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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 7 September 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. The first item of business is portfolio question time, and the first portfolio is health and social care. If a member wishes to request a supplementary question, they should press their request-to-speak button, or indicate so in the chat function by entering the letter R, during the relevant question.

General Practitioners (Menopause and Perimenopause Training and Development)

1. **Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what specific training and CPD GPs undertake to remain updated on developments in helping women through perimenopause and the menopausal stages of their life. (S6O-01316)

The Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport (Maree Todd): Menopause is included in the Royal College of General Practitioners' curriculum, in which all general practitioner trainees need to demonstrate competency in order to practise independently as a GP in the United Kingdom.

Training materials and aids are widely available to GPs to ensure that they remain updated on the latest developments in helping women through both the menopause and the perimenopause.

The Scottish Government has recently commissioned NHS Education for Scotland—NES—to create a bespoke training package and framework focused on the menopause and menstrual health for GPs and others who work in primary care.

Jim Fairlie: Having spoken to numerous constituents about their concerns and their experience of menopause, I know that their experience has been patchy and inconsistent as regards the information and help that they have been offered. Some have been completely dismissed as being too young to be suffering from perimenopause or have been told that menopause is not a disease and that, therefore, getting through the process until it is unbearable is probably the best course of action.

I could cite numerous examples of very poor outcomes for women who have felt completely dismissed when they have raised the changes that they are experiencing in their lives. Dr Louise Newson, who is a practising GP, had to set up her own menopause clinic because no one seemed to be able to provide the correct treatment for her.

I ask the minister, please, to look at what is being done to advance understanding among GPs in Scotland of what perimenopausal and menopausal women are going through and the care that they need, so that they can get individual person-centred treatment that meets their specific needs.

Maree Todd: Women have told us loudly and clearly that they do not always get the support that they need when they seek help for menopause symptoms. In fact, that is one of the reasons for my having specific responsibility for women's health in my portfolio. It is also why, through implementation of "Women's Health Plan: A Plan for 2021-2024", we intend to build a basic understanding of menopause among all healthcare professionals. That will include awareness of the symptoms of perimenopause and menopause, and of the intermediate and long-term consequences of menopause, and knowledge of where to signpost women to for consistent advice and support.

In the past year, we have created a menopause specialist network, which meets regularly and supports primary care teams by providing access to a menopause specialist for consistent advice, support, onward referral, leadership and training, so I expect to see improvements.

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): It is right that we need to consider all ways of helping women through perimenopause and the menopausal stages of their lives. However, to spearhead the policy and advocacy work in that regard, we must appoint a women's health champion in Scotland. In June, the First Minister told the Parliament that such an appointment would be made in the summer. Charities are now saying that the deadline has been missed. Has the Scottish Government made an appointment? If not, why not?

Maree Todd: I assure Carol Mochan that the appointment process is almost complete, and I expect to be able to make an announcement about the appointee very soon. As I have reiterated many times, that was a medium-term commitment in "Women's Health Plan". We have met all our short-term commitments in the plan, and we are making progress on many of the medium-term commitments that we made.

Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con): I want to ask about the accessibility of hormone replacement

therapy supplies. While trying to access my own medication, I have faced barrier after barrier and inconsistency after inconsistency. I have seen the protocol, and it is nothing more than a scrap of paper. What action is the Government taking to stop menopausal and perimenopausal women being bounced around the primary care health service, so that they can access the support and treatment that they need in a timely and straightforward manner?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before I ask the minister to respond to that, I highlight that the question in the *Business Bulletin* relates to “specific training and CPD”. If the minister could respond in that light, that would make Ms Webber’s question supplemental to the question that is in the *Business Bulletin*.

Maree Todd: I am happy to do that. Prescribing guidance to assist prescribers is available from multiple sources, including the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, which revised its menopause prescribing guidance in March. That can be found in the usual places and in the clinical knowledge summary online.

Scottish Government ministers and officials are unable to comment on individual cases of prescribing practice, because national health service boards and healthcare professionals locally have responsibility for service delivery and patient treatment. The decision about which treatment to prescribe is made on the basis of an individual clinical decision by the prescriber, taking into account the patient’s condition and medical history.

I wonder whether my colleague Sue Webber is also referring to shortages in HRT, which is a United Kingdom-wide issue. As, I am sure, she is absolutely aware, supply of medicines and associated shortages is reserved to the UK Government. We will continue to work with it to seek a lasting resolution and will press it to work closely with the affected companies, in order to address that particular problem as quickly as possible.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before we move on to question 2, I make the plea for more succinct questions and answers.

Covid-19 Recovery (Support for Primary Care Services)

2. David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what support it is giving to primary care services as they recover from the Covid-19 pandemic. (S6O-01317)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Humza Yousaf): We are committed to increasing investment in primary care services as they recover from the pandemic. Priorities include

the delivery of extended general practice multidisciplinary teams, to ensure that patients are seen by the right person at the right time. Funding for that has increased from £155 million to £170 million this year, with 3,220 members of multidisciplinary teams already in post.

We are supporting the recovery of national health service dentistry by investing £20 million to allow dentists to see more patients, with a focus on children and on tackling oral health inequalities.

Staff recovery and wellbeing are critical to renewing our NHS, and support includes the national wellbeing hub and a confidential staff helpline.

David Torrance: Kinghorn surgery in my constituency has now been without a full-time GP for several months. What assistance can the Scottish Government give to resolve that issue and provide reassurance for my constituents?

Humza Yousaf: I am obviously happy to reach out to local health boards and health and social care partnerships. As I have already referenced, there has been significant investment in general practice—in particular, in recruitment. We have a target to increase the number of GPs by 800 by 2027, and we are making good progress, with 277 GPs already recruited. Our GP trainee recruitment fill rate this year was 100 per cent, which is another improvement on last year. That has been very successful indeed.

I will reach out to local stakeholders in relation to the issue that David Torrance has referenced, and I will write to him with an update.

Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): The lack of specialist clinics, waiting times for surgery, delayed discharge and stagnation of patient flow through hospitals have led to desperate patients turning to GPs, and we are overwhelmed and patients are angry. Support from pharmacies as independent prescribers is vital in order to reduce GP workload. What data does the Government collect that tells us how many subscriptions are done per pharmacy per day to ensure that Government funding is effective, because the Pharmacists’ Defence Association does not believe that it is effective?

Humza Yousaf: I have received correspondence in relation to some of the concerns that have been raised and I have written back to a number of members of the Scottish Parliament.

Pharmacists play an incredibly important role in alleviating the pressures right across the system, whether they are in acute sites, community pharmacies or general practices. With regard to the money that I have just referenced, pharmacists and pharmacy technicians make up a significant

proportion of the additional MDT staff who have been recruited. For example, if we look at the number for whole-time-equivalent pharmacy technicians in our GP practices, we see that the number recruited was 38.3 in 2018, compared with the number that we now have in 2022.

On the question about prescriptions, I will look into the matter and write to the member with more detail.

I record my thanks to our pharmacists up and down the country, whatever setting they are in, for the incredible work that they do to alleviate the pressure on our NHS and social care system.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I am glad that the cabinet secretary recognises the importance of pharmacists. It is worrying to see the growth in pharmacy closures and the impact of those closures on carers and patients.

The Pharmacists' Defence Association has highlighted how the owners of pharmacies are all able to claim non-activity-based payments after closure, which enables some of them to enhance their profitability at the expense of patient safety.

Will the cabinet secretary set out the range of actions that health boards can take to deal with closures, given that the current arrangements have failed to stop them? Does he intend to provide for additional action to discourage further closures?

Humza Yousaf: If memory serves me correctly—I will correct the record if I am wrong, of course—I have written to Jackie Baillie on that point, because she has written to me about the concerns that she and Dr Sandesh Gulhane have raised today. In my letter, I referenced the fact that closures are very few—although that is not to say that they do not have an impact. Even if they are few, they might well have an impact.

It is for local health boards to look at the contracts that they have for pharmacy provision. If anyone is in breach of those contracts, action can be taken.

In addition, a number of asks have come from members. I think that in my letter of response to Jackie Baillie I said that I would look at those asks and update Parliament in due course.

General Practice (Patient Satisfaction)

3. Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the findings of the health and care experience survey 2021-22 in relation to patient satisfaction with GP services. (S6O-01318)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Humza Yousaf): Any reduction in patient experience is regrettable, but I hope that the

context of that particular survey is well understood. I am certain that it is understood by Ms Villalba and members throughout the Parliament. That context is, of course, the pandemic. Guidance was issued to GP practices not to treat patients face to face unless that was clinically necessary; social distancing was introduced in practices; and, although there were more remote consultations, electronic booking systems were used less, as existing systems could not screen for Covid-19 symptoms.

We will continue to invest in GP practices. We want people to have access to those services at similar levels to those that existed pre-pandemic. The health and care experience survey is a vital tool for us, in that it gets us direct feedback from patients across the country.

Mercedes Villalba: The health and care experience survey results show that patients are dissatisfied with GP services at medical practices that were put out to tender in Aberdeen earlier this year. I have shared with the cabinet secretary the testimonies of patients at Old Aberdeen medical practice. In a letter to me today, the cabinet secretary said that his officials have communicated his

“expectation that GP practice contract monitoring should resume in Aberdeen as soon as is practically possible”.

However, what about the declining standards that have been reported in recent months? Will the cabinet secretary request that NHS Grampian sets out a plan to address the issues that have already been identified by patients such as those at Old Aberdeen?

Humza Yousaf: Ms Villalba raises a fair point. Some of the scores in the health and care experience survey, for example for the Newburn practice, were far from acceptable. Some scores were far below the Scottish average. We have to recognise, too, that some were above the Scottish average. However, scores in relation to accessibility and the ability to get an appointment within three working days were particularly low.

I will ask my officials to reach out to local partners to determine the improvement plan that those practices will put in place, to give reassurance about the actions that will be taken to improve the patient experience.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Does the cabinet secretary agree that much patient frustration lies with the often opaque appointment systems that some GP practices use? I have heard of ill constituents calling 100 to 150 times to get through to some practices, if they got through at all.

What steps can the Scottish Government take to ensure that systems whereby folk know that they

are in a telephone queue are implemented as standard?

Humza Yousaf: Kenny Gibson makes a good point. There is no doubt that a lot of the understandable frustration of members of the public comes from when they have to phone up a general practice, because whether they get through is a game of Russian roulette. I hope that that happens only in a minority of cases—I do not doubt that it is the minority—but I take what the member says on board. I had a discussion this morning about the fact that every general practice should have in place pre-bookable appointments. I accept what Kenny Gibson says and am happy to keep him and other members up to date as we progress the matter.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There is a supplementary question from Tess White.

Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con): Friockheim health centre in Angus got a 95.46 per cent positive score in the health and care experience survey, which was the highest score across Tayside. However, difficulties in recruiting GPs to the surgery meant that it closed earlier this year, which moved 3,000 patients elsewhere. That was another huge blow for rural patient care.

The Scottish Government committed to a £20,000 golden hello to help to fill rural vacancies. Why is that not working?

Humza Yousaf: There were particular issues with that practice, which were raised with me by the constituency MSP at the time. It is right that such matters are taken forward at local level.

The member is correct that we have a number of incentives in place to make general practices in rural and remote areas more attractive, such as the golden hello scheme, the GP speciality training bursary and the Scottish graduate entry medicine programme, the first cohort of which has just graduated. I hope that all those incentives, taken together with the work that we are doing on the back of Sir Lewis Ritchie's report, will encourage more and more doctors and GPs to take up roles in remote, rural and island communities.

Alcohol-related Deaths

4. **Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the latest alcohol-related deaths statistics. (S6O-01319)

The Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport (Maree Todd): Nobody should die as a result of alcohol consumption, and my thoughts go out to all people who have been affected by alcohol harm. We work with various organisations across Scotland, including alcohol and drug partnerships, to address the issue. That

work includes piloting an innovative managed-alcohol programme in partnership with the Simon Community Scotland, commissioning Public Health Scotland to review alcohol brief interventions, consulting on a range of potential alcohol marketing restrictions in Scotland and fully evaluating minimum unit pricing.

We support the principles of the right to recovery, which will be embedded in the national care service to enable everyone to access the treatment that they need.

Jamie Greene: I echo the minister's comments: every loss of life is tragic, be it to drugs or alcohol.

Alcohol-related deaths are Scotland's second national shame, alongside our drugs crisis. Audit Scotland is clear about the scale of the cuts that were made as far back as 2014 to front-line alcohol services. That is why the number of alcohol deaths in my region is up by 10 per cent in the past four years, and it is why someone is 5.6 times more likely to die from alcohol-related disease if they live in a deprived area.

I make a plea to the minister and all Government ministers to listen to people on the front line who are in desperate need of support. They need help but, for far too many, it is simply not there. Will the Scottish Government double down—and I really mean double down—on its efforts to tackle alcohol-related problems in society and to properly fund and resource those efforts, given their notable absence in yesterday's programme for government?

Maree Todd: I absolutely agree that alcohol and drug-related harms are very important public health issues in Scotland. That is why we established the national mission to improve and save lives. At the core of that is ensuring that every individual is able to access the treatment and the recovery that they choose.

Tackling alcohol-related harms is a priority for the Scottish Government. Our alcohol and drugs teams work closely with each other and share knowledge of what works in reducing the impact of addiction, as well as in relation to routes through to treatment. The number of alcohol-related and alcohol-specific deaths, as the member says, are disproportionately higher in deprived communities, which is why we continue to take a whole-population approach when it comes to reducing alcohol consumption and the risk of alcohol-related harms. That, in turn, will drive reductions in alcohol harm in our most deprived communities. We are also taking action to improve the conditions that drive alcohol harms by reducing poverty and inequalities, providing good-quality affordable housing and enabling the best start in life for our children.

However, I have to say that it often feels as though we are working with one hand tied behind our back. We give with one hand and the United Kingdom Government takes with the other.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There is a supplementary question from Monica Lennon.

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): In the light of this tragic public health emergency, does the Government intend to introduce an alcohol harm prevention levy on alcohol retailers to help to fund alcohol prevention activity and much-needed support services?

Maree Todd: As I have said before, I am willing to consider all suggestions on how to tackle alcohol-related harm. The workstreams that we have at the moment are many and extensive, and I expect to deliver results.

I look forward to seeing the evaluation on minimum unit pricing, which, when the Parliament reviews whether the policy should be continued, will be the most extensively studied policy that we have ever passed in this Parliament, I think. At the same time, we will look at whether we have an appropriate minimum unit price. The legislation was introduced more than a decade ago, so it is timely that we review the minimum unit price.

We are considering alcohol brief interventions. Those conversations might help people to open up, consider and understand that they have an alcohol problem. We are considering how they can be used most appropriately and how we can maximise their impact.

As figures show, we still have a profoundly unhealthy relationship with alcohol in Scotland. We need to shift that culture, and tackling alcohol advertising will be part of that.

National Treatment Centres (NHS Tayside and NHS Fife)

5. Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the proposed national treatment centres for NHS Tayside and NHS Fife. (S6O-01320)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Humza Yousaf): The NHS Fife national treatment centre is a £33 million project that will see the creation of a state-of-the-art facility hosting three operating theatres, a supporting in-patient ward and associated out-patient facilities. Construction at the site began in March 2021 and it is well under way. Assuming that there are no unavoidable delays, the project is on course to complete construction in October 2022, and the first patients will be treated in January 2023.

The business case for NHS Tayside national treatment centre is under development. Following

a project pause in March 2020, during the pandemic, the proposals are being refreshed to meet current and future demand and to ensure that they meet our net zero carbon ambitions. An update on the opening date will be provided in due course.

Mark Ruskell: I welcome the cabinet secretary's response. We are still in a situation in which one in nine Scots waits more than a year to receive essential treatment, and they need hope that things are going to change. Will the cabinet secretary clarify what the focus of the treatment centres in Tayside and Fife will be and will he estimate the impact that the centres will have on tackling the backlog of elective surgeries and procedures? Will he also comment on how staff capacity can effectively support the delivery of the specialist services as the centres become operational?

Humza Yousaf: Those points were well made by Mark Ruskell. I cannot overstate just how important and critical national treatment centres are in helping us with the backlog. The member knows that the NTC programme was announced pre-pandemic, and it was important to get through a challenging position that has been exacerbated by the effects of the pandemic. The centres are vital.

The treatment centres will be national so, although those who are local to Fife and Tayside will, of course, benefit, the centres will also be able to help and provide mutual aid to other parts of the country. National treatment centres are important both for the locality that they are in and nationally.

Staffing for the Fife centre, in particular, is well under way. There are no signalled issues or concerns about staffing the NTC, but I am sure that the member will appreciate that it will be phased as the NTC opens and becomes fully operational.

General Practitioner Pensions (British Medical Association Guidance)

6. Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with the British Medical Association regarding the impact in Scotland of its guidance advising general practitioners to consider reducing their pensionable pay or retiring early due to changes in inflation and the way those are used in calculations around GP pensions that reportedly leaves them liable for significant tax charges. (S6O-01321)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Humza Yousaf): Members will be aware that the majority of the pension issues that have been raised are reserved. I have not had the opportunity to meet my health counterpart in the

new United Kingdom Government, but I have raised those issues before and I have seen no flexibility in its position.

The Scottish Government and I have regular engagement with the British Medical Association, and the ways in which pension arrangements affect general practitioners and national health service employees, both directly and via the NHS pension scheme, have been raised with me. I have an introductory meeting with the new chair of the BMA later this month, when I am certain that the issues raised by the member will once again be on the agenda.

Stuart McMillan: Along with other MSPs from across the chamber, I recently met the leadership of the local medical committee who represent GPs and their practices in the NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde area. During that meeting, they highlighted the long-standing issues around pensions and how those issues are leading to some GPs considering leaving the profession early or reducing their working hours to avoid what the BMA has claimed amounts to a “pension theft”.

As our NHS continues to contend with the impact of the pandemic, does the cabinet secretary agree with me that it is vital that the UK Government considers changes to the tax-free annual allowance charges so that more GPs are not faced with this dilemma, which will only exacerbate the staffing issues facing general practice?

Humza Yousaf: I agree whole-heartedly and, as I have said before, I have raised this issue with UK counterparts. There has been no flexibility in their position. There are actions that we may well be able to take but, again, that would involve taking money from other areas in the health budget to try to mitigate a problem that the UK Government is showing inflexibility on.

I will call on the UK Government to look at these issues—I look forward to the first meeting with the new Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, which I am sure will happen in very short order, and I will raise those issues with her again. I am sure that the Deputy First Minister, John Swinney, will continue to convey to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury our displeasure at the pension changes, which have caused such difficulty for GPs and doctors right across the country.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): The health secretary has the power to sort this. He could use recycling of pension contributions, which the BMA has put to him. That is available in Wales and in many parts of England, and Northern Ireland is looking at it. Why is he refusing to go down that route? It could release doctors back into the NHS to be deployed where they are needed. Why is he not doing that?

Humza Yousaf: I am not refusing to do it. It is actively under consideration. However, it would be preferable to deal with the root cause of the pensions issue as opposed to taking money out of other parts of the Scottish health budget. I am therefore pushing the UK Government to make changes to pensions where it can, which would help to alleviate some of that pressure.

I am very open to looking at a recycling of employer contributions scheme—I know that a REC scheme has been available—and that is why I will be meeting Dr Kennedy, the chair of the BMA, later this month. I will of course provide an update to members in due course.

NHS Orkney (Meetings)

7. **Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government when it last met NHS Orkney and what issues were discussed. (S6O-01322)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Humza Yousaf): I met the board’s chief executive and other senior staff when I visited NHS Orkney on 16 and 17 August.

Liam McArthur: I have been contacted this week by a local general practitioner in Orkney confirming that rising heating costs will cause significant implications for the health of his patients. He explains that

“stress caused by financial hardship will adversely affect mental health, and folk turning heating down or off will have negative physical impacts on health. This will create more ill health and further increase NHS workload”.

Although we clearly need urgent action from the new Prime Minister to address the cost of energy crisis, can the health secretary advise what additional support is being made available to NHS Orkney and other health boards to help deal with the increased workload and health impacts referred to by my constituent?

Humza Yousaf: Liam McArthur is of course right—the cost of living crisis is a public health crisis. If people have to choose between heating and eating, either choice that they make will have a detrimental impact on their health. He is also right to make the point that our hospitals, our primary care services and our social care services will feel the pinch because of the rising cost of inflation and, indeed, of energy bills.

As the First Minister outlined yesterday in the programme for government, we are providing support to the public, particularly those who will be hit the hardest—I will not rehearse them due to the need for brevity, but I will say that meaningful action on this remains in the hands of the United Kingdom Government. Therefore, we urge the new Prime Minister and the new Chancellor of the Exchequer to come forward with meaningful

measures that will make a significant difference in the face of rising energy prices, because only they have the powers to freeze or to cap those energy price rises. I will continue my engagement with NHS Orkney and other health boards in that regard.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can squeeze in question 8 if I have succinct questions and answers.

Health Practitioner and General Practitioner Vacancies (Aberdeenshire)

8. Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it is assisting general practitioner practices in Aberdeenshire to fill vacant GP and health practitioner posts. (S6O-01323)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Humza Yousaf): The Scottish Government offers a wide range of initiatives specifically to attract GPs to rural areas such as Aberdeenshire. That includes golden hellos and bursaries for newly qualified GPs to take up posts in hard-to-fill rural locations. Our new ScotGem—Scottish graduate entry medicine—programme, focusing on general practice and rural working, is proving popular, with the first cohort of 44 students graduating earlier this year from the University of Dundee and the University of St Andrews.

Gillian Martin: The situation in my constituency is becoming critical, with Fyvie Oldmeldrum medical group down to two part-time GPs. The practice has received no applications for repeated GP post advertisements over the past couple of years. Mintlaw group practice has had to be taken back under the control of NHS Grampian, with Central Buchan medical practice behind it.

The cabinet secretary has already mentioned incentives, but is the Government considering developing any new, inventive schemes that can further incentivise GPs who have left general practice to return to it or incentivise new graduates to base themselves in rural areas such as mine?

Humza Yousaf: I will ask my officials to reach out to colleagues in the health and social care partnership in Aberdeenshire and in NHS Grampian about the specific issues that Ms Martin has raised.

