Scottish Government.

The other amendments are a group of miscellaneous changes to bring the standing orders back into a fit and proper state. They have been occasioned by some drafting errors, errors in sections and changes relating to removal of certain statutes.

I hope that, throughout this session of Parliament, I will continue to entertain members with various amendments to the standing orders. So that we can have full and proper debate, and so that we can have fit and proper standing orders for the Parliament, I urge members to digest our eloquent reports, for which I thank the clerks and my fellow members of the committee.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee's 3rd Report 2022 (Session 6), *Standing Order Rule Changes – Committee name and remit and miscellaneous changes (SP Paper*

96), and agrees that the changes to Standing Orders set out in Annexe A of the report be made with effect from 11 February 2022.

Business Motion

16:48

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-03144, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 22 February 2022

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

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

followed by Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee Debate: Inquiry into the Use of the Made Affirmative Procedure During the Coronavirus Pandemic

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Nationality and Borders Bill (UK Legislation)

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 23 February 2022

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
Justice and Veterans;
Finance and Economy

followed by Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.10 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 24 February 2022

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
Education and Skills

followed by Net Zero, Energy and Transport

Committee Debate: COP26 - Outcomes and Implications for Scotland's Climate Change Policies

Officer considers that the questions are on the same or similar subject matter or" are inserted.—[George Adam]

Motion agreed to.

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 1 March 2022

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

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

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 2 March 2022

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
Covid Recovery and Parliamentary Business; Net Zero, Energy and Transport

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2022

followed by Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee Debate: Internal Market Inquiry

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.40 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 3 March 2022

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:
Rural Affairs and Islands

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 21 February 2022, in rule 13.7.3, after the word "except" the words "to the extent to which the Presiding

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

16:49

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of 11 Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motions S6M-03145 to S6M-03150, on the approval of Scottish statutory instruments; motion S6M-03151, on committee meeting times; motions S6M-03152 and S6M-03153, on the designation of a lead committee; motion S6M-03154, on the suspension and variation of standing orders; and motion S6M-03155, on temporary amendments to standing orders.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Requirements) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 2) Regulations 2022 (SSI 2022/13) be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (International Travel and Operator Liability) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 2) Regulations 2022 (SSI 2022/25) be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Requirements) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 3) Regulations 2022 (SSI 2022/29) be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Disability Assistance for Working Age People (Scotland) Regulations 2022 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Registers of Scotland (Digital Registration, etc.) Regulations 2022 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Social Security Information-sharing (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2022 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that, under Rule 12.3.3B of Standing Orders, the Finance and Public Administration Committee can meet, if necessary, at the same time as a meeting of the Parliament between 12.45 pm and 2.30 pm on Thursday 24 February 2022.

That the Parliament agrees that the Social Justice and Social Security Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the legislative consent memorandum in relation to the Nationality and Borders Bill (UK Legislation).

That the Parliament agrees that the Criminal Justice Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Fireworks and Pyrotechnic Articles (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

That the Parliament agrees that, with effect from 11 February 2022, for the purposes of committee meetings up to 1 April 2022—

(a) in Rule 6.3A.1 after “member” the words “or members” be inserted;

(b) Rule 6.3A.2 be suspended;

(c) in Rule 6.3A.4 the first sentence be suspended;

(d) after Rule 6.3A.5(d) be inserted “(e) a political party withdraws in writing to the Bureau that nomination of the

member or members nominated for the purposes of committee meetings up to 1 April 2022.”; and

(e) in Rule 12.1.15 the words “(other than a committee substitute)” be omitted in both instances where they occur.

That the Parliament agrees that, with effect from 11 February 2022, Temporary Standing Orders Rule 3 be amended—

(a) in paragraph 1 to delete “11 February 2022” and insert “1 April 2022, except to the extent determined by the Presiding Officer, having regard to relevant legislation and public health guidance. Such determinations shall be notified in the Business Bulletin”; and

(b) to delete paragraph 2.—[*George Adam*]

The Presiding Officer: I call Pam Duncan-Glancy.

16:50

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): I will not press motion S6M-013148 to a vote, but I want to put some comments on the record. The regulations that are in front of us today will not change some of the fundamental issues that exist with the current system of adult disability payment, such as who is eligible and how much people are eligible for. The regulations do not address problems with descriptors; they replicate the personal independence payment rules. Most disappointing of all, they miss an opportunity to properly address disabled people’s poverty.

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): Does the member agree that, if the disabled community had known six years ago where we would end up, it would, by and large, not have accepted that, and does she agree that the community will be deeply disappointed about where we have ended up?

Pam Duncan-Glancy: I agree, and we heard as much in the Social Justice and Social Security Committee.

In 2017, in response to Scottish Labour’s call for assurances that the system would be ambitious and would not have the same effect as personal independence payments rules had, the then Minister for Social Security said:

“The Scottish Government does not intend to replicate UK Government legislation within our social security”.— [Written Answers, 17 March 2017; S5W-07672.]

Five years later, we are being asked to vote for underwhelming rules and to trust that something better is coming. Disabled people have already waited years on a promise on which the regulations do not deliver.

Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): Does the member agree that, at this point in time, it is most important that we ensure safe case transfer for all people who are in receipt of disability living allowance and PIP, and

that the right time for reassessment is during the independent review, after a year has passed?

Pam Duncan-Glancy: I acknowledge that safe and secure transfer is, of course, crucial for disabled people, ensuring that they receive the money that they want. However, they were made promises in 2017 and it is now 2022. A considerable time has passed and the cost-of-living crisis is biting.

Therefore, despite our disappointment, Scottish Labour will vote for the regulations, but I would like the record to show that we are voting for them because disabled people have waited long enough, so they must proceed. The current PIP system is so appalling that we will not block an attempt to improve it. However, we will do all that we can to ensure that the promises that the Government made to disabled people will not be broken or delayed any longer.

16:52

The Minister for Social Security and Local Government (Ben Macpherson): As always, I appreciate input from, and the contributions of, Pam Duncan-Glancy, Jeremy Balfour and other members on the adult disability payment regulations.

There are votes in Parliament that really make a difference for a lot of people, both now and in the future; this is one of them. The regulations will mark a significant milestone in the Scottish Government's delivery of a new social security system that is robust, secure, ambitious and compassionate.