We have a range of initiatives. The ScotGem programme is still in its early days, but I have no doubt that it will make a big, significant difference to the vacancies that exist in GP practices in remote, rural and island communities. I will ask my officials to reach out to local partners on the specifics and to provide an update to Ms Martin in due course.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions on health and social care. We will now move to portfolio questions on social justice, housing and local government. There will be a brief pause to allow members to change their seats before we move on to the next item of business.

Social Justice, Housing and Local Government

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

Single Building Assessment Programme (Cladding Removal)

1. Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will confirm when actions to remove cladding from properties identified as dangerous under the single building assessment programme will be completed. (S6O-01324)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government (Shona Robison): We are taking priority action to address cladding safety issues, having expanded our single building assessment programme, which determines the safety risk from cladding systems on domestic blocks of flats, from 26 to around 100 buildings. We expect the vast majority of buildings that will be assessed to be found to be safe and we will continue to prioritise higher-risk buildings. If cladding is assessed to be high risk, home owners will be invited to discuss the assessment and to agree to actions that will be required to make their building safe. We are working on agreeing the Scottish safer buildings accord, with the expectation that developers will take responsibility for remediating their buildings.

Kaukab Stewart: My constituents in Glasgow Kelvin can be reassured that those projects have continued at pace.

When announcing the Scottish safer buildings accord in May, the cabinet secretary underlined that a joint and collaborative approach was key to resolving the issue of unsafe cladding. Could she provide an update on how the accord has been received by partners across the sector?

Shona Robison: Yes, I can. We are working closely with our partners as we bring together all the stages of the accord's design. Our collaborative approach, through engagement and information sharing, will create a unique and complex agreement. Homes for Scotland, our key partner and the representative body of the

developer sector, strengthens the approach and is important in bringing sectoral understanding and responsibilities to unlocking and resolving the issue of unsafe cladding for home owners in multiresidential buildings across Scotland.

I will keep the Parliament informed when the accord is finalised.

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): A series of freedom of information requests has indicated that 88 school buildings in Scotland still have flammable cladding that is the same as or similar to Grenfell Tower's cladding. Does the cabinet secretary think that it is acceptable to put lives at risk by delaying the removal of that dangerous cladding? When will it be removed from all school buildings in Scotland?

Shona Robison: As Jeremy Balfour will understand, it is the statutory responsibility of local authorities to manage and maintain their school estate, and we expect local authorities to deliver a safe environment for all school users.

The responses that were gathered from local authorities post-Grenfell show that there was not a large-scale problem across the school estate in Scotland, and the Deputy First Minister wrote to local authorities to request assurance that the school estate was considered safe in terms of fire safety, and assurances were provided by all 32 local authorities.

Jeremy Balfour will also understand that the focus of the Scottish Government, as is the case in England and Wales, has been on those residential blocks where people are living that have unsafe cladding, because those are the buildings that present the highest risk. That is not just our opinion; that is the expert opinion. That is why we focused our attention on tackling those residential buildings and providing the funding to do so, so that we play our part in resolving those cladding issues as soon as possible.

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): There are hundreds of buildings in Scotland with highly combustible high-pressure laminate on them—schools, colleges, universities, private schools, hospitals, prisons, hotels and care homes as well as houses. Minutes of the building and safety working group said that, following the pilot of 26 building assessments, a further 100 will be done in the course of the year. However, only one high-rise building in Glasgow is known to have been assessed this year, in May. Given the scale of the problem across Scotland, does the Scottish Government recognise that much more action is urgently required to address it? Can the cabinet secretary advise how many buildings in Glasgow are believed to be affected, particularly given that the Scottish Government office at Atlantic Quay in

Glasgow was recently revealed to be one such building?

Shona Robison: Like Jeremy Balfour, Pam Duncan-Glancy is conflating two different issues. One is about residential buildings where there are people living. Those are the buildings that represent the highest risk and they have been the focus of our attention, as has been the case on the part of the Welsh Government and the United Kingdom Government. That is what we are all doing and that is the right thing to do. Of course, we have committed £400 million in order to take that forward. The accord will help with that, because it will mean that, in the case of those buildings that can be assigned to a developer, the developer will remediate the building and resource that work. That means that we will be able to focus our resources on those buildings that have no developer associated with them. We are focusing our attention on those 100 buildings.

The other buildings that Pam Duncan-Glancy refers to are public buildings such as hospitals and schools, and we would expect the relevant organisations—health boards and local authorities, in those cases—to take the lead in making sure that their buildings are safe. She will be aware of the issues that are being looked at in relation to the Queen Elizabeth hospital at the moment. That is the right and proper way to go about these things. The issues are complex but the approach that I have laid out is the right one.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Questions 2 and 3 have not been lodged.

Inflation, Energy Prices and Interest Rates (Impact on Household Costs)

4. Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what impact inflation, energy prices and interest rates are having on housing costs in Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale. (S6O-01327)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government (Shona Robison): The impacts of the cost of living crisis are being felt by all households in Scotland, including in Christine Grahame's constituency, and are disproportionately affecting people on the lowest incomes, including renters and those without fixed-rate mortgages.

The key levers for tackling the crisis remain in the hands of the United Kingdom Government, and, of course, it must act now. However, our programme for government, which was set out yesterday, contains the steps that we are taking within our limited powers. We are investing an additional £5 million in discretionary housing payments and are extending the scope of the

tenant grant fund. We are also introducing rent controls to strengthen tenants' rights, and a temporary moratorium on evictions.

Christine Grahame: I welcome the announcement in the statement yesterday of emergency legislation to freeze rents across the private and social rented sector.

I have many constituents in Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale who are concerned about mortgage payments as interest rates rise. What interventions—if any, given that a lot of this is reserved—are open to the Scottish Government to assist them?

Shona Robison: I welcome Christine Grahame's identification of the emergency legislation as a significant intervention. She raises an important point about people who have mortgages and are struggling. Although it does not apply to all mortgage holders, a support fund that provides the ability to convert a mortgage to rent or shared equity is available for people who are on low incomes and are struggling. We are reviewing that at the moment to see whether we can make the fund more available to support people. Lenders and advice agencies are aware of that, but I am happy to write to Christine Grahame with that information.

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): House prices are rising at a faster rate in rural areas. Last year, they increased by 13.5 per cent in the Borders alone, as more people seek a rural lifestyle post-pandemic. South of Scotland Enterprise has identified that lack of affordable housing as the biggest barrier to attracting the workforce that we need in the area. Does the cabinet secretary accept that the Government needs to review the target that equates to just 10 per cent of new affordable homes being built in rural communities? That demand will continue to outstrip supply, which will further drive up housing costs and prices.

Shona Robison: We have been focusing very much on the needs of housing in rural and remote Scotland. That is why we are bringing forward a plan that will address the needs in rural and remote Scotland. We are looking at some of the barriers to and timelines involved in getting a housing development off the ground and how we can remove some of those barriers. We are making significant investment in the affordable housing supply programme and, over this parliamentary session, we will invest £3.6 billion in order to deliver 110,000 affordable homes by 2032, many of which will be in Colin Smyth's area. We will continue to do that, but we are always looking at ways in which we can make that money go further, by working with local partners to make sure that we deliver as many affordable homes as possible across all of Scotland.

Refugee Accommodation (Support for Local Authorities)

5. Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what further support it will provide to local authorities for the provision of accommodation for refugees in Scotland, in light of reports that suitable housing has been significantly reduced as a result of its supersponsor scheme. (S6O-01328)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government (Shona Robison): The immigration and asylum systems are fully reserved to the United Kingdom Government. Although local authorities continue to support resettlement schemes by offering accommodation and support in their areas, the Home Office is responsible for the design and operation of resettlement schemes and the UK asylum system.

Refugees who have been granted status following an asylum application have the same rights to access housing as anyone who is legally resident in Scotland.

Since the Ukraine war, under our supersponsor scheme, to ensure that displaced people can travel here safely and immediately, the Scottish Government has directly provided accommodation and support. We have also made £11.2 million available to local authorities to support that work.

Douglas Lumsden: I thank the cabinet secretary for that answer, but it is clear that the houses are not there. Aberdeen City Council's previous administration launched the city's largest council house building programme in decades. Last month, with the Scottish National Party leader citing budget pressures, the new SNP-Lib Dem administration froze four big developments that would have delivered more than 500 new council homes in the city. Will the SNP-Green devolved Government get its act together, give Aberdeen a fair share of funding and allow Aberdeen to build the required new council homes that could be used to welcome people to the granite city?

Shona Robison: I do not think that the Tories are on strong ground when talking about council houses, given the sell-off of tens of thousands of them on their watch over the past few years.

Let us look at the situation in Aberdeen. I have provided all local authorities with the assurance over five years of the affordable housing supply programme investment. We expect all local authorities to come forward with their local housing plans in order to meet local need.

Douglas Lumsden linked that question with the issue of Ukraine. Aberdeen City Council has been working extremely hard on proposals to help with the settlement of Ukrainian refugees. If he had

better communication with his local authority, he would know about some of those very important plans. I suggest that he get in touch with the local authority and bring himself up to speed.

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): Does the cabinet secretary agree that it is somewhat ironic that, while the Scottish Government is doing everything that it can to support refugees by taking 18 per cent of the Ukrainian refugees in the UK, the UK Tory Government is hell-bent on flying other asylum seekers out to Rwanda, to deter them from settling here?

Shona Robison: The irony never ceases to amaze me, and Stuart McMillan makes a very important point.

With the “New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy”, we are doing what we can to support people to settle and integrate. As the First Minister set out yesterday, and as the Deputy First Minister also said, under the Ukraine programme, almost 16,000 people have arrived with a Scottish sponsor in Scotland, which represents 18 per cent of all UK arrivals and is the most per head of any of the four nations. If only other countries could step up to the mark as well.

Building Standards (Price of New Homes)

6. Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what analysis it has done on the potential impact on the sale price of new homes of its proposal to introduce new building standards to prohibit the use of direct emissions heating systems in new builds from 2024. (S6O-01329)

The Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants’ Rights (Patrick Harvie): I refer the member to the answer to written parliamentary question S6W-10120, which was provided on 25 August this year. The research cited found that the cost of installing a zero-emissions heating system ranged from £2,000 to £5,000 more than the cost of installing a gas boiler. However, those costs are highly variable—they depend on a range of factors—and they do not represent predictions of the costs after the 2024 change.

The sale price of a new building is determined by individual developers, and it takes account of a wide range of variables related to building construction costs and local housing markets. Typically, heating system installation costs have a smaller impact on prices than other factors do.

Liam Kerr: I, too, will refer to that parliamentary answer—which did not answer my question, rather like the answer that the minister has just given. In the written answer, the minister admitted to me that, from 2024, installing zero-direct-emissions

heating systems will cost up to £5,000 more per home. In 2019-20, the most recent year before the pandemic intervened, the private sector built more than 16,000 new homes. If Mr Harvie’s rule had been in place, up to £82 million would have been added to construction costs. What impact does the minister think that adding £82 million to construction costs will have on families’ and first-time buyers’ ability to afford a new home?

Patrick Harvie: I am sorry that Mr Kerr chose not to listen to the answer that I gave, in which I explicitly said that I was not making a prediction about what the cost of zero-emissions heating systems would be after 2024. He suggested that I made that prediction, but I did not.

Everybody in the industry is clear that we need to scale up not only the production of the kit—many of the valuable jobs involving that work will be located in Scotland—but the capacity of the industry to carry out those installations. We are working with the industry to build that capacity, which is expected to reduce the costs over time.

All political parties have committed very clearly to the legally binding climate targets, which cannot be met without ambitious action on zero-emissions heating. I wish, for goodness’ sake, that the Conservative Party would start to get behind the actions that the Scottish Government is taking to ensure that we not only hit those climate targets but do so in a way that benefits the cost of living and the economy in Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I hope to be able to call both questions 7 and 8, but I need to have succinct questions and answers.

Housing Waiting Lists

7. Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government how many houses it estimates need to be built to tackle the current housing waiting lists in Scotland. (S6O-01330)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government (Shona Robison): We have committed to delivering 110,000 affordable homes by 2032, of which at least 70 per cent will be available for social rent and 10 per cent will be in remote, rural and island communities. In this parliamentary term, we will invest £3.6 billion towards the delivery of more affordable homes across Scotland, with £30 million of that investment supporting the continuation of the rural and islands housing fund.

Alex Rowley: The number of children who are trapped in temporary accommodation in Scotland is up 17 per cent in one year and is at the highest level on record. Families in the central belt are being offered housing in the north of England because of the lack of housing in Scotland.

According to Shelter Scotland, 130,000 households are on waiting lists for social homes. Shelter has written to the First Minister, calling for an emergency action plan that will buy and build 38,500 social homes by 2026. Will the Government make housing a national priority? Will it bring forward a costed national emergency plan, so that we can address that unacceptable blight on our country? That makes economic sense and it is the right thing to do.

Shona Robison: Affordable housing is a national priority with £3.6 billion allocated to it during this session of Parliament. That is a very clear commitment on our part to build more affordable homes.

Alex Rowley, who raises the important issue of temporary accommodation, mentioned Shelter, which has accepted my request to head up an expert group to look at further solutions to tackle temporary accommodation. He is absolutely right in saying that too many families, particularly those with children, are in temporary accommodation. That is one of my key areas to target, and Shelter will help us to do that work.

I should point out that 20 of the 32 local authorities have managed to reduce the number of people in temporary accommodation since last year. However, more work is to be done to reduce that number, and that is exactly what we are determined to do.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We have to move directly to question 8, because we are running out of time. I ask for brief questions and answers.

Children in Temporary Accommodation

8. Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the increase in the number of children in temporary accommodation, as reported in the annual homelessness in Scotland statistics. (S6O-01331)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government (Shona Robison): As I have just said, I am very concerned by that increase. I am aware that the impacts of the pandemic are still being felt by local authorities and that they are also facing challenges in meeting some households' needs, which is reflected in a backlog of households waiting for settled homes. However, the figures are unacceptable.

I have discussed solutions to temporary accommodation pressures with housing conveners, and I have asked an expert group that is chaired by Shelter Scotland and the Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers for an action plan to reduce the number of households in

temporary accommodation. I expect the initial recommendations to be delivered by the end of the year.

Ruth Maguire: Empty properties that are left in disrepair are a blight on neighbourhoods and could provide much-needed homes to families and children on waiting lists. Will the cabinet secretary provide an update on the progress on compulsory sales orders? Will the Scottish Government consider the proposal for compulsory rental orders?

Shona Robison: Ruth Maguire makes an important point. We are committed to modernising the compulsory purchase order process, to make it clearer, fairer and faster for all parties and to support the delivery of projects that are in the public interest. Compulsory sales orders are being considered as part of that. Any new powers would, of course, need to be compliant with the European convention on human rights. Compatibility with existing powers also needs to be carefully considered. That includes any proposals for compulsory rental orders. I am happy to keep the member updated on progress.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions. There will be a very short pause before we move on to the next item of business.

Public Sector Pay and Emergency Budget Review

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a statement by John Swinney on public sector pay and the emergency budget review update. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of this statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:54

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney): The cost of living crisis represents an unprecedented challenge. Families face a winter when they cannot afford to heat their homes, businesses face energy bills that they cannot pay and parents are struggling to feed their children. That is the reality of the crisis.

Although we are a long way from the full effects being known, last month, the Bank of England set out the reality that the United Kingdom is facing a recession as deep as that in the 1990s and as long as that following the 2008 financial crash.

That is the context within which the First Minister set out the programme for government. She confirmed that we will extend and increase the child payment in November and that we will protect the roofs over people's heads with a rent freeze and a moratorium on evictions. Free school meals will be rolled out further, the fuel insecurity fund will be doubled, rail fares will be frozen until at least March and the warmer homes fuel poverty programme is being widened. That all comes on top of the almost £3 billion in support that is already budgeted for, and an existing £800 million of reliefs for business in this financial year.

The UK Government holds reserved powers over energy, tax, the bulk of benefits and business support, and over regulation that could help to address the crisis. The UK Government has borrowing powers and the ability to deploy financial instruments that can transform household and business budgets. It has all that, yet, as the crisis has worsened, no substantive action has been taken to help people and business. Urgent action is overdue, so I urge the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer not to waste another day before setting out their plans.

Today, I will update Parliament on the impact of the cost crisis on the public finances, and the steps that we will take to keep them in balance while funding the support that is in our power to provide. The crisis is not just a cost of living crisis, as some characterise it. The costs of doing business, of third sector support and of public

services are all rising as well. Indeed, in all my experience, now and during my previous tenure as finance secretary, there has never been a time of greater pressure on the public finances.

Our budget was based on a UK spending review that simply did not foresee the levels of inflation that are now a reality. Last summer, inflation was just 2 per cent. In December, when the budget was agreed, consumer price index inflation stood at just 5.4 per cent. Now, it is more than 10 per cent and is predicted to go higher still. The result is simple: almost every cost that the Government incurs has risen. At the same time, our budget is now worth around £1.7 billion less than it was worth in December.

That alone would require the budget to be revisited, but in times of crisis the job of the finance secretary is not simply to balance the books; it is also to find the money to help families, to back business and to fund the priority projects that improve lives for the long term. Therefore, the emergency budget review must both identify funding to cope with inflation-driven cost increases and aim to support those who most need our help during the crisis.

The review must do so using only the fixed powers of the Parliament. Our total budget is fixed. We cannot vary income tax in-year. Our reserve funding is fully allocated. We have no legal ability to borrow to fund day-to-day spending on things such as pay increases. Our capital borrowing is allocated for projects such as new schools and housing projects that are supporting employment and investing in our recovery. In short, the Scottish budget is at the absolute limits of affordability.

Today, I will set out to Parliament the initial steps that the Scottish Government has taken, and steps that it will take, to manage the nation's finances while maximising the support that we make available to help those who are in need. First, let me quantify the demand arising from public sector pay. As the First Minister set out to Parliament yesterday, in the midst of a cost crisis, our role in pay negotiations is to maximise the support to the lowest paid as a crucial part of our response to the crisis. My job is not to fight low-paid workers' pay claims; it is to fund those pay claims. Accordingly, we have seen police officers agree a 5 per cent deal, while in ScotRail, the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen has similarly settled at 5 per cent.

Negotiations with some of the largest workforces, including the national health service agenda for change workforce, are on-going, but the enhanced pay offers that have been made, excluding direct local government contributions, total approximately £700 million. Last week, we also reached a proposed local government pay settlement. As a result of our intervention and the

hard work of the unions and their members, the pay rise that is proposed for the lowest paid was significantly increased, with awards in excess of 10 per cent, while the increases for the most well-off were capped at £3,000. That is more money for the lowest paid, funded by the Scottish Government.

The proposed settlement means, however, that we must find additional savings. We said that there was no more money, and there is not. Funding the agreement means taking money from elsewhere.

Pay is not the only cost pressure that we face. We have rightly given a warm Scottish welcome to people who have been displaced from Ukraine as a result of the illegal and on-going Russian invasion. Almost 18 per cent of all displaced Ukrainians coming to the United Kingdom are coming to Scotland. That requires us to find around £200 million, which was not planned for at the time of the budget, just as the invasion began. I hope that no one in the chamber begrudges that support.

Public sector pay and the cost of supporting displaced Ukrainians, along with the rising costs due to inflation, are therefore placing enormous strain on our budget. In addition to those factors, we have a clear determination to support those who will find themselves in difficulty this winter. We have already provided almost £3 billion of support to people and, as the First Minister set out yesterday, we will go further. I have heard and am listening to proposals for further action. We are doubling bridging payments, freezing rail fares until beyond March, giving more help for energy efficiency, providing greater support for businesses and the third sector, and managing the impact of rising energy and food bills on hospitals and schools. None of that can be done without reducing planned spend in other areas and in other programmes.

Difficult choices must be made. There is no unallocated cash. There is no reserve that has not been utilised. Every penny more spent on one policy is a penny less spent on another policy. I have therefore written to the Finance and Public Administration Committee today, setting out around £500 million in reductions in planned spending and forecasting that we have made in recent weeks. Those include a reduction of £53 million in the budget for employability schemes. They include utilising funding of £56 million that has been generated by the ScotWind clearing process—funding that will be reinstated in future years and used, as planned, to invest in the just transition. The reductions include a £33 million deferral of ring-fenced agriculture funds, to be returned in future years and, while not impacting on eligibility, they include taking a risk-based

forecasting approach based on demand and making a reduction of £37 million in the budget for concessionary fares.

Throughout the process we have made savings that we consider will have the least impact on public services and on individuals. Still, those decisions have not been easy and—in particular, the reduction in employability funding—they will not be without consequences. Given the circumstances that we face, however, they are unavoidable. At a time of acute labour shortages, historically low unemployment and soaring inflation, we have taken the view that we must prioritise wage increases over spending on employability. That is not a decision that we have taken lightly. It is not a decision that we would have wanted to take.

Any changes to budgets will be formally set out to Parliament in the budget revision process, but it is in the public interest that underlying savings are set out now, so that the scale of the challenge that we face is clearly understood and so that no one in the Parliament, or anyone who is negotiating pay deals, can be unaware of it. Many of the individual savings are small amounts of money, but together they add up to a significant reduction in expenditure, thereby enabling money to be invested in addressing the financial challenges that we face. Last week's intervention by the Scottish Government in the local government pay dispute demonstrates what we are having to do. In order to shift to full consolidation of the award, further savings had to be made.

I have committed to publishing the outcome of the emergency budget review within two weeks of the UK fiscal event that is planned for later this month. Further savings will be required to balance the budget, especially if inflation continues to rise. The majority of our spend cannot be changed at this stage of the financial year. It is contractually committed or supports vital programmes. In short, what I have set out today is just the beginning of the hard choices.

There is one further point that Parliament must reflect on, and this is why I require time, following a UK fiscal event, before I can set out the results of the emergency budget review. For eight weeks we have heard the new Prime Minister talk of unfunded tax cuts—which will not help the lowest-paid people or those who are reliant on universal credit—and of cutting public sector spending to deliver tax cuts for businesses.

If, in pursuing those policies, the United Kingdom Government reduces the budgets of any portfolios for which we have devolved responsibility, the challenge that we face will become harder, as our budget will become smaller. That is the harsh reality of a fixed budget and limited powers. The Scottish Government

simply does not have access to many of the levers that would provide the greatest support in this crisis, such as those relating to taxation of windfall profits, regulation of the energy market and borrowing.

That is why the new Prime Minister and her new chancellor must take action immediately. They have reserved to themselves the powers to deal with this crisis, so my appeal to the United Kingdom Government is to cancel the energy price rises and fund the targeted support that people desperately need; to help families who will struggle to feed their children and heat their homes this winter; and to provide the additional funding that is necessary to meet the impact of higher public sector pay and inflation.

We will do everything that we can. We will make the hard choices, but only the UK Government can act to end this crisis. It should do so, and I encourage it to do so now.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary will now take questions on the issues that were raised in his statement. I intend to allow about 40 minutes for questions, after which we will need to move on to the next item of business.

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of his statement. One word was missing from the statement, which was “sorry”—sorry to the people of Edinburgh and those in the rest of Scotland for the impact that the strikes have had on their lives, especially here in our capital city, where waste piled up on the streets for 12 days during our showcase Edinburgh festivals.

Scottish Conservatives warned Scottish National Party ministers during the passage of the SNP-Green budget that councils across Scotland would be put in a position in which they were unable to meet pay demands. Ministers did not listen and, after year-on-year cuts to council budgets, councils were limited in their ability to address local issues. Just this year, local councils have faced a cut of £251 million in real terms.

The cabinet secretary stated today that the Scottish Government is providing £3 billion. However, a report by the independent Scottish Parliament information centre shows that only £490 million of support has been put in place since October 2021. I am sure that the cabinet secretary does not want to mislead Parliament, so I hope that he will correct the record today.

I will ask two specific questions. It is clear that local government needs a new funding settlement, which the Government has failed to deliver for 15 years. Will the cabinet secretary look again at the idea of a new cross-party discussion about local government funding settlements in the future?

The cabinet secretary has announced £53 million of cuts from employability fund schemes. If we are going to face a recession, such schemes will be such an important part of getting people into work and saving jobs in Scotland. At the same time, the SNP Government is keeping £20 million aside for a referendum. Will he rethink that decision and invest in jobs, not a referendum?

John Swinney: I deeply regret the inconvenience that members of the public in Edinburgh and other parts of the country experienced during the disruption to refuse collection. The ability to address the issue and avoid industrial action would have been helped if, when the Government put more money on the table, Conservative leaders in the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities had not voted to offer workers a 3.5 per cent increase as opposed to the 5 per cent increase that the Government had made it possible to fund. The playing of politics by Conservative leaders in COSLA directly caused the industrial action in the city of Edinburgh, and they should be ashamed of themselves.

On funding, before the additional resources that the Government has provided, the local government settlement for 2022-23 represented an increase of 9.2 per cent in cash terms, or 6.3 per cent in real terms. That is a substantial funding increase for local authorities.

Mr Briggs should know me well enough to know that I would never put myself in the position of misleading Parliament, and it is disgraceful that he has made that suggestion. I will happily put in SPICe the substance of the list of support that the Government is putting in place to assist with the cost of living that is being wrestled with by members of the public. I have it in front of me—it totals £2.968 billion, and I will happily put that information with SPICe. Mr Briggs should be careful about whom he accuses of misleading Parliament.

I am happy to take forward discussions about the funding of local authorities; indeed, the Cabinet has agreed to embark on discussions with local authorities about funding, achievement of outcomes and the role of ring fencing, so that we can engage with them on questions of flexibility.

On the point about employability funding, I was explicit in my statement that I would rather not be making that reduction in public expenditure. However, I have no other choice. The point that I made in my summation to yesterday's debate, which I make again today, is that we are operating in a fixed budget—we can go to no other pot of money than to take that money from existing commitments, which is why we have taken the decision on employability funding.

We think that the judgment is reasoned and rational, because we are experiencing historically low unemployment, we have significant inflationary pressures and the requirement and demand for employability services is likely to be low for the remainder of this financial year. That situation might not be the case in future financial years, as we look at the impacts. The UK Government could act to stabilise the situation, and I hope that it will.

On the question of the allocated resources for the referendum, my statement is focused on this financial year. The commitment to spend £20 million on an independence referendum—for me, that is necessary to ensure that Scotland can decide its own future and get out of the unhealthy and unsatisfactory arrangements of the UK—is expenditure for next year. If Miles Briggs wants to engage substantively in arguments about the challenges of the financial year, let us talk about this financial year and not about the next one.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We have allocated a little more time to reflect the wide interest and the number of members who want to participate, but that will require shorter questions, and shorter answers from the cabinet secretary.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): I thank the Deputy First Minister for advance sight of his statement. Families and businesses across the country are already feeling the pain of rising energy bills, which is why Scottish Labour has called for active measures and welcomes the fact that the Scottish Government has come to agree with many of those pledges.

We appreciate that the Government is not immune from such pressures, as we face an unprecedented economic crisis. However, as well as specifying £500 million of cuts today, the Deputy First Minister has hinted at a larger figure of £1.7 billion. We need greater clarity.

On the £3 billion of support, the Deputy First Minister does not need to place anything with SPICe, which has already done the analysis—only £500 million of that figure has been put in place since the rise in energy costs; the rest pre-dates the rise. [*Interruption.*] The Government does face difficult choices but, if that is to be anything other than a euphemism, we need greater clarity, transparency and honesty.

What is the total value of the funding shortfall for which the Scottish Government is planning? Given that his predecessor suggested that head count would need to be reduced across the public sector by 30,000, will the Deputy First Minister confirm that that reduction forms part of the plans? Given the scale of the cuts that he has seemed to imply with the £1.7 billion figure, what plans has he asked civil servants to examine? When will he

confirm when those plans will be put in place and the timeline for implementing them?

John Swinney: I am not quite sure where Mr Johnson gets his £1.7 billion figure from, but I will happily engage with him on those questions. The substance of the challenge that we face is the rising costs in budget lines. The point that I made about the £1.7 billion relates to the value of our budget because of the impact of inflation. Clearly, we are managing the challenges within the overall budget figure.

I estimate—I have already cited this figure to Parliament—that, on the basis of existing offers, the additional cost of public sector pay is about £700 million. That is a substantial sum of money that we must reconcile within a fixed budget. What I have set out today takes us substantively towards addressing many of the challenges.

Mr Johnson asked about some of the references to head count in the resource spending review. At this stage, none of my predictions on what will happen in the years to come would affect the contents of the resource spending review but, of course, we will have to turn the resource spending review into individual budgets. That process will be determined by many of the decisions that the UK Government takes on the contents of its budget for the next financial year.

To reiterate a point that I made in my statement, if the UK Government reshapes the balance of its budget between what it expects to generate in tax and what it intends to deploy in spending, that will undoubtedly have an effect on our budget, which may require us to revisit some of the assumptions in the spending review.

The budget will go through the normal process of parliamentary scrutiny. The autumn budget revisions will go to the Finance and Public Administration Committee in due course and there will be an opportunity to fully scrutinise all the changes that I am making. I am here today to provide transparency on the changes that we are having to make. Such a statement would not ordinarily be made at this stage in the parliamentary year. It is because we are having to take operational decisions of such a magnitude as we have never taken before that I have come to Parliament to make a statement and to address members' questions.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: It has taken us 10 minutes to do two questions, and we have 18 members who want to ask questions and half an hour for them to ask those questions, so we will have to pick up the pace a bit.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): Although £82 million of what the Deputy First Minister calls savings is actually Barnett consequential from the UK Government, can he provide more detail on

the precise impact of the cuts to the budget? He has given us broad outlines, but I think that people deserve to know what the real impacts will be on rural communities, training funds and, of course, employability schemes. Can he give the people who will face the cuts a bit more detail on what the impacts will be?

John Swinney: I understand the aspiration that Mr Rennie sets out. We will engage in parliamentary scrutiny on such points and answer and address any questions that members have on them.

At the outset, I offer the reassurance that the Government is trying to take a set of decisions that minimises the impact on individuals. That will not be possible in all circumstances, but we are trying to take decisions that minimise the impact on individuals and to make judgments about when we think it is appropriate for us to reduce funding with that objective in mind.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I believe that all MSPs are keen to see everyone in employment paid more, given that we have rocketing inflation. However, given the financial straitjacket of devolution and the fact that we have had real-terms cuts to Scotland's budget of 5.2 per cent this year, even before inflation spiked, what are the implications for the sustainability of Scotland's public finances? Is the Scottish Government looking at whether it can continue to mitigate UK Government cuts in reserved areas?

John Swinney: The expectations on public sector pay in the budget were at 2 per cent. We are obviously at an increased level, and consolidated salary increases will flow through to future years, which will place increasing pressure on future years' budgets. We must restate annually the contents of the resource spending review in order to take account of those factors. That puts increasing pressure on the Scottish Government's budget and, as Mr Gibson highlighted, we do not have the range of flexibilities that we need to expand the size of that cake.

The Government will reflect on the decisions that need to be taken as we look at the contents of the budget, but we believe that it is vital that we sustain the support to mitigate the actions of the UK Government, especially for people in our society who are vulnerable, in order to protect our citizens in their time of need.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members who wish to ask a question to press their request-to-speak button now or as soon as possible.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): With tomorrow's announcement from the UK

Government, there is the possibility that the Scottish Government will receive additional funding as a result of the tax cuts down south. Can the Deputy First Minister confirm that the Scottish Government would use that money, should it arise, to fund tax cuts for hard-working Scots to avoid us being the highest-taxed part of the UK?

John Swinney: I will wait until I see all the detail before I decide what the tax stance of the Scottish Government and the proposals are going to be. We will see what the contents of tomorrow's announcements are, but I reiterate my point to Parliament that, if there is an approach that rebalances tax and spending in the United Kingdom, I would imagine that there will be an impact on the spending power of the Scottish Government. That is an issue that Parliament will have to wrestle with very carefully.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): In the Deputy First Minister's statement, we were reminded that the bulk of benefits are reserved to Westminster, in particular the state pension. Incidentally, I do not think that that is a benefit—it is an entitlement.

Forty per cent of those who are entitled to pension credit do not claim it, and it has been like that for over a decade. Pension credit is a gateway to other benefits, so that saves the Treasury billions. As the UK Government is not pushing those claims—that may be deliberate—what can the Scottish Government do, despite the matter being reserved, to help Scottish pensioners claim their entitlement, which makes such a difference to so many?

John Swinney: That is a very important issue and it is one of the areas of work that is taken forward by the financial advisory services that the Government funds around the country. There is advice available to members of the public.

There is obviously a question about the degree to which people are aware of these opportunities to supplement their income entirely appropriately. I will take forward the point that Christine Grahame makes, to ensure that our advice agencies understand the importance of encouraging awareness of the opportunities.

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): It is local government that usually takes the hit when it comes to Government cuts. The country has seen the impact of £6 billion of cuts over the past decade. What will the impact of the review be on local councils and communities?

John Swinney: As I indicated earlier, in the local government finance settlement for this year, there was a 9.2 per cent cash-terms increase for local government and a 6.3 per cent real-terms increase. That is before we get to the additional

money that I put into local government as a consequence of the pay deal.

Local government, in a very tight financial settlement, is being well supported. As I indicated in my answer to Mr Rennie, we are trying to minimise the impact of any judgments on individuals and communities, and that will be the approach that the Government continues to take as we look for ways to support those who are facing the greatest challenge from the cost crisis.

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): The workforce in the third and voluntary sector play an important role in delivering key services across Scotland, often in partnership with Government and local authorities. Today's announcement will have an impact directly on them, I am sure.

What assessment has the Scottish Government made of the pay and other financial pressures on the sector? What can the Scottish Government do to support the sector at this hugely challenging time?

John Swinney: I acknowledge the significance of the third sector and its importance in providing support to individuals, which we saw during the pandemic and is ever more necessary now, during the cost crisis.

The sector will be under the same financial pressures that the Government is under. Our ability to support the sector to a greater extent is an issue that we will keep under constant review as we look for ways to maximise the support that is available, to provide resilience and capability in communities to meet the effects of the financial crisis that we face.

Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con): Does the Deputy First Minister agree that, if the Scottish Government had not wasted hundreds of millions on ferries that do not float, the malicious prosecution of Rangers, the delays with the sick kids hospital, of course, and other botched SNP projects, he would not be announcing the £560 million cut that he is announcing today?

John Swinney: Bluntly, no, because most of what Pam Gosal talked about was capital expenditure, and we cannot use capital expenditure to pay folks' salaries. It is just not possible. I am very happy to answer questions in Parliament, but it would be helpful if they were slightly more relevant to the realities of life.

Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): Today, the Deputy First Minister has outlined the hundreds of millions of pounds of savings that will have to be made for the Scottish Government to make the enhanced pay offer to public sector workers. Nobody wants to see those savings made, but we have heard how the

Scottish Government's fixed budget has fallen in real terms under Westminster, so we do not have a choice. Mr Briggs might want to think on that. Does the Deputy First Minister agree that not only do we need Westminster urgently to provide additional funding but we need independence, to put future decisions firmly in the hands of the Scottish Parliament and not the Tories at Westminster?

John Swinney: The cost crisis illustrates the limitations of this Parliament's ability to deal with changing and dynamic circumstances. During Covid, we saw the United Kingdom Government extend its financial interventions to a quite extraordinary level. That was welcome. It was necessary in that moment, and it is necessary now. However, it would be better if we were able to take the decisions in this Parliament, as an independent Parliament, about the choices that our people need to face. It would be better if we had those controls at our disposal and did not have to wait for the UK Government to take decisions that we hope will assist us in our endeavours.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): At this moment, as the cabinet secretary outlines £500 million of cuts, public corporation Scottish Water has reserves of almost £500 million, following its price hike earlier this year—a rise that looks set to happen again next year. Has the cabinet secretary demanded that public corporations that have vast reserves play their part in easing the financial pressures that millions of Scottish households face by holding down utility bills and investing in capital projects such as public district heat networks that get houses, public buildings and businesses off the gas grid?

John Swinney: I expect all public bodies, including public corporations, to play their part in assisting the Government as we wrestle with the unprecedented situation that we face.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): A number of claims have been made in recent weeks about the status of the Scottish reserve. The Deputy First Minister referenced the reserve in his statement; will he expand on what he said and clarify the status of the reserve at present and what has been allocated from it?

John Swinney: At the statement that Mr Arthur gave to the Parliament on the provisional Scotland reserve position at the end of the financial year, the expectation was that the reserve would hold £650 million. The budget bill provided for £511 million of that to be inserted into the budget, and we expect to deploy the remaining £139 million at the autumn budget revisions, to support announcements that have already been made to provide assistance to different aspects of public policy in the course of the Government's work.

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): I welcome the fact that tackling the cost of living crisis is front and centre of the Scottish Government's programme for government. In comparison, the UK Government has been missing in action. That has caused anxiety for families and businesses, not only in my Aberdeen Donside constituency but across the country. Has the new UK Government contacted the Scottish Government to outline the emergency plans that are needed to tackle the cost of living crisis?

John Swinney: I have to say that nothing has reached me yet. That is not to say that there have not been approaches about dialogue. However, nothing has reached me at this stage.

As I indicated to Parliament yesterday, the First Minister asked the previous Prime Minister to arrange four-nations discussions on the cost of living emergency. Her request was turned down at that stage. I have been in touch with the former chancellor and I wrote to the new chancellor overnight to request an urgent intervention to address the very issues that Jackie Dunbar has raised.

Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con): The cabinet secretary revealed today that almost £10 million will be cut from the justice budget. At today's Criminal Justice Committee meeting, Police Scotland voiced real concern about SNP cuts resulting in fewer officers on our streets. Without giving us the usual stock excuses that blame the UK Government, will the cabinet secretary tell people why jeopardising public safety is the right thing to do?

John Swinney: I would not countenance jeopardising public safety and I do not think that it helps the quality of debate for Mr Findlay to go chucking around accusations like that. I remind Mr Findlay that crime in Scotland is at a 40-year low and that we properly and effectively fund the Police Service.

I am pleased that the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans has been able to secure a 5 per cent pay increase for police officers. The whole purpose of my statement is to indicate to members that there are limitations on the resources that we have available to us and that we will have to make hard choices. However, as part of those hard choices, I am pleased that our Police Service serves us so well and that we have such low levels of crime in Scotland today.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): It seems to me that some organisations, some businesses and perhaps some individuals have been making huge profits during Covid and the energy price challenges. Does the Deputy First Minister support the idea of a windfall tax? Is there anything that the Scottish Government can do on

that, or are we dependent—again—on Westminster?

John Swinney: As ministers have made clear, there are very strong arguments for windfall taxes, and we have supported measures that have been taken forward in that respect. We believe that, if there are windfall profits out of the proceeds of a range of different activities, there is an argument to consider whether those should be the subject of additional taxation.

Mr Mason will appreciate, though, that issues of corporate taxation are reserved to the United Kingdom Parliament, and the Scottish Government has very limited scope to take forward any issues of that type. We can explore any issues that may arise through the non-domestic rates system, but I stress that that is very much a peripheral approach to tackling the scale of the issue that Mr Mason raises with me.

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): I listened carefully to what the cabinet secretary said about operational decisions for this year, but Scotland's two richest families have as much wealth as the poorest 20 per cent of the population. What work is being done to consider how the Scottish Parliament's existing tax-raising powers—for example, over land-based taxes—could be used to target the super-rich, whose wealth has increased substantially during the pandemic?

John Swinney: The Government takes forward on-going discussions to consider the exercise of the tax powers over which we have existing competence. The conclusions of those discussions will feature in the budget proposals that will be brought forward later in the year, and members will have the opportunity to scrutinise those. There are very limited opportunities for the Government to extend beyond those existing tax responsibilities, but we consider all those questions as part of our efforts to ensure that the public finances are sustainable.

Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP): The Deputy First Minister touched on some of the steps that the Scottish Government is taking to mitigate the cost of living crisis. Can he provide any further detail on how the Scottish Government will maximise the current direct financial assistance that is available to those who are most in need, taking into account the financial straitjacket that the Scottish Government is subject to—sadly—under the current constitutional settlement?

John Swinney: In answering Annabelle Ewing's question, I cite the Scottish child payment as probably the most recent and significant intervention in the matter. It represents a very welcome and highly focused intervention to support families who face financial challenge and

difficulty. We set out yesterday that it will be extended in November and that the payment will be increased.

That is one example—there are others that I could list—of where the Government is taking action to support families who face challenge. Doing that forces us to make choices about how we use our resources because, if we fund the Scottish child payment, we are not able to fund other proposals and services that other people may wish us to fund.

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): Can the Deputy First Minister confirm that no budget has been taken from this year's allocation to the just transition fund for the north-east and Moray, and that every penny of the £20 million from this year's budget will be allocated this year?

John Swinney: No money has been taken from the north-east transition fund. Whether all of it will be allocated this year is a matter that will be subject to ministerial decision making in the course of this year, but we want to see that money allocated in full for the remainder of this financial year.

Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP): Normal independent countries have and will be using extensive borrowing powers to ease the burden of the cost of living crisis. What progress has been made in discussions with the UK Government with regard to more flexibility within the existing fiscal framework, particularly around additional borrowing powers, which are needed now more than ever?

John Swinney: We are in what I would call the foothills of discussions about the fiscal framework, and there are some mountains yet to be climbed. We will raise and discuss those issues, and the response that we will get from the UK Government will be a matter for further consideration and explanation to Parliament. However, this crisis and Covid illustrate the necessity for the Government and Parliament to have a wider range of financial powers and flexibilities to enable us to manage the challenges that we face.

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): The Deputy First Minister will be aware that, before Covid, the number of people with disabilities in employment in Scotland was lower than the number in the rest of the United Kingdom. Covid has meant that many disabled people have been left behind. The cuts to employability training will affect the most vulnerable disabled people in our society. What message does that send to disabled people in Scotland? It says that they are not important with regard to getting back into employment. Will he rethink the cuts, particularly around disability?

John Swinney: I hear Mr Balfour's point and I understand it. He makes a fair point, but the challenge that I face is that I cannot spend money twice. That is the point that we are reaching because of the pressures that we are facing. I hear what he says and I will explore what opportunities there are to try to address the issues that he raises, but we are under severe financial pressure, and to meet the costs of public sector pay, we have to take the decisions that we are taking.

I will try to minimise the impact on members of the public—I have given Parliament that assurance today—but the wider context for our financial pressures is set by the parameters in which we operate from the UK Government. If those were relaxed, I would be in a position where I could allocate more money than I am able to allocate today.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, cabinet secretary. I observe that the response to my appeal to pick up the pace was absolutely exemplary and it has set the standard for the rest of the session.

Programme for Government (Cost of Living)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a debate on the programme for government and the cost of living. I invite members who wish to participate to press their request-to-speak buttons now or as soon as possible. I call Patrick Harvie to open the debate.

15:38

The Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights (Patrick Harvie): As the First Minister said yesterday, the programme for government comes against the backdrop of unprecedented circumstances—circumstances that threaten a humanitarian emergency in every community in the country. The crisis is impacting on people of all walks of life, but that impact will not be evenly felt. People on low incomes, those with poor health or who are in precarious work, those with families—especially young children—and people renting their homes will be among the hardest hit.

As a responsible Government, in order to support people, especially during this winter, we are determined to act to mitigate the impact of the crisis to the maximum extent possible within our limited powers and resources. That includes providing support for energy bills, childcare, health and travel as well as social security payments that are not available elsewhere in the UK. The programme for government also outlines important steps to support people who rent their homes, and that is what I will focus on in my speech.

First, on financial support, we are providing more than £88 million in housing support this year. That builds on the £39 million of additional funding that has already been provided to protect tenants as a result of the pandemic. In our programme for government, we have committed to extending eligibility for the tenant grant fund. That means that, as well as supporting tenants with pandemic-related rent arrears, the fund will now be able to help people who are struggling to pay rent due to cost of living pressures. We are also providing an additional £5 million for discretionary housing payments so that they can help people with energy costs as well as with rental liabilities. That takes our total investment in DHPs to more than £88 million and provides a lifeline for many people.

For some people, renting a home is a choice that they have made freely and happily, and their rented home is of good quality, secure and affordable. For others, that is not the case. People who rent, especially in the private rented sector, spend a greater proportion of their income on

housing than do people who own their homes. Tenants have, on average, lower incomes. In the private rented sector, energy standards are also poorer. Therefore, many people who live in a rented home already faced an incredibly challenging and precarious financial situation, and the new crisis only exacerbates those problems for many tenants throughout Scotland.