Adult disability payment will be the 12th benefit to be administered by Social Security Scotland, and it will be the organisation's most complex undertaking to date. It will benefit all of our constituents if we support Social Security Scotland in that endeavour, given the difference that it will make in the communities that we represent.

The regulations will enable the Scottish Government to take a very different approach to delivering disability assistance, which has been developed around our principles of dignity, fairness and respect.

Jeremy Balfour: Given that the Scottish Parliament has not changed any of the criteria, does the minister agree that we might get a nicer "No" but it will still be a "No" and that that was not what the Parliament set out to do five years ago?

Ben Macpherson: We need to be conscious of the fact that we have a hybrid social security system at the moment and that two important streams of work are taking place. The first is the introduction of new benefits and the second is the transfer of people to Social Security Scotland.

While we do that, we need to ensure that we do not create a two-tier system and that we treat people with equality. That is part of the fairness principle, which the Scottish Parliament voted for in the bill that became the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018.

We are making some changes to the eligibility criteria, and we are changing the way in which we deliver benefits. We are putting an end to the anxiety of private sector assessments. No undignified physical and mental examinations will take place, and we are removing the stressful cycle of unnecessary reassessments and the adversarial approach of the Department for Work and Pensions.

In contrast to what happens elsewhere in the UK, we are introducing a system that is rooted in trust and that is supported by the input of in-house health and social care practitioners. In our system, only one piece of information from a formal source will be sought to support the question on general care and mobility needs in a person's application, and the onus will be on Social Security Scotland to collect that information.

Overall, the experience of applying for and receiving adult disability payment will be fundamentally different from the current DWP system. We are focused on making changes that will have the greatest positive impact on how people experience accessing support, while not risking safe and secure delivery.

I have announced an independent review of adult disability payment, which will be carried out in two stages. The initial stage will commence later this year, and we will consider the mobility criteria first. The full adult disability payment framework will be considered during the second stage, which will begin in the summer of 2023.

I am confident and determined that, from day 1, adult disability payment will deliver a new and much improved experience for disabled people and people with long-term health conditions.

Let us keep building a better social security system together for the people whom we represent and for the common good of Scotland.

I urge Parliament to support the regulations.

The Presiding Officer: The questions on the motions will be put at decision time.

I am minded to take a motion without notice to bring forward decision time.

Motion moved,

That, under Rule 11.2.4 of Standing Orders, Decision Time on Wednesday 9 February be brought forward to 4.57 pm.—[George Adam]

Motion agreed to.

Decision Time

16:57

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

There are five questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S6M-03080.1, in the name of Jackie Baillie, which seeks to amend motion S6M-03080, in the name of John Swinney, on the Coronavirus (Discretionary Compensation for Self-isolation) (Scotland) Bill, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-03080, in the name of John Swinney, on the Coronavirus (Discretionary Compensation for Self-isolation) (Scotland) Bill, as amended, be agreed to.

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

16:58

Meeting suspended.

17:03

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: The question is, that motion S6M-03080, in the name of John Swinney, on the Coronavirus (Discretionary Compensation for Self-isolation) (Scotland) Bill, as amended, be agreed to.

Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is now closed.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)

Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)

Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-03080, in the name of John Swinney, as amended, is: For 122, Against 0, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Coronavirus (Discretionary Compensation for Self-isolation) (Scotland) Bill be passed, and, in so doing, calls on the Scottish Government to review the amount paid in the self-isolation grant to ensure that it at least matches the National Living Wage.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-03100, in the name of Maggie Chapman, on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, on “Reimbursement of Members’ Expenses Scheme—Local Offices”, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament, in exercise of the powers conferred by sections 81(2) and (5)(b) and 83(5) of the Scotland Act 1998, determines that the Reimbursement of Members’ Expenses Scheme, which was agreed to by resolution of the Parliament on 2 March 2021, be amended to:

(a) in paragraph 4.3.5, delete “the” where it appears at the beginning of the fourth line and delete “members concerned” in that same line and insert instead “those members who establish a local parliamentary office”;

(b) delete “When” at the beginning of paragraph 4.3.6 and insert instead “Subject to paragraphs 4.3.9 and 4.3.10, when”;

(c) insert after paragraph 4.3.8:

“4.3.9 Where one or more regional members, returned from a registered political party’s regional list, do not establish and run a local office the limit of entitlement to office cost provision of those members remaining who do establish and run a local office, in the circumstances set out

in paragraphs 4.3.4 to 4.3.7, will be recalculated as though the member or members who do not establish an office had not been returned on that registered political party’s regional list.

Number of Regional Members originally returned on regional list

2
3
4
3
4
4

Number of Members not establishing a local office

1
1
1
2
2
3

Number of Regional Members recalculations subsequently based on

1
2
3
1
2
1

4.3.10 Should a member, who has previously not established a local office, decide at any subsequent point to establish a local office then all of those members returned from a registered political party’s regional list who establish a local office will require to share a local office as set out in paragraphs 4.3.4 to 4.3.7 and those members’ entitlement to office cost provision will be recalculated in accordance with paragraph 4.3.9 from the point of establishing that shared office.”;

(d) renumber paragraphs currently numbered as 4.3.9 to 4.3.13 to paragraphs 4.3.11 to 4.3.15 and amend any references to those paragraphs to take account of the number change accordingly; and

(e) insert after paragraph 4.4.1:

“4.4.2 The above calculation will be based on the number of members originally returned on the regional list for the political party, taking no account of any change made to calculations for those members who do establish and run a local office as set out in paragraphs 4.3.9 and 4.3.10.”

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-03030, in the name of Martin Whitfield, on behalf of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee, on “Standing Order Rule Changes—Committee Name and Remit and Miscellaneous Changes”, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament notes the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee’s 3rd Report 2022 (Session 6), *Standing Order Rule Changes – Committee name and remit and miscellaneous changes (SP Paper 96)*, and agrees that the changes to Standing Orders set out in Annexe A of the report be made with effect from 11 February 2022.

The Presiding Officer: As Pam Duncan-Glancy indicated that she did not wish to press motion

S6M-03148 to a vote, I propose to ask a single question on all 11 Parliamentary Bureau motions. Does any member object?