Although we know that, as the Government regularly restates, there are many responsible landlords who provide a good service and try to protect their tenants, we also know that that is not universal. I am certain that I am not the only MSP who has constituents getting in touch about eye-watering rent increases.

Few people would defend the extraordinary inaction from the UK Government over the summer or the frankly insulting remarks of the man who overstayed his tenure in Downing Street, who said that people should deal with the energy crisis by buying a new kettle. We have to hope that we will see some significant action from the new Prime Minister. However, throughout the leadership campaign, she repeatedly refused to commit to providing sufficient support to deal with the crisis. That is not what the Scottish Government will do.

We have examined what we can do within our devolved powers and limited budget to support people who are bearing the brunt of the crisis now. We have, of course, already taken important steps. We put in place direct support and stronger housing rights during the pandemic, and we have since made them permanent. In doing so, we made it clear that we would continue to seek new ways to give the support that is needed. That is why our programme for government sets out new, immediate and bold action that we will take.

We will work with the Parliament to introduce emergency legislation that will be designed to protect tenants by freezing rents and imposing a moratorium on evictions until at least the end of March next year. We will ensure that rents are, in effect, frozen from yesterday, when the announcement was made, and we will introduce a prohibition on executing eviction decrees for a limited period, which will be similar to the measures that were in place during the pandemic.

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): The Scottish Federation of Housing Associations has warned against Government rent controls in the social housing sector. What consultation—if any—has the Government undertaken on the measures?

Patrick Harvie: The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government and I have had conversations with the social housing sector. We are very aware that we need to take account not only of the protection that

people need from rent increases but of the social housing sector's need to invest in the provision of new homes and improvements in quality. We will continue to make great efforts to engage with the sector as we move forward.

The proposed rent freeze will be in place across both parts of the rented sector. Any emergency action must, by definition, be temporary and its on-going necessity must be continually reviewed. Therefore, given the huge uncertainty as to what the next six months and beyond will bring, we intend to build in regular review points and consider carefully whether and how any measures might be extended beyond that initial period and how those measures will impact on and complement the longer-term reform of the rented sector to which we have already committed during the parliamentary session.

Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab): Like Labour, the Scottish Greens are committed to providing support for tenants. In their manifesto, they committed to supporting student renters. They said that,

“regardless of housing provider,”

student renters would

“have the same protections as those with Private Rented Tenancies”

and that the party would

“Ensure that rent controls apply to student accommodation.”

Now that the minister is in Government, I want to check with him and get his confirmation that he stands by that and that the rent freeze will also apply to student accommodation.

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

Patrick Harvie: I appreciate that, Presiding Officer.

I commend the member for her prescience: the very next paragraph in my speech is about exactly that issue. She will be aware that, in the longer-term work that we are doing on the new deal for tenants, we have been undertaking a review of purpose-built student accommodation. In relation to those emergency measures, our plans include students who are renting in the private rented sector. We want them to benefit from the protections that we are putting in place. For students who are in university or college halls of residence or in PBSA, the structure of the contracts is different and often includes energy costs. Therefore, we are working quickly to determine exactly how we can give parity of protection to those students, as it is our intention to achieve that.

I will move on to the issue of evictions. We have always been clear that eviction by a landlord, whether private or social, should always be a last resort when all avenues to sustain a tenancy have been exhausted. Through the recently passed Coronavirus (Recovery and Reform) (Scotland) Act 2022, we are ensuring that pre-action protocols, which provide further protections against evictions, are made permanent.

However, once again, we find ourselves in unique and unprecedented times. In recognition of that, alongside our bold action to freeze rents until at least the end of March 2023, our emergency legislation will also seek to place a moratorium on evictions. Similarly to the restrictions that were put in place during the pandemic, that action will effectively halt the service and enforcement of evictions across the rented sector. However, cases related to antisocial behaviour or criminality will be allowed to proceed. We are considering what additional safeguards are required, particularly for landlords who find themselves in financial hardship.

Emergency legislation is the linchpin of our action, but it is by no means the whole story. For example, people need to know what their existing rights are—and they are stronger rights than those that exist in other parts of the UK. That will be increasingly important during the next few weeks. Any tenant who, as a result of the announcement that we made yesterday, is told by their landlord that their rent will increase immediately should know that that is illegal and can be challenged. Private landlords must give three months' notice of any rent increases. Our intention is to shape our emergency legislation to make sure that any notices that are issued after yesterday's announcement will not come into effect.

Of course, a private landlord cannot simply throw someone out of their home; they must follow the strict legal processes and conditions that are in place. To try to evict tenants without following those routes is illegal and should be reported to the police immediately. If, over the coming days and weeks, any tenant finds that their landlord is trying to immediately increase their rent or make them leave their property without giving the required notice, I urge them to please seek advice from an organisation such as Citizens Advice Scotland, Shelter Scotland, a tenants union or their local housing department. I ask all members to share those messages about the existing rights, as it is very important that we do so. In order to drive awareness of the new and existing protections that are in place for tenants, we will undertake a further awareness-raising campaign over the coming months.

People who rent are not just worried about paying their rent; they and other households are

facing many other pressures, which is why we provide such significant financial housing support. That is also why the programme for government commits us to doubling our fuel insecurity fund to £20 million to help households that are at risk of severely rationing their energy use or self-disconnecting entirely. We have also recently committed to an additional £1.2 million to enable the immediate expansion of energy advice services, to ensure that households and businesses receive the support and guidance that they need. We want to make sure that people get all the support that they are able to access, so we are preparing a new Scottish Government cost of living website, which will bring all the potential support and how it applies to people in different personal circumstances into one place.

There is a huge amount more. I am sure that members will highlight their concerns during the debate, and the cabinet secretary will add to my remarks, no doubt, when closing. To be clear, though, all the additional help is already needed—it is by no means an alternative to our demand for a major intervention on energy prices, which the UK Government must make to prevent the October price rise and put additional support in place.

This Government has already proposed bold new plans to deliver longer-term work on a new deal for tenants. We initiated that well before the full nature of the cost of living crisis became clear. It is right that we act now to protect tenants in the context of these exceptional pressures, but our longer-term aims remain. We will keep reviewing our work on that longer-term reform as we go, to ensure that we respond to the immediate pressures without losing sight of the aim of delivering the new deal for tenants that is so vital and needed.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I advise the chamber that we have a bit of time in hand, so anyone who takes an intervention should get the time back.

15:50

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Yesterday's programme for government debate set out the extent of this Parliament's concern about the cost of living challenge that faces both of Scotland's Governments, not just in terms of addressing the significant economic problems that we are all grappling with as a result of rampant inflation but, just as important, in terms of the resulting social and personal cost in our communities. It is good to hear what the minister has just said about the advice service that will be provided in that regard.

The editorial in Saturday's *Financial Times* could hardly have been more blunt in its economic analysis of the fragility of the economy, which was that many businesses and members of the public are on the brink, and there is little optimism that the current situation will be short lived. It said:

"A failure to directly support at least the most vulnerable households and enterprises would be catastrophic for the economy",

and it acknowledged that the effort that is required is on the scale of that which was required to tackle the pandemic.

It has been clear for some weeks that the £37 billion package of support that was announced some months ago by the UK Government, including the £400 payments that will start for households in October and the additional support with winter fuel and disability payments, is not enough, and it is certainly not enough to help those who are most in need.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): With regard to the £400 payments, like Liz Smith, I have many people in my constituency who have oil-fired central heating. Is there any news on whether they, as well as those who are on gas and electricity, will get that £400?

Liz Smith: That is a good question, and I think that the issue was raised in the House of Commons at lunch time today. I believe that some important detail will be forthcoming on that point. The member is quite right to say that the issue affects quite a lot of constituents.

It was also good to hear at lunch time much more about the direction of travel for the new Truss Government when it comes to additional support. In particular, I want to welcome the acknowledgement that what is happening now is on the scale of the pandemic. Most of the economic analysts this morning are predicting a package of upwards of £150 billion of support—that is above the level of support for the Covid pandemic and it would also represent the largest welfare bailout in recent history. Likewise, Liz Truss has indicated that an energy price cap is likely to be put in place at around £2,500 instead of the predicted £3,500.

I hope that those measures will persuade the First Minister that the UK Government is taking this matter extremely seriously. I hope, too, that she will respond accordingly to that commitment, and to the assurances from the new chancellor that there is a need for a large package of support now rather than a package of support that is made available through several incremental changes over time. I think that that will give a little bit of help and much needed relief in the short term.

I hope that the First Minister will also acknowledge and support the assurances that

were made by the Prime Minister in her first public statement that this large package of short-term support will be accompanied by policies to address the longer-term imbalances in energy markets. That is important because, as Governments set about tackling this awful crisis not just in this country but in others, too, it is important to pay attention to the most recent economic analysis, and most especially to the factors that are affecting the supply and cost side of the economy, and then those that are affecting the demand side, because tackling each requires slightly different policy approaches.

The on-going war in Russia—especially the action of Vladimir Putin regarding the Nord Stream 1 gas pipeline—is, as everyone agrees, the root of the trouble for the supply chains and the basic costs of production.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): Independent reports have indicated that Brexit has increased food prices by 6 per cent and that sterling has lost 10 per cent of its value, which has impacted on imports. Does Liz Smith agree that Brexit has had that effect? Does she agree with those independent reports?

Liz Smith: I think that Christine Grahame knows my views on Brexit, but it is quite clear that Brexit is by no means the root cause of all of the problem. It is very much a global crisis. Many countries that are not involved in the Brexit situation have to contend with exactly the same forces that we have to contend with. Christine Grahame should bear that in mind.

How many times in recent weeks have we been told that businesses, many of which are at the heart of our communities, are on the brink of closing their doors? The situation is not just creating viability issues for those businesses in our constituencies; it is affecting our schools, hospitals and care homes, many of which are the backbone of our society.

Patrick Harvie: Will the member take an intervention?

Liz Smith: I will take it if I can get the time back.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You can get the time back, Ms Smith.

Patrick Harvie: Liz Smith raises a very important point about the wider cost crisis that is impacting on public services and businesses throughout our economy. Does she agree that the intervention from the UK Government on energy prices must ensure that all those organisations gain that benefit and that the cost should fall on the shoulders of those who have been raking in record profits?

Liz Smith: Yes, I agree with that point. It is not just about the public at large; it is very much about the future of our businesses, and any package of support must deal with the concerns that businesses are facing. I would still like to see the removal of VAT on fuel prices, because that comes through in everybody's production costs. However, we will have to wait until tomorrow's announcement by the Prime Minister to find out exactly what that targeted support could be for businesses as well as for the public.

We also need a re-evaluation of world energy markets and a diversification of energy sources. That will not be easy, because of the inherent contradictions in the short term when it comes to pushing ahead with greener options while making the best use of the supply of fossil fuels. I know that the minister will not like that point, but a balance is required. It makes no sense to harbour total opposition to nuclear energy and the exploitation of oil and gas resources in the North Sea. We need a genuine mix of energy if we are to avoid a serious problem in the future. That mix must be based on need but also on incentives that allow new investment in green alternatives. That is why we must be careful about arguing for longer-term windfall taxes. We must not disincentivise those who can place significant sums of money in our green alternatives.

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Liz Smith: Can I have the time back?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You can have a little more time.

Liz Smith: I will take one more intervention.

Clare Adamson: Would the member like to reflect on transmission charges, which act as a disincentive to people in Scotland to do renewable energy, because it costs far more to get that energy on to the network here than it does in the south of England?

Liz Smith: Surely that is a way of keeping down the costs to consumers. That is exactly the point that consumers will want addressed in the cost of living crisis.

I will sum up quickly—*[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Liz Smith has taken a number of interventions, so members who are intervening from a sedentary position should reflect on their behaviour.

Liz Smith: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

I believe strongly that the UK Government must be bold with its economic assistance, but that does not mean that the Scottish Government has no part to play. My colleagues will address some of the issues as we move through the debate.

There is an expectation among our constituents that we act together, listen to one another, talk and co-operate and that we are united in our approach to dealing with the situation. I will repeat what I said yesterday: I do not think that the constant bickering about constitutional issues is at all helpful.

15:59

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): The cost of living emergency means that households are seeing their incomes squeezed like never before. People who are on low incomes or living in poverty were already choosing whether to heat or eat; the choices that they now face are devastating.

Organisations and businesses are also struggling to cover costs, particularly those in the third sector, which—against a £1 million funding cut—faces ever greater demand for its long-recognised expertise in poverty and inequality. Without sustainable multiyear funding, the support that the sector offers is at risk.

Governments must act right now. The new Tory Prime Minister's inbox will be, as ours are, bulging with despair and challenge on a scale that has not been seen in generations. Sadly, I do not hold out much hope that she will meet that challenge. I desperately urge her to bring down bills and to listen to my colleagues in Westminster, who have long called for a windfall tax on the energy giants, which are reporting excessive profits at the expense of people.

However, it is not all down to the Tories—the Scottish National Party has failed us too. It has not used the powers that are already held in Scotland to do its bit to ease the bite of the crisis. I welcome the announcement on when the Scottish child payment will be increased and rolled out, and I recognise the impact of that payment. However, it is not enough. For those who are already in receipt of it, it amounts to £30 extra this year. For many, it is too late—the delayed roll-out has meant that the over-sixes either have been left on bridging payments and missed out on vital uplifts, or have fallen through the cracks and received nothing at all. All that has led to children in Scotland missing out on £5 million every single week.

The reality is that much of what was announced yesterday was a rehash of previously announced policies that the Government has delayed and failed to deliver.

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government (Shona Robison): I do not understand how Pam Duncan-Glancy can call it “a rehash” when people will receive the money in their pocket from 14

November, which is a date yet to come. Surely she can find it in herself to welcome that money going into the pockets of the families that need it most.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: The cabinet secretary will be well aware that the announcements on the Scottish child payment were made on 9 December last year, in relation to doubling the payment, and in the child poverty delivery plan in March, to add a fiver to it. The date that was announced yesterday is the new bit, which is why people who are in receipt of the Scottish child payment will only get £30 extra this year. It is a not a new or significant commitment, and it already means that thousands of children have missed out on millions of pounds. The cabinet secretary and others can shake their heads all they like; that is the reality in Scotland.

Much of what was announced yesterday was a rehash. Despite the SNP's claim to have spent billions of pounds in response to the current crisis, the Parliament's impartial information service is clear that much of that relates to long-standing commitments that go back many years, including commitments that were made by the Labour Party when it was in office more than 15 years ago. The actual figure is nearer £500 million, of which half was to pass on the UK Government council tax rebate. The people of Scotland need action and a Government that will be bold and level with them, not one that is more interested in scoring political points than in getting people the help that they need.

Neither Government has the ambition—both are tired and neither is bold enough to tackle the crisis. Members can laugh if they like, but I can tell them that people in Scotland are not laughing.

It is not good enough for the Government to sit on its hands when it holds the power to change people's lives. It is galling to hope that people do not notice because the comparator is the worst Tory Government in history. The Scottish people are not daft, but they are desperate. They can see their bills going up and their purses getting emptier, and they recognise the lack of support that is coming from the SNP.

We have seen countless opportunities pass by, when the Government could have put money in the pockets of the people who desperately need it. For example, I have heard from disabled people who cannot afford to charge their wheelchairs. The Scottish Government could have acted, but it did not. It failed to live up to its own fuel poverty strategy by refusing to expand the child winter heating assistance to disabled adults and those on all rates of assistance. It failed to keep its promise to maintain the uplift to the carers allowance supplement, and had it used the social security powers for the real radical change that was

promised, we would have a more adequate and fairer disability and carers benefits system, and people would have been off to a better start at the beginning of the crisis.

The SNP says that it does not have the powers that it needs to act, but that is not true. When Scotland received consequential following the UK Government's initial cost of living package, inadequate as it was, the SNP lazily picked up the blueprint that was drawn up by the Tories and copied it, meaning that some of the most well-off got support, while those who needed it received barely enough to scratch the surface.

There is no excuse: we gave the SNP a plan and showed it how to give the money to the people who needed it most, but the SNP did not use it. Our plan would have seen £1,000 of support get to people who needed it, capped bus fares, cut rail fares and reversed water charge increases—every household would have got a £100 rebate on them. Crucially, we would have targeted £400 at people who needed it the most and were hardest hit. Disabled people, unpaid carers and people on low incomes would have received desperately needed support, and there would have been money left over for the welfare fund too.

It is not too late. The Scottish Government can act now, and I urge it to do so. The problem now is deeper and bigger, so the solutions must be bigger and bolder. Children who are on bridging payments will not receive what they are eligible for until the end of the year—that is a long time to wait when someone is struggling to put food on the table. Doubling it now would really help.

We know the role that debt plays in poverty. People are borrowing money to pay for the basics and to cope with rising bills. Increasing the funding for money advice services to ensure that people get the support that they need to manage what little they have will be crucial. In addition, a winter eviction ban would, of course, ensure that no one is left out in the cold in winter.

Over the past decade, the mismanagement of our economy and the failure of both Governments to work together has meant that living standards and real wages have failed to grow and that we have entered the crisis from a position of significant disadvantage. The country and its people are on their knees. We need more than sticking plasters to get us back on course; we need a stronger, more secure economy that does not just mask poverty but ends poverty and inequality for good.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There is a bit of time in hand. If members have something to say, I would encourage them to make an intervention, which will almost certainly be taken, I am sure.

16:05

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): I am pleased that the Scottish Government is dedicating this time to debate the cost of living and energy crisis. In the coming days, we will see what plans the new Prime Minister will set out for the country to tackle it.

The Liberal Democrats have already called for—in some cases, they were the first to call for—the rise in the energy price to be scrapped; a support scheme to help businesses deal with the rise in energy prices, as the cap does not apply to them; a national programme to insulate homes; and a doubling of the warm home discount and the winter fuel allowance.

It is no exaggeration to say that people are fearful and worried sick about how they will pay their energy bills this winter. The fact is that many cannot pay the sums that are being spoken about. That insidious thought is impacting on businesses and households alike, and it is imperative that our Governments do all that they can.

It is not difficult to see disastrous consequences ahead, should we continue down this path: pensioners, including already hard-hit WASPI—women against state pension inequality—women, further limiting heating and eating; single-person households struggling; parents trying their best to feed their children while working all hours to make ends meet; and more children being cold and hungry and growing up in poverty. The child payment increase will help the worst affected, but people with low fixed incomes are already struggling with limited budgets and there will be businesses that cannot survive eye-watering energy cost increases.

Although the programme for government outlined the measures that the Scottish Government will take, more needs to be done.

Last week, Shetland Islands Council highlighted that, by next April, 96 per cent of households in the islands could be in fuel poverty. To stay out of fuel poverty, households in Shetland would need to earn £104,000, compared with £52,000 for their UK counterparts. The irony of Shetland contributing to making Scotland energy rich, as the First Minister described it yesterday, is not lost on those of us who live there.

It is important to highlight the difference in weather patterns across the UK. Not everywhere has experienced the recent 40°C heat and some may never have switched off their heating this summer.

Households across rural Scotland rely on heating oil, rather than on mainline gas. There is no price cap on heating oil and there has been

little support from either Government so far to directly help those households.

Homes across Scotland lack adequate insulation to benefit energy bills and efforts to save energy to help tackle the climate emergency.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): Beatrice Wishart mentioned oil and gas and those who are off-grid. It is really hard for her constituents in Shetland. Does she agree that the same folk who are off-grid in the south of Scotland are affected, too?

Beatrice Wishart: Yes, I agree that those people are affected by being off-grid. The impact of that is felt across rural Scotland.

Recent Scottish Liberal Democrat research indicated that it could take us more than 300 years to insulate every fuel-poor home in Scotland, at the pace the warmer homes Scotland scheme is working at. One can only hope that the new investment that was announced yesterday will speed up that process.

The cost of travel is also a great consideration for many households. Petrol prices have fluctuated over the summer and cars are essential in many parts of Scotland. Public transport is not cheap to operate, and it is expensive to use, especially when budgets are squeezed. For many who are reliant on daily train or ferry services to commute, additional travel costs can feel like paying a second mortgage. Although the Scottish Government will point to its announcement on freezing ScotRail prices, that will effectively be in place for only two months.

Any money that is available in the system should be used to help people to navigate the cost of living crisis, not to reheat divisive political arguments.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. I call Emma Roddick, for a generous four minutes.

16:10

Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I took part in yesterday's debate on the programme for government, and it was difficult to disconnect any of it from the cost of living crisis. The Scottish Government has clearly made a choice to support people and do what it can to address huge household cash-flow issues.

On the other hand, the new Prime Minister has launched straight into offering a so-called reward for nothing more than being rich, by cutting tax for high earners and prioritising what she calls "economic growth", which we know is her shorthand for saying that the rich are getting

richer, rather than making sure that people in UK countries can access food and warmth.

The fact that the Scottish child payment is being raised for the second time this year is the perfect illustration of the SNP's priorities, but it is far from the only measure here that will have a huge impact for those who are in poverty or who are just about managing.

When I campaigned for independence in 2014, we talked a lot about a tale of two Governments and a tale of two futures. However, this is not just a tale of two futures; it is a tale of two presents. As social security is partially devolved and partially reserved, it provides a perfect illustration of the contrast between the UK Tories' approach to social security and the fairness that we have here.

The Social Justice and Social Security Committee recently received a briefing from a researcher at the University of Glasgow that dug deeper into the statistics on Department for Work and Pensions benefit sanctions. Many of us will remember the rising Covid rates this spring but, in May 2022, a universal credit claimant who was out of work was around three times more likely to be on benefit sanctions than to have Covid. One in fourteen such people were under sanction at that time. The DWP's approach is punitive, hostile and degrading.

Social Security Scotland, on the other hand, is already delivering 12 benefits, seven of which are new and exclusive to Scotland, and has outstanding feedback. In the most recent client survey, 93 per cent of respondents described their overall experience as very good or good, which is a higher satisfaction rate than the DWP's target number, which it is still a long way from reaching. The difference is now so stark that I struggle to see how anyone can deny it.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: The member will be aware that there was a target for the adult disability payment as well, but it is now no longer on the Social Security Scotland website. Does she agree that we need to ensure that the target is retained so that people know how quickly their application will be processed?

Emma Roddick: It is very important to have targets. Pam Duncan-Glancy and I are both members of the Social Justice and Social Security Committee, and it is important for us to be able to scrutinise such matters. I know that that question has been raised in the committee and I am sure that an answer will be forthcoming.

One Government is making itself and its donors richer, and one is supporting people through a cost of living crisis. One Government sees the value in keeping kids out of poverty, and one contemptuously insists that it will not resort to what

it calls handouts, as if handing food to a hungry bairn is a bad thing.

This summer, my team and I spent a lot of time trying to get help for constituents who had responded to my cost of living survey. Ninety-eight per cent of respondents to that said that they were worried about their energy bills, and that even included people who are really quite well off. Seventy-four per cent said that the cost of living was affecting their mental health.

We are talking about fundamentals. There is a disagreement between the UK Government and the Scottish Government about what sort of society we want to be. Do we want to be a society in which we look after one another, or one that protects the wealthiest and engages in a race to the bottom on employment, housing and even human rights for the rest of us?

Across the Highlands and Islands, folk are displaying their intention to have the kind of society in which people look after one another. In South Ronaldsay, where Orcadians are likely to face extreme fuel poverty and struggle to heat their homes this winter, a local church has turned into a warmth bank. That should not be necessary, but thanks to inaction from the UK Government, people will rely on such places to survive.

The anti-democratic stance that the Tories are taking is up to them, but Scotland does not agree with them. I do not know how many times this country will have to vote SNP before the Tories admit to themselves that their insular conservative politics are just not winning hearts and minds. Scotland has made its choice, and the SNP Government is simply listening and acting on the wishes of the electorate. If the Tories will not listen, hell mend them.

16:14

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): I begin on a note of consensus regarding some aspects of the programme for government that I welcome, and which I have indeed campaigned for. The children's care and justice bill is a welcome development, and I hope that it will finally deliver on the promises that have been made to care-experienced young people. I also hope—as I have discussed and hope to discuss again with the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills—that it represents a move to end restraint of children in care settings. The First Minister has made a number of key promises to care-experienced young people, and this must be the time when they are delivered on.

I also welcome the announcement of the establishment of a Scottish patient safety commissioner. The devil will be in the detail on the

proposal, but it can and must help improve patient advocacy.

In the limited time that I have today, I wish to concentrate my comments on housing, as the Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights did. It is clear that storm clouds are starting to gather on the horizon of the Scottish housing market. Over the past year, the cost of building a home has increased by an average of 17 per cent. Over the past two years, the cost of building a new home in Scotland has increased to over £200,000. The decision by SNP ministers to remove the first home fund and help to buy for first-time buyers has pulled the ladder up for many aspirational Scots, and it has negatively impacted on the housing sector.

The national planning framework, as it stands, is not fit for purpose, and it needs to be redrafted to help facilitate the delivery of housing and renewables targets. We need a housing revolution in Scotland. It is disappointing that the Scottish Government has not included housing as a key infrastructure priority through its national planning framework. That needs to change. If there is going to be a slowdown in the construction sector in the months ahead, it is vital that both the Scottish Government and local government work to retain construction jobs, so I hope that ministers will actively consider reintroducing help-to-buy schemes and moving forward on shovel-ready projects.

Shona Robison: On first-time buyers support, as Miles Briggs will know, we have shifted resource to those who can least afford to buy so as to help them to get on to the property ladder, which they would not otherwise be able to do. He will also know that those who accessed the previous funds would have been able to purchase without that support. In the light of what the Deputy First Minister said earlier about constrained finances, is Miles Briggs saying that we should shift that money away from those on the lowest incomes towards those who are better off? I just want clarity about where that money is coming from.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can give you the time back for that intervention, Mr Briggs.

Miles Briggs: On the question of supporting people to enter the property market, the cabinet secretary will be aware that so many people who do not have the money for a deposit relied on the schemes, which, for many, now do not exist. Builders are saying that first-time buyers are not coming forward for properties in Scotland. Those homes do not just exist for them to then—

Shona Robison: Will the member take a further intervention?

Miles Briggs: Yes.

Shona Robison: The evidence, which I can send to Miles Briggs, is that the first-time buyer market is actually very buoyant. There may be issues in the city of Edinburgh, for all the reasons that we understand, but on a Scotland-wide basis the first-time buyer market is very buoyant. Surely we should be putting our resources to those who would otherwise not be able to enter the housing market without government assistance. If Miles Briggs wants to widen that provision, he must tell us where the money is coming from.

Miles Briggs: Not for the first time, the cabinet secretary does not understand Edinburgh. As for where first-time buyers want to get on the property ladder, the current price does not allow them even to get on to it. *[Interruption.]* Well, there has been no solution brought forward by the cabinet secretary; the Government has pulled the ladder up. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Excuse me. Could the front bench please not heckle from a sedentary—

Miles Briggs: Part of what we need to see is a change of priority.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Briggs, I ask you to take your seat.

Mr Briggs has taken a couple of interventions from the front bench. Therefore, he has the right to expect the front bench not to heckle him when he is responding to the interventions that he has heard.

Miles Briggs: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

I do welcome the provisions that have briefly been outlined today on homelessness prevention, which will be included in the housing bill. However, the housing bill cannot simply be an attempt to cover over SNP cracks in the wall. The housing crisis that we are facing is a result of the fact that SNP-Green and Labour-Liberal Democrat Scottish Governments over the past 20 years have failed to deliver the affordable homes that they promised to communities across Scotland.

The announcement of a rent freeze scheme may have grabbed the headlines, but there has been no consultation or opportunity for Parliament to properly scrutinise how it will be legally implemented. Ministers must now demonstrate how they intend to deliver on the policy.

Patrick Harvie: Clearly, we will introduce legislation, which will go through parliamentary scrutiny, and it has to meet the legal tests, just as any proposed legislation going through Parliament does. Is the member actually saying that we should have signalled our intention in advance, resulting in a wave of rent increase notices before that legislation was in place?

Miles Briggs: I am saying to the minister that he should have consulted, because just a few short months ago, when he and his colleagues voted against Labour's proposals, he described them in the chamber as unworkable and said that, in the long term, they would heighten the risk of eviction and destabilise an already vulnerable housing sector. Perhaps that is why, as I have said to him, the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations is warning the Government that rent controls will destabilise the social housing sector. It would be extremely regrettable—indeed, it could drive a Scottish housing crisis—if the policy results in fewer rental properties being made available, especially in parts of Scotland such as the capital where the private rental market is already overheated.

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

Miles Briggs: I will, if I can get the time back.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You can, but it should be a brief intervention.

Mark Griffin: The UK Government is consulting on a rent cap in the social rented sector. Does Miles Briggs support the UK Government's intervention in that market?

Miles Briggs: I am concerned about the impact, because the Scottish Government's proposals could lead to the loss of private rented property. I do not know whether Labour expects that to happen or whether it would be happy with that, but we cannot allow private rented properties, especially in the capital, not to be made available. That would mean that they would not be available for students—students could be camping in fields when they go to university, as we have seen in parts of Europe. We cannot allow that to happen. Those properties cannot leave the market, because there are no homes to replace them with.

Organisations that have expressed concerns are looking for an answer. The answer is a mixed housing approach with more social rented affordable housing targeted at lower earners; it is not to destabilise the sector even further.

It is concerning that the Scottish Government has still not published its review on housing for varying needs. Organisations such as MND Scotland have called for action to fast-track applications for adaptations and accessible housing for people with life-limiting conditions such as motor neurone disease. I hope that the review will be published as soon as possible.

The programme for government has the potential to drive a housing crisis in Scotland. Ministers should be warned that the problems that they are seeking to solve could be made much

worse by their actions. I hope that they will think properly about what they are proposing.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Christine Grahame to speak for about four minutes.

16:22

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): Oh! I just extended my speech because I thought that we had time.

I welcome the increase in the child payment to £25 and the extension of the payment to every child under the age of 16 in a qualifying household, which is due by the end of the year. This is the only part of the UK with that intervention. More than 2,500 children in Midlothian and a similar number in the Borders are already benefiting from the payment. Surely to goodness members across the whole chamber can say that the policy is a great idea.

The freeze to rents for private and social housing is a bold but necessary move—we are in a crisis. Free school meals for primary 5s and those younger—with the determination to extend the policy to all children in primary school—assist fundamentally the wellbeing of children and the family at large. In the first three years of the policy, baby boxes have been delivered to more than 144,000 homes, with an incredible 93 per cent uptake. We have free prescriptions, while prescriptions now cost more than £9 per item in England. We have free bus travel for all under-22s and over-60s. We have no tuition fees. Those are just a few examples of the socially just measures that the Scottish Government has carried, and is carrying, forward.

That is a different world from the one south of the border, and it is a pity that Pam Duncan-Glancy is not here—*[Interruption.]* Oh, she is back. I am glad that she is here, because she seemed to think that we are sitting on our hands. If that is sitting on our hands, let us have more of it. I am proud of those initiatives.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: Will the member take an intervention?

Christine Grahame: Let me get into my flow a wee bit.

The energy and cost of living crisis has reminded us how vulnerable devolution leaves us. The public sector pay increases were budgeted for when inflation was at 3 per cent, but it is now at 10 per cent, and it will probably rise. Of course, people rightly look to protect themselves and their dependents from this economic tsunami, and the Scottish Government is right to try to meet the demands, but we must all accept—although Opposition parties seem to think that we have a

forest of money trees—that, with a fixed budget and very limited borrowing powers, money will be cut from other budgets. Devolution must wait for this unelected Prime Minister to, perhaps, give the devolved Governments so-called handouts.

Importantly, the crisis exposes the fragility of the UK economy under the stewardship of the Tories and their successive—although not successful—Prime Ministers and the stark limitations of devolution.

The UK economy was always built on the sands of consumerism and credit. Energy, wind power and tidal power have not really financially benefited Scotland or the UK. Those turbines in the Borders are not Scottish built—they are probably Danish—and the energy from our natural resources was hawked off to international companies, as happened in the 70s with the oil. Even the retail energy companies are owned by a Spanish group for Scottish Power and by the French state for EDF Energy.

In the 70s—this is an important history lesson— inflation flew off the Richter scale by more than 23 per cent, while oil revenues flooded the UK Treasury. Not a penny was saved for a rainy day; every one was used to prop up a failing UK economy. Norway, by contrast, set up Statoil—still more than 60 per cent state owned—and saved that unexpected energy bonus in the Norwegian pension fund, which is now in credit in trillions. The UK banked nothing.

UK debt is more than 100 per cent of gross domestic product. If it were a business, it would be filing for bankruptcy. Add Brexit to that—I say to Liz Smith that my reference was to a report by the UK In A Changing Europe think tank on the impact of Brexit on the economy—and it perhaps explains partly why we are at the bottom with regard to inflation, apart from Russia. We have the highest inflation rate of the G7. Those are hard lessons for Scotland, and they have to be learned.

Here is the bigger picture.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): You must conclude now, Ms Grahame.

Christine Grahame: The bigger picture will be short, but important—

The Presiding Officer: Ms Grahame, you must conclude.

Christine Grahame: My conclusion is this. We have had enough—

The Presiding Officer: Your very brief conclusion, thank you—

Christine Grahame: We have had enough of Elastoplast; we need Scottish independence and radical policies—

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Grahame.

Christine Grahame: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

16:26

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): We need action, now, from both the Conservative and SNP Governments, to help people with the cost of living. Scottish Labour will continue to offer solutions that will make a difference. With rising fuel prices and rising bus and rail fares this year, we need meaningful action now to reduce the cost of public transport, as the Trussell Trust evidenced in its briefing for today's debate.

Few people are hit harder by those costs than people who are in work on modest incomes and who have to spend thousands of pounds to commute to their work. The Government needs a legislative and policy programme to make life easier for them, not more difficult. For too long, we have seen the opposite approach, which was illustrated earlier this year when the SNP-Green Government legislated for a workplace parking levy. We warned that it was wrong, then; the Government needs to recognise that it is wrong, now.

Taxing people on low incomes who have no choice but to drive to their work is not fair, and it will only make the cost of living crisis worse for them. There should be a moratorium on that commuter tax, but there is no mention of such a thing in the programme for government.

Shona Robison: For clarity, will the member tell us the view on that policy of Cammy Day, the Labour leader of the City of Edinburgh Council?

Neil Bibby: We are working with Edinburgh's Labour council to ensure that we work on modes to get people out of their cars, which would not induce a workplace parking levy. Such a levy was not in the manifesto of the Edinburgh Labour group.

The workplace parking levy powers were introduced following the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019. However, three years on, we still have not seen the introduction of bus regulation powers, which were contained in the same act. Many people in my region who use the bus do so because they cannot afford a car, yet they have been hit by exorbitant bus fares from private bus companies.

From Sunday, thanks to the leadership of Labour mayor Andy Burnham, people in Manchester have seen the introduction of a capped single bus fare of £2, which will make a real difference to working people there. Even the former Tory Secretary of State for Transport,

Grant Shapps, subsequently announced a roll-out of such a fare across England. Where is the same leadership in Scotland to tackle the broken bus market?

In the city of Glasgow, which the First Minister represents, and in many parts of the west of Scotland more widely, the cost of an adult single bus journey is £2.65. It is not fair that working people in my region pay significantly more to take the bus than people in Edinburgh, Manchester, Leeds and London do.

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

Neil Bibby: Sorry, I have to make progress.

Where, too, is the national smart travel card that Nicola Sturgeon promised in 2012? The Government managed to deliver free integrated travel cards for the global delegates of the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP26. We were told then that progress was being made on the introduction of a smart travel card, but it is still nowhere to be seen. As with the public energy company that was promised, the SNP talks a good game but fails to deliver on its promises.

Yesterday, the First Minister announced a freeze on ScotRail fares until March next year, but she neglected to mention that fares had already risen by 3.8 per cent in January—an increase that was introduced two months before fares went up in England and Wales. When ScotRail fares are already too expensive, the Government's action is not nearly enough to help Scotland's hard-pressed commuters and get people on to public transport.

There is a better way. We need to be bolder—look at the difference that the €9 ticket in Germany has made in increasing passenger numbers and reducing carbon emissions. There were 15 per cent more passengers in June compared with before the pandemic, and 1.8 million tonnes of CO₂ emissions have been saved. We will not get people on to public transport unless we make it more affordable. That is why Scottish Labour has called for ScotRail fares not only to be frozen but to be halved for three months, to help with living standards and the climate crisis, and to help to grow revenues in the long term.

The Presiding Officer: You must conclude, Mr Bibby.

Neil Bibby: I will. We need to be much bolder, because people are paying not only for the rising cost of living but for the cost of the Scottish Government's failures.

16:31

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): Yesterday, in his speech in the chamber, Douglas Ross said that the cost of living crisis is

“one of the biggest threats to livelihoods in our lifetimes.”—
[*Official Report*, 6 September 2022; c 21.]

I agree, but the current cost of living crisis is not the first threat to livelihoods that my community in Motherwell and Wishaw has had to face in my lifetime at the hands of a Conservative Government. I am old enough to remember the miners’ strike, the closure of Ravenscraig, food parcels for the community, fuel poverty and the hated poll tax. The simple truth is that, in the intervening years, some people in my community have barely recovered.

Douglas Lumsden demanded that the just transition fund for the north-east be spent in full, but the steel industry in my community was thrown on the scrap heap, along with the livelihoods and aspirations of my community. That is a mistake that the Scottish Government will not make.

I and my colleague Marion Fellows will host two cost of living events in the constituency for our constituents. The first will take place in the Lanarkshire Association for Mental Health wellbeing centre and cafe in Wishaw this Friday, and the second will take place in Motherwell’s Dalziel building, where our offices are, the following week. Many third sector, council and Government organisations will be there to help people financially and with their mental wellbeing at this incredibly difficult time.

I am urging my constituents to make use of the two events, where there will be local third sector mental health organisations, such as the Miracle Foundation and You Are My Sunshine—YAMS—as well as food banks from across the area, of which, I am sad to say, there are too many—we should not need food banks in 2022. However, they will be at our events. Today, some of them have put out an appeal because their stocks are low as a result of an incredibly busy weekend.

Organisations that help with financial insecurity will also be there, such as Christians Against Poverty, the credit unions in our area and Citizens Advice Scotland. I was heartened to hear Patrick Harvie say that the Government is trying to build a hub to bring all those threads together to support people in the community. I very much look forward to working with him on that.

We will also have people from warmer homes Scotland, the fire brigade and St Andrew’s First Aid at the events, in order to help people to make their homes as safe as they can be as they face different challenges this winter. In addition, people from Social Security Scotland, Welfare Rights, the Department for Work and Pensions and

employability services will be there, and support will be available for families from organisations such as One Parent Families Scotland.

We will highlight the many vouchers that are available from private organisations and supermarkets such as Aldi and Lidl; the pet aid programme that is operated by the Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, which supports people who are struggling to feed their pets at home; and the organisations that can make available free period products in their local area.

Thirty years after the closure of Ravenscraig and the poverty that I saw in my community then, I am appalled that I am having to host such events. However, we will do as much as we can to support our constituents and we will highlight all the Social Security Scotland benefits that are available. I cannot list them all now, but we will encourage the uptake of benefits such as the best start grant early learning payment, best start foods, the carers allowance supplement, funeral support payments and, of course, the adult disability payment that has already been mentioned, which people have a right to.

I have to say that, in all of this, I am fed up with mitigating the decisions that are made elsewhere. I am fed up mitigating the bedroom tax, welfare reform, the two-child cap and the rape clause. I want our country to be able to make its own decisions. I do not want to be pleading with a Westminster Government to do a windfall tax. I want us to be leading on this.

The Presiding Officer: You must conclude.

Clare Adamson: It is a simple choice between a Boris element in a new kettle, or the benefits of independence, which are elementary.

16:35

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): This programme for government comes in the midst of a humanitarian crisis that is without precedent in the devolution era. The Scottish Government’s response is the right one: protect the vulnerable in the short term, while addressing the long-term structural problems that have often been caused by decades of deregulation in the pursuit of profit.

On housing, it is clear that an evictions ban and a rent freeze are needed, but deeper reforms must also happen. When I see just how bad the quality of rented flats is in areas such as Stirling, I know that the crisis goes beyond costs—it is also about the dismal living conditions that are placed on some tenants, which need to be tackled urgently.

That is why the new deal for tenants, announced by the First Minister yesterday and

expanded on by Patrick Harvie today, is so critical. I know that the Scottish Government will continue to reach out to those who are equally passionate about fixing the housing crisis to design the right solutions.

Mercedes Villalba: Will the member take an intervention?

Mark Ruskell: I will if there is time in hand.

The Presiding Officer: There is a very little time in hand.

Mark Ruskell: I will take a brief intervention.

Mercedes Villalba: I am very grateful to the member. I am sure that he agrees that the cheapest energy is the energy that we do not use, so he will want to see incentives for residential rented properties to be made more energy efficient by their landlords. Does he agree that we should maintain the rent freeze on all properties until they reach energy performance certificate rating C requirements?

Mark Ruskell: The issue about private rented accommodation and the quality of energy efficiency measures is being dealt with in the heat in buildings strategy, and I know that the minister is on top of that issue. We need to improve that quality across the private sector.

On transport, the freeze on rail fares is a welcome assurance to commuters. Free bus travel has already benefited hundreds of thousands of young people and their families, and hundreds of thousands more will join them in the months ahead. More fundamental long-term reform is coming to break the cycle of decline in bus services, reverse Tory deregulation and bring services under public franchises and municipal ownership.

On energy, funding for more direct advice and grants will give many more householders the ability to control their energy use and even generate their own energy. However, this Government is pushing up against the limits of the devolution settlement. To go further, it needs the fiscal power to fight Tory austerity, alongside the regulatory powers to make energy markets work for people and planet, rather than profit.

Oil and gas companies are recording billions of pounds in profits while half a million Scots have simply no money left after paying household bills. When BP's boss bought a £5 million house with his bonus earlier this year, he talked about the corporation having

"more cash than we know what to do with".

Meanwhile, people on prepayment meters have been disconnecting their homes to avoid rising bills.

Fundamental reforms are needed that lie beyond the powers of this Parliament. Although Scotland's electricity generation is dominated by low-cost renewables, electricity prices still move in lockstep with wholesale global gas prices. That is wrong and it needs to be changed.

Like the banks before them, no energy company is too big to fail, and nationalisation in the public interest must now be on the table. Just as bankers and Governments were responsible for the 2008 financial crash, now, in 2022, it is the oil and gas corporations and the Governments that aid and abet them that are fuelling the cost crisis and the collapse of our climate. With Jacob Rees-Mogg in charge of energy at Westminster, the chief arsonist has now been sent in to put out the fire.

The obscene revenue from oil and gas could have been used to fund clean energy transition and independence from global markets. However, the so-called windfall tax was, in fact, a tax-avoidance scheme for more drilling.

We do not have to look far to see how a genuine windfall tax could have been used. Germany, Italy and Spain are all raising billions of euros to support their people through this crisis.

Scotland has the richest renewable energy reserves of any country in Europe. It is time that we had the power to use that energy for the common good, and not for the few.

16:40

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): The global cost of living crisis must be the top priority for both Scotland's Governments. I am looking forward to seeing what the new UK Government brings forward for families and businesses tomorrow.

As we heard, the UK Government has already announced £37 billion of support, with all people who are on means-tested benefits receiving £1,200. UK households will receive £400 next month to help with energy costs, and this morning there was the announcement of a 36 per cent uplift in spending and a 22 per cent increase in recipients—that means that 50,000 people in Scotland are under the UK's warm homes discount scheme.

Scots expect their devolved Government to be doing much more. Yesterday, the First Minister said that

"the powers to act ... do not lie with this Parliament ... If they did, we could have acted".—[*Official Report*, 6 September 2022; c 9.]

But the Scottish Government does have powers. For example, it could have created a cost of living support fund, as we have called for it to do, to provide additional payments to the most

vulnerable households. It could deliver additional funding to local councils to support families who are at risk of being unable to make housing payments or to buy essentials. It could have created a rural hardship fund to support off-grid households. It could rule out income tax and business rate rises. It could urgently review its ill-informed total opposition to nuclear energy and North Sea gas.