As no member objects, the final question is, that motions S6M-03145 to S6M-03155, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Requirements) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 2) Regulations 2022 (SSI 2022/13) be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (International Travel and Operator Liability) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 2) Regulations 2022 (SSI 2022/25) be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Requirements) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 3) Regulations 2022 (SSI 2022/29) be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Disability Assistance for Working Age People (Scotland) Regulations 2022 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Registers of Scotland (Digital Registration, etc.) Regulations 2022 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Social Security Information-sharing (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2022 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that, under Rule 12.3.3B of Standing Orders, the Finance and Public Administration Committee can meet, if necessary, at the same time as a meeting of the Parliament between 12.45 pm and 2.30 pm on Thursday 24 February 2022.

That the Parliament agrees that the Social Justice and Social Security Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the legislative consent memorandum in relation to the Nationality and Borders Bill (UK Legislation).

That the Parliament agrees that the Criminal Justice Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Fireworks and Pyrotechnic Articles (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

That the Parliament agrees that, with effect from 11 February 2022, for the purposes of committee meetings up to 1 April 2022—

(a) in Rule 6.3A.1 after “member” the words “or members” be inserted;

(b) Rule 6.3A.2 be suspended;

(c) in Rule 6.3A.4 the first sentence be suspended;

(d) after Rule 6.3A.5(d) be inserted “(e) a political party withdraws in writing to the Bureau that nomination of the member or members nominated for the purposes of committee meetings up to 1 April 2022.”; and

(e) in Rule 12.1.15 the words “(other than a committee substitute)” be omitted in both instances where they occur.

That the Parliament agrees that, with effect from 11 February 2022, Temporary Standing Orders Rule 3 be amended—

(a) in paragraph 1 to delete “11 February 2022” and insert “1 April 2022, except to the extent determined by the

Presiding Officer, having regard to relevant legislation and public health guidance. Such determinations shall be notified in the Business Bulletin”; and

(b) to delete paragraph 2.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Commemoration

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-02909, in the name of Stephen Kerr, on commemorating the 70th anniversary of the accession to the throne of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament commemorates the 70th anniversary of the accession to the throne of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II; recognises that this anniversary also marks 70 years since the death of Her Majesty's father, King George VI; understands that Her Majesty has been Head of State of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Crown Dependencies and British Overseas Territories, and Head of the Commonwealth, for the last 70 years, and expresses its indebtedness for her selfless and dutiful service to the country and its people.

17:09

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): It is a real honour for me to open this debate commemorating the 70th anniversary of the accession to the throne of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth—an occasion that we celebrated together, as a nation, on Sunday 6 February. For the past 70 years, Her Majesty has been the head of state of our United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Crown dependencies and British overseas territories, and the head of the Commonwealth. Throughout her reign, she has continuously displayed the true virtues of leadership: duty, sacrifice and service.

Although Sunday was a day of national celebration, for Her Majesty, it would have been a day of mixed emotions, as it also marked the 70th anniversary of the passing of her father, King George VI. The then Princess Elizabeth was in Kenya with her husband, the Duke of Edinburgh, when her father suddenly passed away. The next day, the now Queen Elizabeth landed in London and was greeted by the first of 14 Prime Ministers to serve under her: Sir Winston Churchill. According to the historian Dr Kate Williams, Sir Winston Churchill initially thought that the Queen was too young and inexperienced to be head of state, saying, "She's just a child", despite Her Majesty already being the mother of two children.

Through paying attention to detail, hard work, dedication and professionalism, Her Majesty ensured that Sir Winston Churchill would have to change his mind, and he did. During her 70-year reign, Her Majesty has shown us that the best virtues of leadership are service and selflessness. True leaders prioritise the cause that they are serving over personal interests, and Her Majesty's

dedication to upholding the national interest can be seen in her behaviour during the Covid-19 pandemic, in particular after the death of her late husband of more than 70 years.

Last month, various publications noted that Downing Street had offered Her Majesty an exemption from the strict rules that were in place for funerals. According to those reports, Her Majesty declined, saying not only that the exemption was unfair for everyone else in the country who had lost a loved one during the pandemic, but that she wanted to set an example for the nation. Even at one of the most difficult and painful moments in her life, Her Majesty put the national interest first and showed true leadership, not through words but through action.

The spirit with which Her Majesty undertakes her duties as sovereign is summed up in the letter that she published to mark the beginning of her platinum jubilee. The focus of the letter was the future of the Crown, and she asked the British people to give her son, the Duke of Rothesay, our full support when he becomes king. In the letter, Her Majesty also reflected on the importance of partnership, and the loving support that the Duke of Edinburgh gave her during their marriage.

It was in that letter that Her Majesty announced that she would like her daughter-in-law, the Duchess of Rothesay, to become Queen consort when Prince Charles becomes king. Her Majesty turned an occasion about her into a moment to support others and ease succession to the throne, highlighting the selflessness that has been a core characteristic of her reign. Her Majesty signed off her platinum jubilee letter with the words, "Your servant"—that says it all.

In recent decades, leadership has often been associated with assertiveness, popularity and calculation. Her Majesty reminds us that that definition is false. Service is at the heart of leadership, and it is that service that allows Her Majesty to unite our country in a way that no politician ever can. During the Covid-19 pandemic, despite numerous politicians having given thousands of speeches, the speech that the British people remember is the one that was given to us by Her Majesty. In her speech, Her Majesty focused on unity, saying:

"if we remain united and resolute, then we will overcome it."

Her Majesty also reflected on the virtues that characterise Britain:

"self-discipline ... quiet good-humoured resolve and ... fellow-feeling".

Every politician in our United Kingdom, regardless of political party, has a responsibility to uphold those virtues. One of my favourite quotes from King George VI is:

“The highest of distinctions is service to others.”

Over the past 70 years, Her Majesty has shown that she is the perfect example of her father’s words.

Some argue that the concept of monarchy is antiquated, but Her Majesty has shown that it is needed more than ever. With the loving support of her late husband, the Duke of Edinburgh, Her Majesty has modernised the royal family while upholding the values of which we, as a country, are proud: duty, sacrifice and service.