However, this is a Government that is hindered by the fact that it does not know how to target support. Last week, a response to a parliamentary question that I asked revealed that

“at present there are no National Statistics estimating the number of households in fuel poverty in 2020 and 2021.”—*[Written Answers, 22 August 2022; S6W-09956.]*

It is a scandal that this Government does not have up-to-date data on who is in fuel poverty.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Does Liam Kerr accept that although we might have the power to do certain things, we do not have the money to do certain things, and that if we give more money to local government, for example, that will mean that there is less for the national health service?

Liam Kerr: The First Minister sought, yesterday, to justify this Government’s inaction when she said:

“it is not a lack of political will that stops us. It is a lack of money.”—*[Official Report, 6 September 2022; c 11.]*

I suggest to John Mason that we examine that. People are well aware that the UK Government is providing the highest funding settlement ever—a union dividend that is in excess of £12 billion, or £2,184 for every person in the country.

People also know that this Government underspent its budget by £650 million last year and is putting £20 million into its plans for another referendum. That is the wrong priority at the worst possible time. The Government is squandering more than £1 million a year on a team of 22 civil servants who are writing a new prospectus for independence.

Also, as we discovered recently, up to 2021 the SNP Government had wasted £4.5 billion of taxpayers’ money through delays, overspends and the like.

In a global crisis, frivolous and wasteful spending such as that proves that the SNP Government’s priorities are not the same as those of the people whom it serves. Those are spending choices that have been made by this Scottish Government. If the SNP’s budget really has been maxed, that is simply because the “political will”—to quote the First Minister—of this Government is to spend time and money fomenting grievance and

promoting separation, at a time when Scotland and the whole UK need to come together.

Both Governments must do more. The UK Government has proved that it will step up. This SNP Government already has the powers and the money. What it lacks is the political will. That is what needs to change.

16:44

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): I am sure that I speak to the experience of many of my MSP, third sector and public sector colleagues when I say that I have referred too many families to food banks over the years. This summer, I had to ask our local food bank for parcels of food that did not need to be cooked for families who had no funds, and had a prepayment meter and nothing in the cupboards.

It is summer. It has been a particularly warm one, but—to state the obvious—winter is coming. What will people who are already vulnerable do when the inside of their house is as freezing cold as it is outside? What about the 116,000 Scottish pensioners who already live in extreme fuel poverty?

The situation that is unfolding is of a scale that requires an emergency response. The increase in the Scottish child payment is such a response: its importance cannot be overstated. I am particularly concerned about the effects that increased fuel poverty will have on children. Those effects are immediately apparent in physical health, but there will also be long-term effects on mental health and cognitive development. Infants who live in cold homes burn calories trying not to be hypothermic and hypoglycaemic, rather than using their energy for growth and organ development. Children in cold homes experience higher than average rates of chronic ill health, and families that include children with health conditions or disabilities who rely on electricity powering their medical equipment will be hit even worse.

Let us be clear: a freeze on energy bills should be just that and not a temporary pause that generates a future bill from the UK Government that families will be asked to pay back. Energy costs in the UK are 30 per cent higher than they are for our European Union neighbours. The UK Government has all the powers to combat those soaring costs, just as EU countries have.

The Health, Social Care and Sport Committee is about to publish our report on health inequalities, and I fear that the wrong decisions being made this winter by Liz Truss will be the root cause of widening health inequalities for children in 20 years’ time.

I have lost count of the number of people in my rural area, Aberdeenshire—which, incidentally, is thick with wind turbines—who have asked me this question: “Why are our fuel bills so high when we generate all this cheaper wind-generated electricity?” It is a perfectly reasonable question, and one that was rightly raised by Clare Adamson when she talked about unfair transmission charges. It is cheaper for EU countries to sell their electricity to our grid than it is for Scottish companies.

Liam Kerr: Will the member take an intervention?

Gillian Martin: I do not have time. If our energy system does not work for our citizens, whom does it work for? Scotland has the energy, but it needs the powers.

We are all here because we want to help people. It is why we do the job, but too many members think that it is sufficient to ask the Scottish Government to mitigate the root causes of poverty. Mitigation is a temporary fix. When the source issue remains, and the people who are responsible for energy, welfare and every fiscal lever do not act appropriately, our mitigation gets swallowed up. It is just not enough.

The Scottish child payment and fuel insecurity uplifts that were announced yesterday are lifelines, as is widened eligibility for the warmer homes scheme. How many weeks will it be before that is swallowed up by the surging cost of fuel and inflation of food prices? How long before the hard-won pay deals for workers are cancelled out by increased household costs that are outwith this Parliament’s control?

Scotland needs the powers of a normal independent state to tackle all our cost of living problems at source in order to protect the people of Scotland. At a cost of £3.60 per person in Scotland, a Scottish independence referendum seems like a very wise use of £20 million.

16:48

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): I believe, as all members do, that we are, if we are not already deep into one, on the cusp of a national emergency. I see it every day in my region, and now that we have returned to Parliament I am distinctly aware that the issue should be the primary focus of the Scottish Government, going forward.

The cost of feeding your family and heating your home in this country is unmanageable, and in many cases it will be fatal. We have to frame the debate in those terms, because that is how worrying the situation is. Anything less than that is not serious and will not work.

I thank the Trussell Trust for all its work, and I particularly thank Fiona, whom I visited in Peebles during the recess. Fiona brought home to me the reality of people’s lives at this time. The Trussell Trust’s research has revealed that more than 2 million people across the UK have skipped meals during the past three months in order to keep up with other essential costs. Fiona told me that mothers, fathers and carers are choosing not to eat so that their children can eat, and that grandparents are skipping meals in order to put money aside for heating their homes this winter. We often hear from both Governments that Scotland and the UK are the best places to live and raise a family, but that is all just public relations nonsense, if the reality is as stark as that, for so many people.

I have said this in the chamber before and I say it again: I deplore the Tory Government’s attack on working-class people. The Tories are the friends of the rich and show no interest in redistributing wealth to those who need it most. We know that the new Prime Minister will try to deregulate and strip taxes from the wealthiest, and we also know the effect that that will inevitably have.

So, now, more than ever, we need the Scottish Government to step up and use the powers that it has to help those who need it most. Scottish Labour has called for immediate action, including a rent freeze, a winter eviction ban and more affordable public transport to directly support people at the sharp end. After visiting Aberlour Child Care Trust and meeting young families in Dumfries, I also call on the Government to wipe out school-meals debt. That simple action could bring great relief to many families.

It is promising that some of those commitments have been met in the programme for government, but we need emergency legislation in order to implement them without further delay. I want to make an important point, which is that we need to get a grasp of how long the measures have taken. My colleague Pam Duncan-Glancy raised that. In my kindest moments, I might say that the SNP just has poor time-management skills, but we must do this with urgency. The increased child payment, for example, is very welcome, but why have six to 16-year-olds had to wait 21 months to claim what they were promised in 2018?

The Minister for Social Security and Local Government (Ben Macpherson): Would Carol Mochan acknowledge that the Scottish child payment was created during the pandemic as one of seven new benefits that the Scottish Government is delivering? It is a remarkable achievement in that time, and it is widely acknowledged in that sense.

Would she also recognise that the joint programme of social security delivery in Scotland

requires engagement with the DWP, and that the Scottish Government has moved at pace to deliver the Scottish child payment, its extension and its uplift?

Carol Mochan: The member knows that I do not like pats on the back for the Government. We must do more and we must do it faster. That is the ask.

We have dithered on an emergency rent freeze when the writing was on the wall. We even saw the ludicrous spectacle of the Scottish Green Party going out of its way to tell us that that could not be done—but it can be done.

We must remember that proper reform is not a one-shot policy announcement for a polling increase here or there, or for a day of positive press attention. It alters the course of people's lives for the better through determined and consistent action. I look to members on the back benches when I say that we should be asking Government to do everything that it can—even when it is our own party that is in Government.

All that is why Scottish Labour is calling for an emergency cost of living act.

16:53

Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): As the long days of summer passed with no one in charge of the good ship Westminster, it became clear that this crisis needs emergency action akin to the pandemic response. In that response, we cannot forget that the inequalities that were magnified by the pandemic are being underlined and reinforced by the current crises of galloping inflation and horrific energy costs. Those who were already operating on the margins with deficit budgets now find themselves facing unimaginable poverty. We must also recognise the disproportionate impact on women and those facing multiple inequalities and the very gendered crisis of incomes that exists.

Lamentably, food banks have become a necessary part of a UK whose welfare safety net has been hammered by a decade of Tory-led austerity, and we are now hearing of countless cases of those lifeline larders dealing with bare shelves as donations start to dry up because households can no longer afford to put a few items in the collection trollies and supermarkets reduce their bulk buying, which means that there is less to share out.

At a time when more folk will need support to ensure that hungry bellies receive sustenance and fears rise for safety as people turn their heating off and use camping stoves and candles indoors, I am thankful that we have a Scottish Government that is using as many avenues as possible to put

money and support where it is needed most, and that is creating a social security safety net that is seen as the glue that binds us and not as begrudged handouts.

Bringing forward the increase and extension of the unique and lauded poverty-busting Scottish child payment will help parents buy essentials for their families. Increasing the pot for discretionary housing payments and extending it to include money for energy costs is a welcome move that will directly help those who cannot afford that most basic of human needs: warmth.

The announcement of emergency legislation to introduce a moratorium on evictions is also to be welcomed, as is the proposed rent freeze, which I am sure we can all agree demonstrates that the suggestions that are made by other parties can be listened to and deployed where appropriate. That will give a level of comfort to tenants across the country who face unaffordable rent increases and the threat of eviction during the coldest months.

It is important to note that, as a country, we have also taken the decision to divert moneys to mitigate the effect of wrong-headed UK policy choices, such as the bedroom tax and the benefits cap, as Christine Grahame outlined. Our decisions to introduce the baby box, extend early years provision, protect free tuition and free personal care, extend free bus travel to people under 22 and extend free school meals demonstrate that, with some powers, we can protect our folk despite budgetary constraints. I ask members to imagine what we could do as a normal independent country. The asks from Labour members show us that they seem to think that we are that independent country already.

I spoke about food banks, but I will also mention the clothes count too campaign, which seeks to highlight and unite the work that is being done by clothing and baby banks across the country. I have used a clothing bank and supported countless others to do the same. Their work means that dignity is assured for families that face impossible budgetary choices.

I will not repeat the asks that my party colleagues have of the UK Government, but I extend a plea to the new Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to right the wrong of leaving people under the age of 25 suffering the indignity of a universal credit standard rate that is a poverty-inducing 20 per cent lower than the rate for their older peers. Their bills are no less than those for the rest of us. Addressing that would be an indication that she takes reducing poverty, not just reducing overall spend, seriously.

My final ask is that the cost of doing business be seen as an urgent issue and that the UK Government intervene to prevent further business

closures in my constituency and across Scotland. Without immediate intervention and an energy price cap for businesses, disaster looms. Over the past month, more than 10 businesses in my constituency have already shut down. That is not acceptable.

16:57

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): I hope that, in her closing speech, the cabinet secretary will say when the rent freeze legislation will be published and outline the legislative timeline. As of this morning, it had not been published and it does not feature in the proposed business for next week that we will vote on. However, we know that the matter is urgent. The minister set out in his opening speech that it is not beyond anyone's imagination that, regardless of the First Minister making a commitment yesterday to freeze rents, some landlords will go out and hike rents as we speak. Tenants who do not know their rights might well accept that hike without challenge or awareness of the looming freeze. It is important that the proposed legislation be published and that it increases people's awareness of their rights as of yesterday.

That freeze was the centrepiece of yesterday's announcement, along with the introduction of a winter evictions ban and the expansion of the eligibility for the tenant grant fund. We welcome the Government's support for our proposals, but why wait? Why the delay? Why did it take the summer for the Government to realise that keeping our homes running, warm and safe was at the heart of the cost of living crisis?

The growing pressure over the summer has put people at breaking point. Energy, housing and food bills just keep going up. Research by YouGov for the Trussell Trust found that more than 2 million people who receive universal credit have skipped a meal since the spring. Citizens Advice Scotland reports soaring numbers of online inquiries for advice. Views on its website for "grants and benefits to help pay energy bills" and "struggling to pay energy bills" are up more than 120 per cent. By March, the number of children in temporary accommodation climbed by 1,000 to 8,835. That came before the Bank of England increased interest rates to 1.75 per cent.

The cost of living crisis is clearly a national emergency, but the Government has found no urgency. It spent the summer grandstanding, jetsetting and showboating when, instead, it could have come back to the Parliament and shown the people of Scotland that it was ready to go and ready to act. The Government has had the whole summer, yet it has said nothing. The summer culminated in the national bin strikes—strikes and an industrial dispute that the SNP banked on

wriggling out of. It took the city that we are in smelling like a landfill site during the Edinburgh festival for the Government to finally accept its role in making sure that vital workers are paid a fair wage.

Yesterday, the First Minister said:

"We will put as much money as possible into people's pockets through decent pay rises".—[*Official Report*, 6 September 2022; c 13.]

However, for years, council workers have campaigned and rallied outside the Parliament, protesting that the Government and successive finance secretaries have washed their hands of any role in local government pay. Paying waste collectors, school cleansing and catering staff and other low-paid local government staff has always been in the gift of the Scottish Government; it has just chosen to ignore that.

However, there is a pattern of behaviour through the Government's actions. When Opposition parties bring forward policy suggestions and proposals, the Government just attacks.

John Mason: When Opposition members, including Mr Griffin, bring forward suggestions, they seldom fund those. If we had given more to local government, it would have meant less for the national health service. Does he accept that?

Mark Griffin: We have brought forward proposals that, amazingly, the Government has adopted as its own a month or two later. After two months of attacking my colleague Mercedes Villalba for her detailed proposals to protect tenants during the cost of living crisis, all of a sudden, those proposals are great and the Government has adopted them as its own.

The Government has continued with its grievances over powers and its spin. It rolled out all the excuses under the sun. At a COVID-19 Recovery Committee meeting, I heard that the proposal to implement a rent freeze was not competent, that it would be subject to legal and human rights challenges and that the Government had not consulted on it. Those were all excuses that members of the Green Party advanced but now seem to accept were nonsense.

Why did the Government not use the month of June to work with Mercedes Villalba? Instead, it scaremongered, saying that the plan would increase rents. It did not say that it would work on any of the European convention on human rights claims over the summer; it just said that the plans would force evictions. It just said no.

Patrick Harvie: I think that the member will acknowledge that we did not just say no. We went into the matter in a substantial amount of detail. It was very clear, even from the closing speech in the stage 3 debate on the Coronavirus (Recovery

and Reform) (Scotland) Bill, that, regrettably, the member who was moving amendments 72 and 73 on rent freezes was relying on a legal precedent that not only was decades old but related to the renting of a single property that was let out without toilets or running water, which had to be installed at the tenant's own expense. That was the precedent that was being cited to justify a two-year blanket rent freeze.

I hope that the member can accept that the Government is getting the detail right, which is what we have to do if we want the protection to exist in the real world.

The Presiding Officer: You should be closing, Mr Griffin.

Mark Griffin: Mr Harvie is a seasoned parliamentarian. He knows the parliamentary process and he knows full well that, if the Government had said in June that it accepted the principle of a rent freeze that my colleague Mercedes Villalba was proposing, it could have worked on the detail as the bill made its way through the Parliament. It is not good enough to say at the very end of stage 3 proceedings that the proposal was not competent. There was no effort made to work with my colleague to make sure that there were workable proposals to protect tenants. We could have had those in place months ago, which would have protected tenants for far longer than by only implementing the proposals now.

Many thousands of people will struggle to heat their homes this winter or keep a roof over their head. The issue is urgent and it should have been dealt with in June. However we expect to see the emergency legislation being lodged in the Parliament this week.

17:03

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I begin by citing my entry in the register of members' interests: I am an honorary vice-president of Energy Action Scotland and I derive some income from rental properties in which I have an interest.

There has been a degree of consensus in the debate about the severity of the problems that the country is facing. We have heard about the rising cost of energy, in particular, and the impact that that is having on many individuals. People are genuinely fearful about their ability to meet the costs of heating and lighting their homes, among other rising costs.

Importantly, it is not just individuals and households who are affected; there is also a large impact on the business sector, of which Liz Smith reminded us. Many small businesses, particularly in fields such as hospitality, are currently seeing

horrific quotes for energy for the coming year. It is the same in the care sector. One nursing home in Fife contacted me to say that its estimate for electricity had gone up from £13,000 in the current year to £130,000 next year. With the cost at that level, the business is not viable and will have to close its doors, with devastating consequences for staff and residents. That story is repeated across the country. We are facing a crisis situation that requires urgent action from both of Scotland's Governments.

Earlier in the year, we saw a £37 billion package of support from the UK Government, including payments of £400 to households, starting in October, to help with fuel bills. Although that was welcome, it is now clear that that does not go far enough. Some fair points have been made in the debate about those who have off-grid properties that rely on bottled gas or oil and who were not covered by that £400 payment. I listened with interest to what the Prime Minister had to say about that earlier today in the House of Commons. We will hear more tomorrow from the UK Government about what additional support will be provided. As Liz Smith said, it appears likely that there will be measures to cap energy costs for households. We await details of that—it will be a welcome move—but we also need to see support for businesses that are impacted and, indeed, other organisations.

It is not good enough for SNP members to see all of this as being down to the UK Government, as they have done during this debate. We also need to see action from the Scottish Government—a Government that, let us remind ourselves, now has the highest budget in the history of devolution, if we discount the one-off additional Covid support that was provided last year; a budget that is up 10 per cent in cash terms compared to last year. Also, let us not forget that the block grant provides an additional £2,000 above the UK average for every man, woman and child in Scotland, thanks to the Barnett formula and fiscal transfers from south of the border—fiscal transfers that, incidentally, this SNP Government wants to end, even though it benefits from that extra money.

The Scottish Government is fond of telling us that it has a fixed budget, but that is not quite true. This is a Government that has not just a record block grant from Westminster but extensive tax powers over income tax, land and buildings transaction tax, landfill tax, non-domestic rates and council tax—a package of around £20 billion in tax powers. It is a Government that has powers to borrow, albeit that it had already maxed out the credit card long before the current crisis hit.

Of course, under the fiscal framework, the overall size of the budget that is available to this

Government is determined by the performance of the Scottish economy and the Scottish tax base relative to those of the UK as a whole. We know that, because our economic growth and our tax growth have been lagging behind those of the UK, our budget has been shrinking. All of those things are matters that the Scottish Government could give its attention to.

There is much that the Scottish Government could do to help the situation—Liam Kerr gave us a list of initiatives that the Government could take forward. We are also seeing water charges rise when Scottish Water is directly under the control of this Government. Neil Bibby mentioned the workplace parking levy that this Government legislated for, which heaps additional costs on commuters who have no alternative to using their cars to get to their place of work. Further, many Scottish workers have to pay more income tax than workers elsewhere in the United Kingdom, thanks to choices made by this Government.

We have already seen broken promises from this Government. By now, there should have been free school meals in every year of primary school, but the introduction of that policy has been delayed. Also, the much-vaunted public energy company, which was promised five years ago, has long since been abandoned by the SNP even though it promised that that would make a real difference to people's bills. Further, Energy Action Scotland, an organisation of which I am proud to be an honorary officer and that is the charity at the forefront of providing vital support for people in fuel poverty, was told just weeks ago that its entire budget support from the Scottish Government was being removed. I am pleased that, according to civil servants, that decision seems to have been reversed, but it would be good if the minister, when she sums up the debate, could confirm that Energy Action Scotland will get the funding that it needs instead of being threatened with having its budget cut entirely.

At the start of the debate, Patrick Harvie set out on behalf of the Government its proposals for a rent freeze. As Miles Briggs told us, that move is already causing a great deal of concern for private sector landlords, a large proportion of whom are not wealthy, large conglomerates or companies but the owners of simply one property—perhaps one that they bought to supplement their pension—who are already seeing substantially rising costs, including mortgage payments.

Patrick Harvie: As I acknowledged in my speech, landlords are in different financial circumstances. We seek to recognise that, and there are landlords who have done their best not to pass on rent increases in difficult times. However, does Murdo Fraser recognise that there are also landlords who have sought to exploit

every opportunity to increase rent? What does he say to my constituents and those around the country who are being notified of rent increases of 30 or 40 per cent or more? Does he not share my concern about our need to protect people from that kind of behaviour?

Murdo Fraser: The measure that is being proposed by Mr Harvie and this Government will affect every landlord in the country. Even landlords who face rising mortgage payments and insurance costs will be hit with the same measure. Letting agents are reporting that the trend of private landlords selling up and leaving the marketplace is being accelerated at a time when there is already, as we heard from Miles Briggs, a mismatch between supply and demand. From all the international evidence, including the evidence from Sweden, Ireland and Berlin, we know that rent controls have the inevitable consequence of reducing the supply of rented properties. At a time when people are queuing up to try to rent properties, the proposal will simply damage the sector even more. As we were told earlier, it is not just an issue for the private rented sector—the social rented sector faces exactly the same issues.

In conclusion, I agree that there is more that the UK Government will do, and we look forward to hearing about that. However, rather than just sitting on the sidelines, criticising others, which it is so good at, this SNP-Green Government needs to step up and do much more than it is currently doing. The measures that it has already announced go nowhere near far enough, and it needs to do much more to play its part in tackling the crisis that the country faces.

The Presiding Officer: I call Shona Robison to wind up the debate.

17:12

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government (Shona Robison): In the main, this has been a good, helpful and constructive debate. However, before I continue, I will deal with Murdo Fraser's last point. Looking at what we can do to make this country fairer and more equal is at the heart of the work that I and this Government do every day, and we have looked under every stone for every opportunity. For Murdo Fraser to describe that in the way that he did—after months of inaction from the UK Government, which has been posted missing—is really quite galling, even for him.

Let us get back to looking at the facts, rather than the fiction. I am very pleased that our programme for government gives such prominence to the action that it is vital to take right now in order to tackle the cost of living crisis while

also maintaining our strong, long-standing approach to social justice. This Government has allocated almost £3 billion—this year alone—to a range of support that will contribute to the mitigation of the impact of increased costs on households.