In these times of division, nobody can unite our country in the way that Her Majesty does. Talk surrounding the royal family often portrays a person being cast aside for the interests of the Crown. Her Majesty the Queen turns that narrative on its head. It is because of her personal qualities of duty, sacrifice and service that the Crown prospers today and will continue to prosper in the future.

A platinum jubilee is a once-in-a-lifetime event. In the months ahead, many people across Scotland, and across our United Kingdom, celebrate it accordingly, remembering the personal service of our remarkable monarch. God save the Queen!

17:15

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): I congratulate Stephen Kerr on his motion celebrating the 70th anniversary of the accession to the throne of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II of England—the first Queen Elizabeth of Scotland.

Regardless of our differing views on the monarchy in modern-day Scotland, the debate is, rightly, a moment to celebrate a unique achievement by a woman who has given her life to serving others, which is reflected in the fact that she is the longest-reigning queen and the longest-reigning monarch currently living.

Last week, the platinum jubilee celebrations got under way across the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth, and around the world, as communities came together to celebrate the Queen’s 70-year reign. I am sure that many loyal fans and royal watchers will be hopeful that the pandemic will not inhibit the celebrations.

Having anticipated the popularity of the debate and the likely references by many members to the number of countries that the Queen has visited, miles that she has travelled, trees that she has planted, hands that she has shaken and hats and handbags that she owns, I shall instead take a brief walk back in time.

My first memory of the Queen is from a Sunday drive in our family Austin A40 from my home in Aberdeen to see the Queen’s holiday home, Balmoral castle. Although my sister and I could see only the roof of the castle from the road, that was enough for us—we were in awe. During the 70s, 80s and 90s, my family were true royal fans, following every wedding, birth, christening, divorce, death and scandal.

The Queen’s connection to the north-east is lifelong. It is not unusual to encounter her walking, riding or driving around Deeside, clearly at home and always wearing her headscarf. My husband, who was then a serving police officer, returned from Deeside security duties one evening, advising me that, earlier that day, he had had to apologise to the Queen after blocking her in on an estate road as he and his colleague assisted a royal watcher in changing her flat tyre. Graciously, the Queen had offered to help.

Throughout my working life, I, too, spent many hours undertaking security duties when royals were in residence. Many royal watchers arrived at numerous venues where the Queen was undertaking public engagements and official visits, and at Balmoral, too. Some were in full military uniform, with many claiming to be the Queen’s long-lost second cousin—some were the genuine thing. That is a light-hearted moment of reminiscing, but it reflects a life of military precision, with every public engagement planned, co-ordinated, rehearsed, tweaked and diligently undertaken.

Although the debate on the cost to the public purse continues, there is absolutely no question as to the contribution that the Queen has made to the lives of many people who hold a special space in their life for her, as well as her contribution to local groups, charities, organisations, businesses and others that have benefited from her popularity and presence.

Members will all have their own memories of the Queen visiting their constituency or region. That is no less the case for Aberdeen, which she visited in the 60s, during an outbreak of typhoid; in the 70s, when she pressed the button to start oil flowing from the North Sea to Grangemouth; in 2012, to open the University of Aberdeen’s Sir Duncan Rice library; and in 2017, to open the Robertson family roof garden at Aberdeen royal infirmary. In my constituency, she visited the Sue Ryder Dee View Court neurological centre, and her many local patronages include Voluntary Service Aberdeen and the Royal Horticultural Society of Aberdeen.

I wish Her Majesty the Queen well as she celebrates such a milestone. The 70th jubilee celebrations are a fitting acknowledgement of a life of service to others. I look forward to an extra bank

holiday in June and to hearing more about the platinum pudding competition.

17:20

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): It is a great privilege to speak in my colleague Stephen Kerr's members' business debate in commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the accession to the throne of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

Sadly, the anniversary also marks 70 years since the death of Her Majesty's father, King George VI. That event was the catalyst for his daughter's accession to the throne, which was bestowed upon her when she was only 25. There were numerous duties that she needed to undertake and it was an enormous responsibility for someone so young. Almost overnight, the young Princess Elizabeth became Queen and head of state of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Crown dependencies and overseas territories and the head of the Commonwealth. As an aside, it is interesting to note that Queen Elizabeth I was also 25 when she became Queen in 1558.

Princess Elizabeth, as the King's eldest daughter, was next in line to the throne. She was in Kenya at the time of her father's death and swiftly returned home. Before leaving Kenya, she penned many letters of apology to potential hosts for having to cancel her long-awaited visit, which had actually been meant to have been father's visit. She also became the first sovereign in more than 200 years to accede to the throne while abroad.

Following her coronation, on 2 June 1953 at Westminster abbey, which has been the setting for all coronations since 1066, Her Majesty became the 39th sovereign to be crowned and swiftly took up the mantle. She has taken her journey as Queen with great dignity. In a broadcast during her 21st birthday, on 21 April 1947, while on a tour of South Africa with her parents and younger sister Margaret, she promised:

"I declare before you all that my whole life whether it be long or short shall be devoted to your service and the service of our great imperial family to which we all belong."

Service defines the Queen. More than three quarters of a century ago, at the age of 18, she joined the Auxiliary Territorial Service. She did that because she wanted to be part of the services. She took no rank other than second subaltern because her father wanted her to have an opportunity to serve. At that time and since, Her Majesty's resolve, determination and immeasurable loyalty to our country have shone through.

Celebrations to mark her 70th anniversary as monarch of the realm will take place during the year. The first will be a four-day bank holiday from 2 to 5 June. The jubilee bank holiday will provide an opportunity for individuals the length and breadth of the country to celebrate. In addition, there will be the Queen's green canopy, a unique tree-planting initiative created to invite people from across the United Kingdom to plant trees for the jubilee. The platinum pudding competition has already been mentioned. It will be chaired by celebrity chef Mary Berry. There will also be the big jubilee lunch, which will encourage communities the length and breadth of the country to get together and get to know each other a little bit better. Many other events will take place throughout the country. I am sure that we will all participate in our own constituencies and regions.

I very much welcome the Queen's words during her platinum jubilee message last Saturday, 5 February. She said that she would mark the anniversary and that it gave her great pleasure to renew the pledge that she gave to our country in 1947 that her entire life would always be devoted to our service. Echoing her, I hope that, especially during this time of division, the jubilee will bring families, friends, neighbours and communities closer together, all as one.

17:24

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): I thank my colleague Stephen Kerr for bringing this important debate to the chamber. Remarkably, the Queen is the only British monarch to reach the 70-year milestone, surpassing Queen Victoria's 63 years and 216 days and joining a handful of kings and queens from around the world.

As we have heard from others, Princess Elizabeth was in Kenya when she heard the news that her father had died. Aged just 25, she flew home, knowing that her private life would never truly be her own again. Her husband, Prince Philip, would never finish his naval career, but would take on the role of her selfless consort. She knew how important that role would be, having witnessed her mother dedicating the same duty to her father during his reign.

In the past 70 years, the Queen has shaped her role as head of state of 15 sovereign countries. Over seven decades, she has seen extraordinary social, cultural and technological progress. She has responded extraordinarily to difficult situations. She has been calm and reassuring and has set a fine example for us all during the Covid crisis.

In an interview for the February edition of *Holyrood* magazine, I was asked who I would invite to my fantasy dinner party. Of course, I said

the Queen. She is an inspiration to women and girls across the world. She is a leader, a proud mother, an eager conservationist and a dedicated philanthropist. The Queen is so popular that the Palace advertised this year for a new, full-time employee to read her post and to provide a timely and welcome response to the good wishes of her thousands of long-term admirers. Her unwavering devotion to the country is unparalleled by any other monarch or world leader. It is ironic therefore, that everyone else gets a holiday to celebrate her extraordinary hard work, commitment and service.

In the short time that I have, I will touch on the Queen's love of the countryside and of animals. It is no secret that the Queen loves horses: she is an avid equestrian and was famously photographed riding one of her fell ponies in 2018, aged 92. Her interest in fell ponies and British native breeds dates back to her early childhood. Fell ponies are not the Queen's only love. She has raised Highland ponies under the Balmoral prefix, and Shetland ponies. While Shetland ponies need no introduction, the Highland pony is very rare. In Scotland, the Highland pony was historically used on small farms. It was Queen Victoria's interest in the breed that sparked the royal family's association with Highland ponies.

Lest you think that the Queen enjoys only diminutive equine species, be assured that she is also fond of the thoroughbred horse. She attends each day of the week-long Royal Ascot event and has bred many thoroughbreds and achieved success in racing over the years. The royal farms are also home to a trio of cattle breeds: the Highland, the Jersey and the Sussex. The Queen has raised Highland cattle at her home at Balmoral since 1953, while her Sussex cattle reside at her estate in Windsor.

Farming and the countryside have always been passions for the Queen. She spends a considerable amount of time at Balmoral in Scotland, or at Sandringham. It is therefore a fitting tribute that British farmers are being invited to light beacons across the country at 9.15 pm on 2 June to mark the Queen's platinum jubilee. Around 1,500 beacons will be lit across the UK as part of the celebrations across the four-day bank holiday weekend.

I want to reflect on the words shared by the Queen when she opened the Borders railway in 2015 as Britain's longest reigning monarch. She said:

"Inevitably, a long life can pass by many milestones; my own is no exception."

In her platinum jubilee, may we all wish Her Majesty the Queen good health and thank her for

her selfless duty throughout her fantastic 70-year reign.

17:28

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I congratulate Stephen Kerr on securing this important debate and commend him for the content of his speech.

I also add my congratulations to Her Majesty the Queen as she celebrates the 70th anniversary of her accession to the throne. That is a monumental achievement for a British monarch and one that is unlikely ever to be repeated. As Stephen Kerr reminded us, she has endured 14 Prime Ministers—so far.

Our country has changed dramatically in the past 70 years. In 1952, the average cost of buying a house was just under £2,000; now it is almost a hundred times greater. Forget mobile phones: only around 14 per cent of households even had a landline. The country would still have to cope with food rationing for a further two years. There was no Netflix—in fact, there was not even colour TV. That is all unimaginable to us today.

The one constant that our country has had throughout has been Her Majesty. She has not been a constant only for people who were born and brought up in the UK. As members may be aware, I was born and grew up in Hong Kong. As Hong Kong remained a British colony until 1997, the Queen was very much regarded as the people of Hong Kong's monarch, too. She was, in fact, the first British monarch to visit Hong Kong, which she did in 1975. I remember that that caused huge excitement, not least for me, at the tender age of 11—please do not get your calculators out to work out how old I am now. She was accompanied on that visit, as on so many other visits, state openings and trips, by her husband, Prince Philip.

I cannot begin to imagine the strain that was put on the new marriage of such a young couple when the 25-year-old Princess Elizabeth suddenly became Queen following the untimely death of King George VI. Together, they went through incredible highs and lows, both in their roles as heads of state, and as parents, grandparents and great-grandparents.

Not that we need any more evidence of Her Majesty's exceptional taste and impeccable judgment in visiting Hong Kong, but if I may be parochial for a moment, members may be interested to know that, very shortly after succeeding to the throne, in 1953, Her Majesty visited the wonderful constituency of—you guessed it—Dumbarton. When the new monarch arrived by train into Dumbarton East train station—undoubtedly on a much more reliable service than those that go through the station today—she was

welcomed by 5,000 cheering local schoolchildren. As I would encourage everyone to do, Her Majesty and Prince Philip took in the many sights that my constituency has to offer, and ended the day visiting the historic Dumbarton castle. She was the first British monarch to visit the area since her great-great-grandmother, Queen Victoria, visited Dumbarton in 1867.

As any visitor to Dumbarton will tell you, one trip is never enough. That is why Her Majesty and Prince Philip returned to Dumbarton in 1965, this time taking a trip on the Maid of the Loch paddle steamer up Loch Lomond, visiting Helensburgh and meeting the doctors and nurses at the Vale of Leven hospital. Her Majesty returned again to open the new Chivas Regal bottling plant at Kilmalid, and, I am told, she enjoyed a wee sample.

The fact that there is an ever-dwindling group of us in the Parliament who have been here since 1999 means that there are few who have attended more state openings in the Scottish Parliament than I have. When Her Majesty opened the building that we are in today, she described the Scottish Parliament as

“a landmark for 21st century democracy”.