With regard to Pam Duncan-Glancy's point, I do not think that people care about when announcements were made; they care about the money in their pockets. Christine Grahame gave a really good example of that when she highlighted the £9 prescription charges that people in England will be paying—as highlighted today by the BBC—while we have scrapped prescription charges. It might not have been announced this summer, but that puts money in people's pockets—money that they do not have to spend on prescriptions—and it matters.

The £3 billion package also includes actions to tackle child poverty, reduce inequalities and support financial wellbeing, alongside the hugely important social security payments that are either not available anywhere else in the UK or far more generous. I will come to the child payment in a moment.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: To address the point about the dates, I am afraid that the cabinet secretary is missing the point. I was not suggesting that money in people's pockets is the bad thing; I was suggesting that the announcement was dressed up as a new cost of living approach, which is not the case. The payment is something that the Government was already doing. It is a good thing—I am not saying that it is not a good thing—but it is something that the Government was already doing. The date that was announced was the new bit—that is my point.

Shona Robison: It is all about support to households. If someone needs a prescription today, surely it is the prescription charge not being there that matters, not when that was decided.

We are supporting, and will continue to support, people in all areas of life with free childcare, no tuition fees and five family benefits to help low-income households with the cost of bringing up a family, along with additional support for unpaid carers, including financial support through our carers allowance supplement, and through new support for fuel bills, which is more vital than ever.

The UK Government must play its part. I know that the Tories have been talking among themselves for the entire summer, but they need to get out of that niche, because no one at all—I would probably include some people in their party and their supporters—believes that the UK Government has done what it needs to do. We need that clear action from the UK Government because it has the levers.

Miles Briggs: Before recess, I raised the fact that, in Scotland today, 8,635 children are in temporary accommodation. I suggested to the cabinet secretary that she introduce a ban in that regard. What has she done over the summer with that suggestion?

Shona Robison: Over the summer, I have ensured that Shelter and other organisations that can help us to resolve the temporary accommodation issue are now working to tell us what further action we need to take. Further action will be taken to address that issue.

Is it ironic that, in his speech, Miles Briggs said that he wanted the focus to be on supporting those first-time buyers who are better off. That is what he said. Is it not ironic that, in the same breath, he says that wants more effort to be put into tackling the use of temporary accommodation? We cannot do all those things. Liam Kerr asserted that we do not know how to target support. All that comes from a party that essentially wants to fund tax cuts before public services. That is a bit rich indeed.

While we continue to do everything possible within our powers, we have made clear time and again the urgent action that is required from the UK Government. Despite a finite budget, this Government is doing all that it can. Earlier, the minister spoke about the additional bold actions that we are taking to ensure that tenants will be secure in their homes this winter. In his speech, he talked about an eviction moratorium over the winter, which seems to have been lost on some Labour members. That is an important action.

As I said, the actions that we have taken during our years of government collectively add up to substantial household support for families. If we had not done that, the crisis today would be even worse for people.

One of those actions is the Scottish child payment, which is a vital new benefit to tackle child poverty head on. Although campaigners called for a £5 payment, we said that we would introduce a £10 payment for all under-16s. We also said that we would go further by introducing it early for under-6s, so that within a couple of years of announcing that significant new financial support, we were getting money into the households of more than 100,000 children.

We went even further by introducing bridging payments ahead of the introduction of our full Scottish child payment. Therefore, I am delighted that yesterday, the programme for government confirmed that that will be in place from 14 November. On that day, all those who are currently in receipt of the payment will see it increase to £25, which is a 150 per cent increase in eight months. That is money in people's pockets. It is also the day on which we will open

applications to eligible families with children under the age of 16.

In March, I published “Best Start, Bright Futures: tackling child poverty delivery plan 2022-26”, which sets out bold action to drive progress on our national mission to tackle child poverty. The impact of the current crisis makes meeting our interim statutory child poverty targets even more challenging, but even more important.

We estimate that 400,000 children could be eligible for the Scottish child payment when it is extended. Based on the modelling that was undertaken in March, it is estimated that it will lift 50,000 children out of poverty and reduce relative child poverty by 5 percentage points next year. That is an astonishing goal, given the crisis in which we are living. I am aware that the crisis makes achieving that very challenging. However, in the current difficult circumstances, the Government will continue to prioritise efforts to tackle child poverty. Of course, the Scottish child payment is only one of our five family payments that support children in the early years.

We know that having to apply for benefits can be a barrier, preventing some families from accessing the support to which they are entitled. Therefore, we will also award the best start grant early learning and school-age payments automatically, without the need to apply, to eligible families that are in receipt of the Scottish child payment.

We believe that social security is an investment in people, and we take our responsibility to make people aware of their entitlements very seriously. We have a benefit take-up strategy that sets out a series of actions to make sure that people access the support to which they are entitled. We will do more of that.

We are going further to help people find out what support is available. By the end of this month, we will launch a new website that provides a one-stop information source for people to find out what they are entitled to—benefits provided by the Scottish or UK Governments and a range of other support, such as how to reduce their energy and household costs and how to access reliable debt and welfare advice. I commend Clare Adamson’s work in her locality, and I encourage others to do the same.

We will continue to do what we can in these unprecedented times. As a Government, we are committed to taking some hard decisions to ensure that we can do that. While taking this emergency action, we will continue to look to the future and build a better Scotland for all of us, making communities and households more resilient and able to flourish and succeed. However, we know that we must have the full

powers of independence to be able to fully achieve that for our nation.

Business Motions

17:22

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-05893, 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	13 September 2022
2.00 pm	Time for Reflection
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Topical Questions (if selected)
<i>followed by</i>	Ministerial Statement: Independent Review of Skills Delivery Landscape
<i>followed by</i>	Scottish Government Debate: Delivering Economic Transformation - Scotland's Inward Investment Plan
<i>followed by</i>	Committee Announcements
<i>followed by</i>	Business Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.00 pm	Decision Time
<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business
Wednesday	14 September 2022
2.00 pm	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
2.00 pm	Portfolio Questions: Justice and Veterans; Finance and Economy
<i>followed by</i>	Scottish Government Debate: Delivering Economic Transformation - Scotland's Export Growth Plan
<i>followed by</i>	Business Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Approval of SSIs (if required)
5.00 pm	Decision Time
<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business
Thursday	15 September 2022
11.40 am	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
11.40 am	General Questions
12.00 pm	First Minister's Questions
<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business
2.30 pm	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
2.30 pm	Portfolio Questions: Education and Skills
<i>followed by</i>	Scottish Government Debate: Excellence in Scottish Education
<i>followed by</i>	Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 20 September 2022

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

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 21 September 2022

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Covid Recovery and Parliamentary Business; 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)

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 22 September 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: Net Zero, Energy and Transport

followed by Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee Debate: Future Parliamentary Procedures and Practices

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 12 September 2022, in rule 13.7.3, after the word "except" the words "to the extent to which the Presiding Officer considers that the questions are on the same or similar subject matter or" are inserted.—[George Adam]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-05894, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on a stage 1 timetable.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Moveable Transactions (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be completed by 16 December 2022.—[*George Adam*]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

17:23

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motion S6M-05895, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Health (Tobacco, Nicotine etc. and Care) (Scotland) Act 2016 (Supplementary Provision) Regulations 2022 [draft] be approved.—[*George Adam*]

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

Point of Order

17:23

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I apologise to you and to those in the chamber for not declaring at the start of my speech in the previous debate that I am the owner of rented property in the North Lanarkshire Council area.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Griffin. Your point is on the record.

Decision Time

17:24

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): There is one question to be put as a result of today's business. The question is, that motion S6M-05895, in the name of George Adam, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Health (Tobacco, Nicotine etc. and Care) (Scotland) Act 2016 (Supplementary Provision) Regulations 2022 [draft] be approved.

Institutional Racism in Sport

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The final item of business is a member's business debate on motion S6M-05615, in the name of Kaukab Stewart, on changing the boundaries—ending institutional racism in sport. The debate will be concluded without any questions being put. I invite members who wish to participate to press their request to speak buttons now or as soon as possible.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes with concern that the report, *Changing the Boundaries: The Plan4Sport Independent Review into Racism in Scottish Cricket*, found Cricket Scotland to be institutionally racist; understands that the review identified 448 examples demonstrating institutional racism; further notes Sir William Macpherson's definition of institutional racism contained in the 1999 report of the public inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence, as "the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin"; acknowledges that institutional racism in sport may not be restricted to Cricket Scotland; recognises what it sees as the detrimental effect of institutional racism on an individual's potential, achievement, health and wellbeing; notes the hope that the implementation of the immediate and long-term recommendations of the independent review will deliver substantial improvements in the experience of people of colour in all sports; further notes the recommendation to improve the diversity of the Cricket Scotland board, and the view that this recommendation, coupled with steps to review diversity at all levels of decision making, can be of great importance in delivering diversity in boards and at all levels of decision making across all sports; notes the view that effective equalities and anti-racist strategies are important in organisations that are in receipt of government funding; welcomes the assessment framework set out in the report; notes the view that this could be used as a conditional part of funding criteria for all funding of sport in Scotland; highlights that ethnically diverse communities are a priority group for sportscotland's 2021-25 Equality Outcomes published in 2022; believes that there are many examples of clubs and individuals delivering local programmes that engage with diverse communities, including in the Glasgow Kelvin constituency; appreciates what it sees as the important work being done by groups including, but not limited to, Show Racism the Red Card, Kick it Out, Running Out Racism; notes the calls for partnership working to eradicate any forms of racism in sport, and looks forward to the day when zero tolerance for any processes, attitudes and behaviour that amount to racial discrimination, through the exclusion of minority ethnic people from participation and talent development opportunities, becomes a reality in Scottish sport.

17:26

Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): First, I offer a warm welcome to the visitors in the public gallery. They include many individuals and representatives of organisations, including colleagues from Running Out Racism, Show Racism the Red Card, Active Life Club and the Scottish Trades Union Congress, among others, that work tirelessly to eradicate racism in all its

forms, including in sport. I acknowledge the overwhelming cross-party support for the motion—we are all grateful for that.

This is an uncomfortable topic. Recognising the existence of institutional racism is to admit to years of apathy as people suffered around us, and to accept that processes and structures that were designed without all voices present have caused harm and affected the achievements of so many people. If there is one clear message that we should take away from the debate, it is that we need to get comfortable with being uncomfortable, for it is in that discomfort that true change can take place.

Today, we reflect on the findings of "Changing the Boundaries: The Plan4Sport Independent Review into Racism in Scottish Cricket". I commend sportscotland for commissioning the review. It is never easy for anyone to come forward, and those who do often suffer negative impacts on their career, family or mental health. However, it is because of people's bravery that we now have a chance to reflect and move forward in the true spirit of sporting endeavour. Maya Angelou said:

"when you know better, do better."

This is our chance to do better.

Woven throughout the damning report of the review are themes of an absence of leadership, a lack of accountability and transparency and an overall loss of confidence in the incident report handling processes. Four hundred and forty-eight examples of institutional racism were identified against the national governing body, Cricket Scotland.

Sir William Macpherson, in his 1999 report of the public inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence, defined institutional racism as

"The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin".

That is the definition that is referred to by the authors of the review. From participants, we heard that there were "too many close friendships" in Cricket Scotland for confidentiality requirements to be upheld. We heard that people who had previously raised concerns were victimised as a result and that the familiar old adage of, "It's just banter," was invoked as a means of silencing those who spoke out. At board level, there was no overall vision or strategy for tackling racism and there was a total lack of diversity in workforce and governance structures.

Although the findings of the report are certainly alarming, it is vital that we not only consider the consequences of our inertia but seize this opportunity to learn. I am grateful to Aneela

McKenna, an experienced diversity officer, for informing my thoughts on the subject.

I acknowledge the examples of excellent practice that are clearly evident, especially at grass-roots club and association level. We can learn from the good and, with a collective will and responsibility, we can improve across all sporting disciplines, not just in cricket.

As a starting point, the review includes many practical and deliverable recommendations. I acknowledge the work that is already under way by sportscotland and urge it to proceed in partnership with organisations that have expertise and experience to offer. That may well help to rebuild trust and confidence. I welcome Cricket Scotland's commitment to have a new board in place by the end of this month.

Let us be clear: racism exists everywhere in society. What makes an organisation institutionally racist is not that it has racism. The issue is whether an organisation prioritises tackling racism and being actively anti-racist in its policies, procedures and culture, or remains passive and content with a never-ending cycle of deny, defend and deflect, on repeat. Even if we never truly understand the experiences of others, it is important to strive to be an ally. Paul Reddish OBE, who is here today, talks of allyship as

"standing up for those when they are not in the room and handing the microphone back when they are present".

I am minded of the words of Nelson Mandela, who said:

"Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does."

In allyship, we must strive to share the pitches, the tracks and the boardrooms as equals.

Looking forward, there is a need for on-going proactive oversight and scrutiny of sporting bodies and organisations, and to include critical expert voices in the process. One option may be to link into the Government's on-going work on a national anti-racist infrastructure, led by Dr Ima Jackson. A key recommendation of that work is to establish a more effective accountability and governance infrastructure in Scotland. The terms of reference state:

"Too often recommendations have been made on racism and minority ethnic 'issues' that have subsequently been forgotten and not implemented. They may then be raised again by other groups without reference to what has been asked before. This absence of institutional memory within the current system and structures is frustrating, disempowering and can be understood as a mechanism by which systemic discrimination occurs."

I believe that governance structures and policies that adhere to and deliver on the Macpherson definition of institutional racism should become a

statutory obligation for bodies in receipt of government funding. That should be able to be applied robustly across different groups, with support from the national agency, while recognising the varying size and demographics of sporting bodies.

Let us ensure that another generation do not suffer from racism, with nowhere to go and no hope of redress or apology, but are instead embraced by the sport that they love. We must rebuild trust among our sportsmen and women of colour and ensure that we are not discussing the same issues yet again in the next parliamentary session.

I would like to thank Qasim Sheikh and Majid Haq for their enormous bravery, and I note that Majid is in the gallery today. However, we cannot continue to rely on the bravery of individuals to raise these issues.

There is momentum for positive change. Scotland has given us great sporting successes. Imagine the increased scope of that success if the potential of all of Scotland's sportspeople was set free from the shackles of discrimination. This is truly a leadership moment. I urge everyone, including those in authority, from Government to sportscotland to clubs and associations, to embrace the facts—uncomfortable though they may be and might make us—and deliver the necessary policies to change them.

I will finish with the words of James Baldwin, who said:

"Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced."

[*Applause.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Stewart.

I know that this is an issue about which people quite rightly feel passionate, and it may seem counterintuitive, but I encourage those in the public gallery not to participate, and that includes applauding. As I say, I appreciate that it may be difficult, but that is one of the protocols that we ask the public to observe here.

17:35

Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con): I, too, give a warm welcome to everybody in the gallery. I am honoured to open today's important debate on ending institutional racism in sport on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives, and I thank Kaukab Stewart for bringing the debate to the chamber. I extend my thanks to sportscotland for commissioning "Changing the Boundaries", Plan4Sport for conducting the review and producing the report, and Running Out Racism for its hard work in condemning institutional racism

within sport, and for taking active steps to reform the way that sporting bodies conduct themselves.

Along with Kaukab Stewart, I am one of the first women of colour to become a Member of the Scottish Parliament. I am also the first Indian Sikh in the Scottish Parliament. It has taken a long time for ethnic minorities to gain a voice, but we have one now. It is strange that we hear talk of a fair and inclusive Scotland, because as the report reveals, as yet it is an empty phrase and merely a tick-box exercise.

Sport brings out many emotions, such as competitiveness, joy and pride, but, unfortunately, it has also been known to bring out anger, bitterness and hate—the ugly side. When we think of racial discrimination in sport, we often think of it as abuse from the opponents' fan club but rarely as coming from within the sporting bodies themselves.

“Changing the Boundaries” is a damning indictment of institutional racism, which still permeates our institutions. The review recorded a shocking 448 examples of institutional racism with 31 allegations of racism against 15 different people, two clubs, and a regional association. The definition of racism that is used in the report highlights what is often forgotten, which is that there is no process whereby individuals can report discrimination, so there is no opportunity for redress. Without proper reporting mechanisms, how can any organisation know about the extent of the racism that it is presiding over? In the absence of awareness or of willingness to implement anti-racist infrastructure sporting bodies are, in effect, enabling racism to go unchecked.

Cricket is an internationally acclaimed sport and top teams come from all over the world—from countries such as India, Pakistan, Zimbabwe, New Zealand, the West Indies and many more—so to see such institutional racism and lack of inclusion in Cricket Scotland is shameful. I am hopeful that the changes that are to be made at Cricket Scotland, with a new board and the collaborative working between Cricket Scotland, sportscotland, Plan4sport and Running Out Racism, will see an overhaul of the previous lack of oversight and scrutiny.

However, this is only the beginning. “Changing the Boundaries” has highlighted what is missing from many sporting bodies across the country and provided recommendations that I hope will be eye-opening for many. It is essential that black, Asian and minority ethnic individuals feel valued, have a sense of belonging, and feel confident that the club has their interests at heart and will condemn racism and take action.

I hope that we will not wait another lifetime before we see transformation take place. First,

boards must be diverse. Only when the boards are representative will BAME people have a voice in the operational processes. Secondly, the Scottish Parliament must take more responsibility for the development and implementation of anti-racist infrastructure. Finally, we must incentivise sporting bodies to reassess their operations both structurally and culturally.

17:40

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): I congratulate Kaukab Stewart on securing this important debate and thank members for their excellent speeches.

The report has shocked not just Scottish cricket but the wider sporting community and people across Scotland—not just because of its clear and undeniable conclusion but because of the veracity of the allegation of institutional racism, the force with which it has been proved, and the scale at which it is rife within the sport. The publication is devastating and is a stark reminder that we must intensify our efforts to overcome racism and prejudice.

The report identified an astounding 448 examples of institutional racism, with the failure of 29 out of 31 indicators coming to light. One study conducted as part of the inquiry found that 62 per cent of respondents had experienced, seen or reported incidents of racism or discrimination, with 34 per cent having experienced it personally. That is unacceptable in sport and in our society.

I thank the two former international players, Qasim Sheikh and Majid Haq—Majid is in the gallery today—for being brave enough to share their experiences in Scotland, which ultimately led to the inquiry and the report. That was not the first time that they had spoken out—I know that they felt that complaints that they had made previously during their playing careers had little impact.

We know that Scottish cricket's governing body is now in special measures, with oversight from sportscotland, and we hope that it will be closely monitored to ensure that it demonstrates an anti-racist approach. However, we must acknowledge the fact that the problem was allowed to get so bad in the first place. Real change is needed and so, too, is scrutiny. To move forward we must see oversight of the issues and of the governing bodies, and for the governing bodies—which are often volunteer run, overloaded with vital responsibilities and lacking the expertise that they need to deal with them—to be supported to end racism and all forms of bigotry and discrimination.

As my colleagues have said, anti-racist expertise and lived experience must be central in shaping what comes next. I am not sure that the organisations themselves have that experience

yet, so the Government must do what it can to support them. A key part of that must be for both governing bodies and sportscotland to take strides to improve their internal diversity. We want a Scotland in which all societies are actively anti-racist. Sport plays a central role in that, as it does in our everyday lives. That is why it is so important that the anti-racist infrastructure to oversee public bodies that has already been agreed to will be used to scrutinise sport.

Last summer brought a rightful outcry when England football players, Sancho, Saka and Rashford, faced a torrent of online racial abuse following their missed penalties at the final of Euro 2020. We know that it is an issue that is not in only one sport. Cove Rangers player Shay Logan has regularly spoken about the racist abuse he has faced throughout his playing career, and still does—he has often shared abusive messages from opposition fans. It is simply unacceptable that this is still going on.

I was pleased to see the Scottish Football Association step up following the shocking cricket report, by writing to all clubs and making it clear that any player or official found guilty will have a 10-match ban. However, the solution cannot simply be punishment or piecemeal, it is going to have to be systemic and structural to tackle the root causes of the problem and to prevent it in the future.

Sport is an area on which we must focus such anti-racist activity, partly because of the report, but also because we can harness sport as a source of community and solidarity—a source of good—which is vital if we are to address bigotry and discrimination.

On that note, I pay tribute to Partick Thistle Football Club and its community trust whose hard work to promote inclusion is the kind of example that we need to see replicated across the Scottish Professional Football League and beyond. The trust's "Accepting Activity" programme, which is run from Petershill Park in Springburn, brings together people with a range of challenges in their life—people who are homeless, asylum seekers and refugees, and people facing recovery from addiction—to play football. Over 50 adults regularly attend every Monday and Thursday and around 75 per cent of them are from a black and minority ethnic background. They are able to play football for free, and training gear and football boots are provided for free, too. When the game is over, the players are all provided with food. The community trust tells me the programme has participants from all over the world: Ghana, Gambia, Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Vietnam, Iraq—the list goes on. Many of them have now joined local grassroots clubs, including Petershill, Summerston and Knightswood.

Also thanks to the excellent fundraising work of Jags for Good, some of these players are now able to access Partick Thistle home games through a free season tickets group. Not only is that a gold standard example of using football for good and bringing communities together, but it encourages diversity from the outset.

Sport is a force for good and it should be open to everyone. When we come together and face the uncomfortable truth that my colleague Kaukab Stewart spoke about, we can begin to tackle injustice. This is a fight for all of us and I believe that all of us in the Parliament are ready to take up that fight for the good of the people we represent.

17:45

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): As deputy convener of the Parliament's cross-party group on rugby development in Scotland, I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak in this important debate, and I thank my colleague and friend Kaukab Stewart for securing it.

It is regrettable that we have the need for the debate, but it is crucial that we, collectively as a Parliament, send a clear and loud message to all in the sports community that racism has no place in sport or in Scottish society and that racism should be addressed and called out at every level.

I begin by paying tribute to Majid Haq and Qasim Sheikh, who had the courage to raise their heads above the parapet and expose the level of racism that has been seen in Scottish cricket. I also thank everyone who was part of the report process. Their contribution, in a difficult situation, has been invaluable, and my thanks and admiration go to all involved. Their work will, I hope, be instrumental in bringing about a new era, not just in Scottish cricket but across sport in Scotland more generally.