At the most recent state opening in October last year, Her Majesty spoke of her “deep and abiding affection” for Scotland. I am sure that we can agree that those feelings are entirely reciprocated.

On behalf of the Scottish Labour Party, I wish to thank Her Majesty for the 70 years of dedication and commitment that she has given to serving her people and her country. We wish her the very best on her platinum anniversary.

17:33

Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con): It is an honour today to celebrate the 70-year reign of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, who is the longest reigning monarch in our history. I pay tribute to my colleague Stephen Kerr for securing the time for this debate.

We all know the history of our Queen and her love for Scotland. She is descended from the royal house of Stewart on both sides of her family. She has spent many summers at Balmoral castle in Royal Deeside, Aberdeenshire, in my region.

So many of us, our parents and our grandparents have family memories of events over the past 70 years. I remember the silver anniversary in 1977, when I was a little girl, and, more recently, the diamond jubilee in 2012. Those were times of national celebration and affection.

From as far back as the second world war, the Queen has been the country's constant servant,

and she remains unrelentingly dedicated to her work, even at the age of 95. Since she came to the throne, the Queen has sent almost 300,000 100th birthday messages, and close to 900,000 diamond wedding anniversary cards. Today, I want to share a personal history of two photographs and two certificates hanging on the wall in my home. For my family, like so many others, they represent how Her Majesty the Queen and the royal family are so often interwoven in our stories and histories.

The two certificates proudly hanging in our hallway speak of hard work, learning and service to others. One of the certificates is the Duke of Edinburgh's gold award, presented by the Queen's consort, who stood by her side for most of the 70 years of her reign. The other certificate is the Girls Brigade Queen's award. One was presented at the Palace of Holyrood by Prince Philip and Queen Elizabeth, and the other was presented by Queen Elizabeth in Dundee. Those were both special life events for my wife and her family—as such events are for so many young people in the Girls Brigade, Boys Brigade, guides and scouts.

There are two photographs in the entrance hall. Ishbel, a florist all her life, regularly made the arrangements for launch days of ships on the Clyde from where she worked on Buchanan street. In 1959, one of Ishbel's arrangements became the Queen Mother's Christmas card that year. That picture proudly hangs in our home.

The other photograph is of my wife's parents, Ishbel and George—who are watching this debate—celebrating their 60th wedding anniversary in 2018. They were personally presented by the Provost Ian McAllan and the lord-lieutenant of Lanarkshire, Lady Susan Haughey, with a diamond wedding anniversary card from Her Majesty the Queen. That day was a celebration of their life together, and one made memorable by the Queen and her representatives.

I would like to take a moment to acknowledge lords-lieutenant, who work in a voluntary capacity to represent the Queen in communities across the UK. Last week I was delighted to meet the lord-lieutenant of Kincardineshire, Alastair Macphie, and to learn about his role.

George and Ishbel, now in their late 80s, are so fond of these pictures. They made sure that they had pride of place when they came to live with us when Covid-19 hit. The pictures give them daily joy.

It is not just Her Majesty the Queen's life and reign we celebrate today, but those personal family ties and celebrated moments that bring us all together as one nation, and one family.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Given the number of members who wish to speak in the

debate, I am minded to accept a motion without notice, under rule 8.14.3, to extend the debate by up to 30 minutes. I invite Stephen Kerr to move the motion.

Motion moved,

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

Motion agreed to.

17:38

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I thank Stephen Kerr for bringing the debate to the chamber and allowing me to sneak in a few comments on the 70 years since the Queen ascended the throne.

As has been said, the then duchess was in Kenya at the Treetops hotel, when she heard of the death of her father, King George VI, early in the morning on 6 February 1952. She was a young woman and most of her teenage years had been mired in world war two.

During her reign, the Queen has seen 14 prime ministers and 13 United States presidents, starting—incredibly—with Winston Churchill and Harry S Truman. Her role in diplomatic relations cannot be overstated, having welcomed so many world leaders to the United Kingdom—including some who were very controversial. In her tireless travels while representing our country, the warm welcome that she receives everywhere she goes is testament to her world standing and, as Stephen Kerr said, the way that she can bring communities together. I often think that she is more valued and welcomed around the world than by some of her subjects here in the United Kingdom.

I have been lucky enough to have met Her Majesty on several occasions, the first of which was way back in 1986 at the Commonwealth games in Edinburgh. Standing in line as a hairy young Scots boy in a kilt, I was extremely nervous about what I could possibly say to Her Majesty. However, I need not have worried. Her Majesty has the ability to engage with anyone, from young athletes to heads of state, and make them feel special and like they are the only one in the room. It is a remarkable gift from a remarkable lady. We all have a huge debt of gratitude for her lifetime of service to her country and I am glad that I have had the opportunity, just for a couple of minutes, to pass on my best wishes to Her Majesty the Queen.

17:40

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): I thank Stephen Kerr for lodging the motion. I start by wishing Queen Elizabeth the very best after 70

years in public life. Surely, at the age of 95 and having just lost her husband of many years, she is entitled to some peace and quiet.

I mean that sincerely, but I have to speak on behalf of the half of Scotland that supports a republic, and I wonder why we are debating the motion at this time. It appears to me that it is primarily a motion congratulating longevity. Surely, if that is the case, we all have other people as worthy, if not more worthy, of such an accolade. For example, take my mother. Next year, when the Queen celebrates the 70th anniversary of her coronation, my mum will be celebrating the 70th anniversary of my birth. Although the Queen has had every support known to mankind during the past 70 years, my mum and dad brought me and my two younger brothers up in a single end, and then in a room and kitchen, while struggling to make ends meet with low wages and sometimes no wages.

I ask again: what is so special about any individual to deserve such a motion? The Queen has been fortunate in that she does not have a difficult life. I accept that she has a life of public service, which cannot always be easy, but there are not many royals who would be willing to swap places with people who rely on the other benefit system—the one that does not treat people as though they are special but as though they are less than human and should be grateful for the pittance that the state gives them to try to exist on.

The Queen, like us all, has a family full of flaws, so I am always a bit bemused at the reverence that is bestowed on that family. However, given that that reverence exists, I wonder about the hypocrisy of the Tories—the party that lied to the Queen to get Parliament illegally prorogued and the party that had a couple of parties as she mourned and waited to bury her husband, yet has the gall to lodge this motion.

I make no bones about the fact that I believe in a republic. No family should have the right to be treated as superior because of an accident of birth. They are simply people who are spoiled and pampered by this class-ridden society, but they are still only people. The UK, as is clear from the narrow range of schooling of so many of our leaders, is a class-based society, to the detriment of those at the bottom end of that skewed measurement of worth. The Queen is, of course, at the peak of that pyramid of entitlement.

We have a housing crisis while they have multiple houses with massive lands attached. We have food banks while they have banquets. We have people on benefits chased up for every penny while they are given tax breaks to protect their wealth and property.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Dornan, I will stop you briefly. I have a point of order from Rachael Hamilton

Rachael Hamilton: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I believe that Mr Dornan has gone slightly off topic.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That is not a point of order and I do not believe that James Dornan has deviated from the topic, even if he has deviated from the spirit of the other contributions in the debate.

James Dornan: I am happy to accept both of those points. I read that the Queen is considering retiring next year, which makes perfect sense to me. However, at that point, the debate should not be, “Should we skip a generation because we don’t like Charles and Camilla and we like Will and Kate?”, but “Has the anachronism that is the royal family run its natural course, and is it time for a republic?”

I respect anyone who has continued to work until the age that the Queen has, and I sincerely wish her well, but it is time that Scotland and the rest of the UK had a grown-up debate about whether we wish to be perceived as subjects of Charles and Camilla or as citizens of a Scottish republic.

17:44

Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con): I am honoured to contribute to today’s members’ business debate, which has rightly been brought to the chamber by my colleague Stephen Kerr. I would like to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the accession to the throne of Her Majesty the Queen, who is not only our longest reigning monarch but an inspiration to women across the world.

Her Majesty’s professional accomplishments are to be marvelled at, but we often forget how she has been a champion in paving the way for the modern woman. Her Majesty has been a wife, mother and grandmother, yet she has garnered the respect of world leaders at a time when it was still uncommon for women to be in a leading role, let alone the head of an entire nation and the Commonwealth.

As a young woman, she was thrown into a role that carries immense responsibility, but she has never second-guessed her decision to put the Crown and country first. She has been a constant source of stability, comfort, identity and inspiration for the whole nation. Her Majesty is an expert in many things, has a great sense of humour and is exceptionally quick witted.

Although most of us will never get the chance to know her personally, does it not feel as though we

all know her on some level? Her Majesty stands at the heart of British values and at the core of our identity as a nation. I know that I speak not only for myself when I say that Her Majesty is an inspiration to all women.

We are approaching international women’s day, which will take place next month, and Her Majesty is the perfect role model whom many women, such as me, look up to. Her Majesty has become an icon for women. She earned the respect of the entire nation by proving that she is a born leader. She is intelligent, diplomatic and level-headed. We need not even consider her gender, for it has never stood in her way. Her Majesty is quietly powerful. We need not hear from her about how she has normalised having female leaders—we see it.

I hope that everyone in the chamber will join me in congratulating Her Majesty on her 70 years of loyal service. To me, she is not only a leader; she is the mother of the United Kingdom.

17:48

Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con): I thank my colleague Stephen Kerr for bringing the debate to the chamber so that we can all join together in celebrating the remarkable achievement of Her Majesty the Queen’s platinum jubilee.

Her Majesty has become the first British monarch to have reigned for 70 years. In that time, there have been many extraordinary firsts. On 23 May 1953, Everest was conquered for the first time by Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay. News of that incredible achievement would reach the United Kingdom on the morning of Her Majesty’s official coronation on 2 June 1953.

In 1969, Neil Armstrong became the first human to walk on the surface of the moon. On 9 November 1989, the Berlin wall came crashing down in a resounding victory for freedom and democracy that was rejoiced the world over. There have also been advancements in technology, medicine, human rights, international trade and global travel.

The selfless dedication to duty and a commitment to upholding the values of freedom and democracy are a testament to everything that Her Majesty seeks to achieve in her daily life. The list of titles and responsibilities that are invested in Her Majesty could fill the chamber 10 times over, so, given the time that is available, I will pick out one or two.

As head of the British armed forces, Her Majesty has overseen the finest military men and women the world has ever seen. Our military personnel hold a very special place in the heart of

the nation, and throughout the past 70 years, those traditions have been expertly handled by Her Majesty in her role as commander-in-chief of the British armed forces.

For many, trooping the colour has always been a special highlight of the British summer, but the event that is clearest in my memory is watching Her Majesty lead the nation in remembrance day services at the cenotaph.

Her Majesty has a close and personal connection to Scotland, where she is known as the chief of chiefs. It is always a pleasure to see the Royal Company of Archers, resplendent in their uniform of green velvet, providing an official bodyguard on state visits such as the opening of the Scottish Parliament, which we all attended a few months ago.

However, it is not official state visits that are most clear in my memory. What stands out is the footage of Her Majesty, Prince Philip and their young family at Balmoral, enjoying many happy days at home in the Scottish Highlands. The love and affection that Her Majesty holds for Scotland are unrivalled. We have always held a special place in her heart. It is important that we always remember Her Majesty's words. She said:

"I have spoken before of my deep and abiding affection for this wonderful country, and of the many happy memories Prince Philip and I always held of our time here. It is often said that it is the people that make a place, and there are few places where this is truer than in Scotland, as we have seen in recent times."

I echo the words of David Cameron, who, as Prime Minister, eloquently led the House of Commons on the occasion of Her Majesty's diamond jubilee celebration. He said:

"On her first address to the nation as Queen, Her Majesty pledged that throughout all her life, and with all her heart, she would strive to be worthy of the people's trust: this she has achieved beyond question. The nation holds her in its heart, not just as the figurehead of an institution but as an individual who has served this country with unerring grace, dignity and decency."—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 7 March 2012; Vol 541, c 849.]

I think that we can all agree that there is no finer tribute to Her Majesty on her platinum jubilee.

God save the Queen!

17:51

The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): I congratulate Stephen Kerr on securing the debate and on his speech—it is a rare occasion on which I agree with every word that he says.