The "Changing The Boundaries" report makes for grim reading. The investigations will be concluded in due course, and it is important that, as a Parliament, we allow that to happen in the proper way. The report makes several high-level recommendations and sub-recommendations for immediate action in order to address institutional racism in Scottish cricket. The recommendations are crucial and, although I welcome the commitment from the Scottish Government and sportscotland to implement them, I would welcome an update from the minister on the timescales for completion.

It has been highlighted that, presently, sportscotland has limited powers to address issues within governing bodies, which are often run by volunteers and are charged with vital responsibilities, such as safeguarding against discrimination, but I call on sportscotland to use its

powers to their full extent. I support the calls for safeguards to be built into sports governance to allow for scrutiny and oversight of boards' activity and to ensure that all discrimination is addressed.

Although the report on cricket raises significant issues, it is important that we also look to the future and consider the positive work that the sport community in Scotland has undertaken to tackle racism and discrimination. Indeed, as the managing director of Plan4Sport stated,

"whilst the governance and leadership practices of the organisation have been institutionally racist, the same should not be said for cricket in Scotland. There are many outstanding clubs and individuals delivering local programmes which truly engage with diverse communities."

I welcome the Scottish Government's funding and support for sportsScotland's equality, diversity and inclusion approach—sport for life. The approach provides meaningful internal action and leadership to Scotland's sporting community to tackle racism and all other forms of discrimination.

Scottish Rugby has picked up the approach particularly well, and I congratulate it on winning the sports equality award for the work that it does across clubs to celebrate diversity and to cut out discrimination. I ask the minister for a commitment that such work will continue and that the Government will redouble its efforts to tackle racism.

In conclusion, as Martin Luther King Jnr said,

"I look to the day when people will not be judged by the colour of their skin, but by the content of their character."

17:49

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I thank Kaukab Stewart for bringing the debate to the chamber. In her speech, she quoted Nelson Mandela, who said:

"Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire, it has the power to unite people in a way that little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they understand. Sport can create hope, where once there was only despair. It is more powerful than governments in breaking down racial barriers. It laughs in the face of all types of discrimination."

Members who had to endure my stumbling speech last term in the Black Lives Matter debate might recognise that quote, because I used it then. I think that it is extraordinarily powerful.

Sport can be such a force for good. It is the tip of the spear when we are tackling inequality, whether it relates to colour, creed, religion, sex or gender. Sport is about viewing something through the prism of performance and excellence. Sport is about what we have in common with one another, not what divides us. Sport provides a way for society to accept differences. In the end, the only difference that sportsmen and sportswomen are

interested in is in their ability to perform, as they recognise the dedication and effort that is needed to deliver in the arena.

As members might know, this is a very personal debate for me, having witnessed friends of mine suffer racial discrimination over the past four decades or so. That puts the current situation in a whole different light. Forty years ago, the world was very different. I ran against the first two black men I met. Both of them were heroes of mine at the time, and they are now, I am glad to say, lifelong friends.

Scotland was not the diverse country that it is now becoming. I have coached athletes from India, French Guiana—which really tested my schoolboy French—Poland and Iraq, just to name a few. That was unheard of 40 years ago, and I am always delighted to see athletes from such diverse backgrounds at my local athletics club.

These days, the younger generation are much more integrated and informed than we ever were at that age. Back in the early 1980s, many black and ethnic minority sportsmen and sportswomen suffered in silence for fear of being excluded from teams. It was extraordinarily hard to witness. In society back then, television programmes were full of casual racism. It was the norm to have words and phrases dropped into conversations that would make us recoil these days.

I suspect—and I really hope—that the current situation is a case of unintended casual racism, which has had to be endured and has, thankfully, eventually been called out. That is, of course, what we must continue to do whenever it rears its head.

That is an education issue and, to be honest, I think that it is a generational issue to a certain extent. We must guard against the fact that racism is a learned trait, so we must continue to tackle that. Let us not fall into the trap, though, of thinking that racism is a thing of the past. We should consider, as Pam Duncan-Glancy said, the appalling treatment of the young black English footballers who missed penalties at the European championship.

At the start of my speech, I said that sport can help to change the world. I am thinking of real pioneers in sport—people such as Jesse Owens, who competed back in 1936 in front of Adolf Hitler; Cassius Clay, who won Olympic boxing gold and then went back to segregation in his country; Arthur Ashe, in tennis, who now has a stadium named after him; and Tiger Woods, in golf, who won at the masters, where only a few years previously black men had not been allowed to play. They shone brightly and are remembered because of their sporting prowess.

That does not mean that we do not have more work to do. After this year's European

championship, I was approached by a complete stranger in the street who indignantly inquired, "Are white men not allowed in the team anymore?" I have to say that I used language that I would not repeat in the chamber. However, that serves as a reminder that we have so much more work to do.

I thank Kaukab Stewart for bringing the debate to the chamber to remind us, once again, that racism still pervades our society, despite the huge steps that I have seen over the past 40 years in the sporting arena. Let us continue to use sport—and music and art, incidentally—to highlight what binds us and what connects us, because, ultimately, we should respect and celebrate individuality. The things that we should be judged on are our actions and performances. Sport is such a great leveller. It is why I am so passionate about investing in it and promoting it. It is not about teaching our children to do sport; it is more about teaching our children through sport.

17:54

Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP): I thank Kaukab Stewart for bringing this debate to the chamber. Her passionate speech really moved me, so I thank her for that.

I am sad to be speaking in the debate. We should not be debating racism in cricket because it should not be happening, but the sad fact is that racism has been institutionalised in cricket for many years.

In preparing for the debate, I attended a briefing on the issue from sportscotland, which I will touch on shortly. We were also briefed on the issue by Running Out Racism, which describes itself as follows:

"A group of cricket lovers—players, administrators and fans—that want the current coverage on cricket in Scotland to lead to changes in the way our institutions are run, so that racism of all forms in cricket can be eradicated. We want to be part of the solution, and to have our say in what happens next."

It is fantastic to see so many people in the gallery tonight. I thank all of them for raising the issue and for their bravery in doing so.

The sportscotland briefing highlighted the following important points. All of this has happened with Cricket Scotland winning various diversity awards and with budgets and oversight continually signed off. That demonstrates that there are issues with the oversight and governance of governing bodies. Cricket Scotland lacked both diversity and expertise to take things forward, and it is critical that anti-racism expertise and the voices of lived experience are involved in action planning.

Safeguards also need to be built in that can provide scrutiny and oversight in relation to such

issues. At the moment, sportscotland has limited powers to address issues in governing bodies, which are often volunteer run and charged with vital responsibilities for issues such as racism, discrimination, safeguarding and the like.

Anti-racist infrastructure to oversee and support public bodies' approaches, with the aim of ensuring that Scotland can become an anti-racist society, has already been agreed, and there are plans to use that to provide scrutiny in sport. That infrastructure is focused on ensuring that it is for all policy development and implementation in health, education and housing, and that it equally applies to sport and culture, given the current profile and challenges in the sector.

Members have talked about other sports, which need to learn from the review of racism. I coached football for more than 25 years, spending 15 years in the professional game. Over that period, I saw several racist incidents. As a football fan—I am a Hibs season ticket holder; I am sorry to mention that—I have heard racist abuse being directed at players. One of those players was a guy called Kevin Harper. Kevin was one of the first black players in Scotland, and one of the first black players for Hibs. I have talked to him in person about a lot of these issues and they still affect him now, all these years later.

Last year, I was contacted by two constituents, a week apart, about racist incidents in two amateur football games. My constituents were frustrated by the lack of action by the Scottish football authorities. I arranged three round tables, involving the sports minister, Maree Todd, and all the football governing bodies: the Scottish Football Association, the Scottish Youth Football Association, the Scottish Junior Football Association, the Scottish Amateur Football Association and Scottish Women's Football. I also involved a couple of the senior clubs—Hibs and Hearts—in the area.

At the round tables, I discovered that the SFA employs only one person to look at diversity and racism issues, including policy, incident reporting and liaison with clubs. However, the SFA also has an equalities and diversity board, which meets quarterly and is keen to get a wider understanding of the different areas of the work that is carried out.

In comparison, in England—and I understand and appreciate that there is more money in English football—all premier league and championship teams must have full-time diversity officers, who look at issues of racism, misogyny and homophobia. That approach will be extended to league 1 clubs this season and to league 2 clubs next season.

The Scottish football authorities need to learn from the experience of Scottish cricket in dealing with these issues and from how sportscotland dealt with the situation, and they need to do more to tackle racism, sectarianism, transphobia, homophobia and misogyny in our sport.

I commend sportscotland for its work. Other sports—particularly football—need to do more.

17:58

Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): I thank Kaukab Stewart for bringing this important debate to the chamber and for her passionate speech. The “Changing the Boundaries” report is damning in its conclusions; as other members have said, the wealth of evidence was undeniable. It is worth noting that Plan4Sport, which produced the report, had almost 1,000 interactions with people to hear about their experiences. I would like to thank each and every one of the people who came forward and shared their stories about the impact that Scottish cricket has had on their lives.

The report found the leadership practices and governance of Cricket Scotland to be institutionally racist. It also found 448 instances that demonstrated institutional racism. Like so many colleagues across the chamber, I express my deep concern at the findings and my solidarity with those who experienced that institutional abuse. No one should be made to feel unsafe, unwelcome or abused in sport. We must ensure that those who have experienced or witnessed racist incidents have the confidence that their reports will be taken seriously and, crucially, acted on when they come forward.

That Cricket Scotland has won various awards for diversity is a further cause for concern and demonstrates that we cannot be complacent about the perceived progress that we have made on equalities in Scotland. We cannot be content with any progress that we have made while racism still thrives.

It is essential that the safeguards that we build in to provide the additional scrutiny and oversight that are needed in Scottish sport take account of the limited powers of institutions such as sportscotland to effectively explore and address racism across different governing bodies. Where vital responsibilities are discharged over areas such as safeguarding, racism and bullying in governing bodies, it is essential that institutions that lack expertise on their boards, which are often small or reliant on volunteers to function, are fully supported in those endeavours.

The Scottish Greens share the view that genuinely impactful equalities and anti-racist strategies should be central to organisations that

receive Government funding. Further to that, I welcome the assessment framework that is set out in the report. I share the view that is noted in Kaukab Stewart’s motion that that could be used as a condition in the funding criteria for all funding of sports in Scotland.

I look forward to the response of the Scottish Government on the proposed anti-racist infrastructure model, which we understand is being considered and which will potentially be published next year. The report will inform the work on oversight and how to support public bodies to ensure Scotland can become an anti-racist society.

I am pleased that some measures are already being taken to provide oversight of Cricket Scotland until October 2023. Cricket Scotland is undertaking an immediate recruitment process for new board members and for additional staff to ensure the effective operation of new equalities measures and the undertaking of a governance review. It is vital that the voices of those with lived experience are part of that process.

We must also remember that cricket will not be the only sport in which such things happen. The situation should be a wake-up call to all governing bodies and taken as an opportunity for them to stand together and say that racism will not be allowed in our sports teams. Although I have spoken about the structures and teams involved, we should all remember the impact that there will have been on individual players, their lives, their families and their love of their sport. I hope that all those who have come forward are getting the support that they deserve.

I also thank Running Out Racism and other organisations, such as Show Racism the Red Card and Kick It Out, for their campaigning efforts to give this important issue the public attention that it deserves, and I thank all the people who joined the rally outside Holyrood to make their voices heard—that racism has no place in Scotland.

As parliamentarians, we must tackle these challenges, which are prevalent in all areas of public life. We must continue to be vigilant in the face of discrimination and address any form of inequality head on. Sport should be a welcoming place for everyone. Racism and all other forms of bigotry and discrimination have no place in Scottish sport and no place in Scotland.

18:03

Foyso Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): I thank Kaukab Stewart for bringing this very important matter to the chamber.

Here we go again. Another investigation, another organisation found to be institutionally

racist, and a long list of actions to be taken. In 1999, the Macpherson report noted that institutional racism is

“The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin.”

Since then, positive steps towards equality have been taken. I applaud the work of campaigns, including Show Racism the Red Card and Kick it Out, which encourage the end of racism within sport. Twenty-three years after the 1999 Macpherson report, however, racism is still present across society.

Recently, we have seen stark inequalities laid bare in the Scottish Government’s equality impact assessment of its “Scottish Government Race Recruitment and Retention Action Plan”. Now, institutional racism in sport, most recently within Cricket Scotland, has been brought to light.

Institutions that receive Government funding must be held to account and must promote anti-racist equality practice. Institutions and their boards must not be given awards while failing to uphold standards of fairness, equality and accountability for those whom they serve. It is unacceptable that Cricket Scotland was winning diversity awards while 448 cases of institutional racism were happening.

The report detailed allegations of favouritism within Cricket Scotland towards white children from public schools. I commend those who shared their lived experiences of racism within the sport, including former Scotland internationals Majid Haq and Qasim Sheikh. Their doing so has helped to expose the realities that racism does still exist in Scotland and that something needs to be done now. I hope that, in the future, it will be easier for other victims of racism to share their experiences and be supported in doing so.

I welcome reports that many clubs support diversity and equality. However, more needs to be done so that the culture of equality is present within all clubs and, indeed, across all sports. Institutional change is needed to weed out institutional racism, so the introduction of diversity officer roles and independent complaints mechanisms within sport could be a good start.

The Plan4Sport report, while it is shocking and extremely disappointing, is a wake-up call to the reality of racism in sport in Scotland today. We need to use this opportunity to influence the future for Cricket Scotland and other sports bodies and institutions in Scotland. Now is the chance for the Scottish Government to prove that it takes institutional racism seriously and that, instead of offering piecemeal recommendations that do not go far enough, it is committed to overhauling racist

institutions and practices throughout the nation and within its own institutions.

This is a time for us all to work together. I am committed to joining any discussions that the Scottish Government might have to influence meaningful action that could end institutional racism in Scotland and in Scottish sport.

I am a cricket lover and have played the game, myself. Sport should be an exciting, enjoyable pursuit for children and adults alike, and we should not be allowing a culture to exist in which people feel that they cannot succeed in, or enjoy, sport because of institutional barriers against their skin colour, religion, or cultural background. I want to see strict laws monitoring methods to ensure change.

Racism in Scotland has gone on long enough. Now is the time to deliver change.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you very much, Mr Choudhury.

In order to allow the final speaker in the open debate to contribute, 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 Kaukab Stewart to move such a motion.

Motion moved,

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

Motion agreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That is not an invitation to take up to 30 minutes, Ms Mackay. Take around four minutes, please.

18:09

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): I thank my friend and colleague Kaukab Stewart for bringing this hugely important debate to the chamber, and for her long-standing work on combating racism throughout society generally. I am delighted that her motion has received such amazing widespread cross-party support.

The fact that the debate is about ending institutional racism in sport is shocking. The fact that it has been proved that there is institutional racism in sport is shocking, and the fact that it took two international cricketing whistleblowers, Qasim Sheikh and Majid Haq, to speak out before it was acknowledged is beyond shocking.

Qasim Sheikh described the day that the report was published as he sat in front of a press conference as the most difficult of his life. He should not have had to do that. His complaints about racism had been ignored until they were endorsed by a sportscotland report. That speaks volumes. Cricket’s governing body, and even

some fellow players, had turned the other way when complaints were raised. It was a case of “See no evil, hear no evil.”

As we have heard, the sportscotland report reveals 448 institutionally racist incidences. There were 448: let that sink in. It is shocking. There is no doubt that cultural change is required. Uncomfortable truths must be confronted, so we can only hope that this is the watershed moment that has been needed for so long. Cricket Scotland’s entire board resigned on the eve of the sportscotland report and the sport is now in special measures. It has until the end of the month to develop an action plan and will remain in special measures until at least September 2023, subject to its delivering outcomes that demonstrate an anti-racist approach.

The irony is that all that happened while Cricket Scotland was winning various diversity awards, as Gillian Mackay highlighted. That beggars belief and devalues the very purpose of the awards, which, in my opinion, would not even be needed in 2022 if we were a truly diverse population.

Sporting excellence has nothing to do with the colour of anyone’s skin, and outdated and racist attitudes have no place in Scotland—or anywhere else, for that matter. Those who perpetuate them should be called out at every opportunity.

Yesterday, I spoke in a members’ business debate that was brought to the chamber by Liz Smith, during which we celebrated the success of Team Scotland at the Commonwealth games. There was much to applaud. That is in stark contrast with today’s debate.

How do we move on from this sorry state of affairs? I do not pretend to know what goes on behind the scenes of sporting bodies. I can only comment on what has been made public; it seems to me that the two bodies have traditionally lacked diversity and expertise to take things forward. Of course, the voices of lived experience are, in my opinion, the most important to have at the heart of forward planning. Safeguards must be built in to provide independent scrutiny and oversight. I understand that sportscotland has limited powers to address issues within a governing body that appears to be all-powerful. That has to change, so I hope that the measures that are proposed will be effective.

We know that the problem of racism in sport does not exist just in Scotland or in cricket, but as a small nation that consistently punches above its weight in the sporting arena, we must address racism now and eradicate it for good.

18:12

The Minister for Public Health, Women’s Health and Sport (Maree Todd): I thank Kaukab Stewart for lodging the motion about what is an important issue and a significant moment for sport in Scotland. The “Changing the Boundaries” report was more than uncomfortable to face. Frankly, it was distressing, it was shocking and it was utterly damning.

Tonight’s debate has covered a lot of ground. Although I am encouraged by some of the positive stories, I am under no illusion that there is long way to go to ensure that sport is truly inclusive and welcoming for all. Let me be absolutely clear: I firmly believe that there is no place for racism or discrimination of any kind in sport or in wider society.

Nelson Mandela has been quoted by a number of colleagues and what he said bears repeating:

“Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire, it has the power to unite people in a way that little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they understand. Sport can create hope, where once there was only despair. It is more powerful than governments in breaking down racial barriers. It laughs in the face of all types of discrimination.”

I really believe that that can be the case. Sport can unite people and sport can be a leading light in tackling some of the ingrained inequality and unfairness that we have in our society. Being involved in sport and physical activity is so beneficial for people’s physical, mental and social health. It helps prevent heart disease, strokes, diabetes and a lot of cancers. It plays an important part in helping us maintain a healthy weight. It makes a positive contribution to good mental health, helps to reduce stress and improve self-esteem and self-efficacy, and helps to manage depression and anxiety. Sport also strengthens communities. That is why I believe that it is vitally important that everyone in Scotland feels welcome in sport and has the opportunity to be involved. Sport is a critical part of improving the health of the nation but also of creating a fair and just society.

I was saddened, angry and distressed to read about what many have experienced in Scottish cricket. Last week, I met the interim chief executive officer of Cricket Scotland and sportscotland to discuss the “Changing the Boundaries” report, the recommendations and the associated action plan. I was genuinely pleased to hear their progress so far and how they plan to proceed. The board recruitment process is under way for a chair and two non-executive directors. I know that they are promoting these roles widely to reach directly into as diverse an audience and communities as possible. The governance review

will be commenced once board members are in place.

The action plan is being developed and an equality, diversity and inclusion task force is being established. The cabinet secretary and I have been clear that we expect to see that progress continue, and we will be undertaking regular meetings to hear about the progress.

We are also looking forward, along with the Minister for Equalities and Older People, to our forthcoming meeting with Running Out Racism. As others have said, that organisation was established after concerns were raised about racism in Yorkshire cricket and it has done a huge amount to support everyone who has experienced racism in cricket.

I give my heartfelt thanks to each and every person who spoke to the review and described their experience. I know that that cannot have been easy. Fundamental to our response to the report is the need to listen to those who have bravely spoken out and to ask them about the changes that they need to see take place in cricket and sport. I have confidence that sportscotland and Cricket Scotland understand the importance of this work. I know that they are willing and positive about working with others to bring about change.

I am also grateful to sportscotland for appointing Plan4Sport to undertake the independent review so quickly after allegations surfaced and for its commitment to this work.

Of course, as many have said, racism is not confined to cricket, just as racism is not confined to sport. Sportscotland is speaking to all Scottish governing bodies of sport about the issues that are raised in the report and is supporting them to consider what needs to happen in their own sport.

Brian Whittle: Will the minister take an intervention on that point?

Maree Todd: Certainly, but let me just complete the point. My sense is that this will just have lifted the lid and that we are peering inside and will see a grim picture replicated throughout sport.

Brian Whittle: I have been listening to the debate today with great interest and I keep hearing the idea that sportscotland does not have the powers that it requires to tackle racism. I am thinking about my own sport. To be an affiliated club in track and field athletics, each club has to have a trained welfare officer. To be a coach in that club, we have to undergo an equalities course every time we renew our licence. Should we think about replicating that across the whole of Scottish sport?

Maree Todd: Certainly there are good pockets of work in many sports. We have heard about

some of them today, but what we need to do is take a systematic approach to this right across the board and make sure that there is no sport and no place for institutional racism to thrive in, as it clearly has done in cricket.

We absolutely need sports to ensure that they are truly inclusive of the communities that they take place in. As many have said, that needs to be from the playing field right to the boardroom. We have to do more. It needs to include not just people who are involved in sport. It is not just they have to educate themselves about racism; they have to understand unconscious bias as well. We all need to be active in our intent to root out racism. Passive sympathy is just not enough.

I have to acknowledge that there is a lack of trust in the organisations and the processes. Given the level of institutional racism that has been exposed, that does not surprise me. I understand that. We have to work to rebuild that trust by listening to people with lived experience and acting to ensure system change. This is an important issue. It is important to everyone in the chamber and the communities that we serve. This report has made grim reading. It is a low point in Scottish sport, but let us hope that this low point can be a new beginning.

I am open to all ideas about how we might work together and collectively make a difference. I am more than happy to continue cross-party discussions and to update colleagues regularly. I am very keen to hear ideas on how we take this forward, to understand where gaps exist and strengthen structures where they need to be strengthened. We are listening. We are having more detailed conversations about the issue and engaging with stakeholders right across a range of issues from race to safeguarding.

Finally, I thank everyone who has contributed to the discussion tonight and again thank my colleague Kaukab Stewart for bringing the motion to the Parliament. I am also very grateful to the many people in the gallery and the many people watching at home who have shone a light on this issue, who made us all feel uncomfortable. I promise you that we will do better.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate and I close this meeting of Parliament.

Meeting closed at 18:22.

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

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