I am pleased to take part in this evening's proceedings as the Scottish Government minister with responsibility for the royal household, as a

member of Her Majesty's Privy Council and as a member of the Scottish Cabinet, which sent its appreciation this week for the long and distinguished service of our head of state.

The debate allows me to provide a brief update to the Parliament on this year's platinum jubilee in Scotland and to reconfirm the Scottish Government's recognition and commendation of Her Majesty the Queen's remarkable legacy and dedication to duty during the 70 years of her reign here and in the 15 other independent states around the world—including Canada, Australia and New Zealand—where she is head of state.

Her Majesty is bound to Scotland by ties of ancestry and affection, as has been noted. As a direct descendent of the royal house of Stewart on both sides of her family, her personal relationship with the people of Scotland and our country began in childhood and has deepened through her many private and official visits during the seven decades of her reign.

This is an apt time to recall some of the milestones of Her Majesty's visits and engagements in Scotland throughout the past seven decades. Her Majesty's first state visit to Scotland as Queen came on 24 June 1953, just weeks after the coronation. Cheering crowds witnessed a magnificent procession accompanying the royal carriage, bearing the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh, to St Giles cathedral for a national service of thanksgiving. There, for the first time since 1822, the honours of Scotland were carried before the monarch and presented to her.

In September 1967, Her Majesty visited John Brown's shipyard at Clydebank, which was the birthplace of the Royal Yacht Britannia, RMS Queen Mary and RMS Queen Elizabeth. On that occasion, she christened the new Cunard liner, the QEII.

In 1977, the year of Her Majesty's silver jubilee, about 200,000 people in Glasgow welcomed her on her tour of Scotland. Further north, in Dundee, 10,000 Dundonians waved as she passed through and, in Aberdeen, I am told that the crowds waiting on the pavements to see her were 20 people deep.

On 24 July 1986, here in Edinburgh, Her Majesty opened the Commonwealth games, which is an undertaking that she performed again in 2014, when Glasgow hosted the games.

In July 1999, with the return of Scotland's Parliament for the first time in nearly 300 years, Her Majesty formally opened the Parliament, which was then housed in the General Assembly hall, and gifted a specially commissioned mace—which rests before us—to mark the Parliament's authority. In her speech, she commented:

“This is a society in which the qualities of co-operation, learning, entrepreneurial flair and national pride run deep”,

before mentioning

“the grit, determination and humour, the forthrightness and above all the strong sense of identity of the Scottish people”,

which are all qualities that occupy a personal place in her own and her family’s affections.

In 2002, the golden jubilee year, Her Majesty visited Scotland and opened the jubilee wheel at the Millennium Link in Falkirk and the Space in the Scottish School of Contemporary Dance in Dundee. She travelled to the Isle of Skye and to Lewis, and she attended the Borders gathering at Melrose.

In the 2010s, Her Majesty opened major pieces of infrastructure that have benefited the people of Scotland. In 2015, she opened the Borders railway, and the Queensferry crossing was officially opened by her in September 2017. The 2010s was also the decade of Her Majesty’s diamond jubilee; in 2012, Perth had its city status restored by the Queen.

Most recently, there has never been a clearer indication of Her Majesty’s selfless dedication to duty and her love of Scotland and its people than her attendance at the opening of the sixth session of the Scottish Parliament in October last year, just a few short months after she lost her consort of 73 years.

Her Majesty congratulated the Parliament for marking the new session safely in “a very trying period”, while noting that Parliament had

“been at the heart of Scotland’s response to the pandemic”.

Her Majesty then told the chamber of her

“deep and abiding affection for this wonderful country, and of the many happy memories”

that she held of her time here. She added that the new session brought

“a sense of beginning and renewal”,

and she urged us all to “work together” despite any “differences of opinion”.

We strongly hope to see Her Majesty again this summer, during royal week, while she is in residence at the Palace of Holyroodhouse and holding summer court at Balmoral.

Throughout her reign, the Queen has demonstrated commitment and support to a diverse group of organisations that span the length and breadth of Scotland. That varied list includes the Aberdeen Association of Social Service; the Highland Association—An Comunn Gàidhealach; the Piobaireachd Society; the Royal Caledonian Curling Club; the Scottish Football Association;

and the Royal Scottish National Orchestra. I could go on.

Her Majesty also holds a number of appointments in the armed forces in Scotland. She is, for example, colonel-in-chief of both the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards and the Royal Regiment of Scotland.

Through her patronages, Her Majesty has provided vital publicity for the work of those organisations and has allowed their enormous achievements and contributions to society to be recognised.

Her Majesty is one of the longest-serving monarchs in the world ever—the length of her reign has recently overtaken that of Emperor Franz Josef of Austria-Hungary. This year, her platinum jubilee will be celebrated throughout the land. We have ensured that the people of Scotland have access to the long weekend in early June so that they can enjoy community-led events. Those include the big lunch, dedicated Highland games and Guinness world record attempts. We will also see the return from previous events of the lighting of beacons. I have recently been advised that a tune that has been composed for the occasion by piper Stuart Liddell of Inveraray will be played throughout the Commonwealth as the sun sets on 2 June.

There is also great engagement with the Queen’s Green Canopy, as that initiative to

“plant a tree for the Jubilee”

has been taken forward by schools, communities, scout and guide troops and individuals, to name but a few. Plantings range from single trees to platinum crowns of silver birch, and those, as well as the dedication of ancient trees to the platinum jubilee, will enhance and benefit local areas.

We are indebted to the work that has been carried out by the Scottish lord-lieutenants, community and local councils, and local authorities in engaging with their communities to develop all those activities.

Her Majesty’s selfless dedication to and affection for Scotland and its people, as head of state and as a steadfast friend of our Parliament since its establishment in 1999, are beyond question. Her Majesty the Queen has led us forward through remarkable innovations, such as we have seen in technology and medicine, while providing a firm foundation for us through the difficulties of a changing climate and a worldwide pandemic.

I invite members to join me in noting our respect for Her Majesty the Queen’s immeasurable dedication to and affection for Scotland and its people, and in offering our unreserved thanks for her selfless and dutiful service to our country.

Meeting closed at 17:59.

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