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Wednesday 23 November 2022

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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 23 November 2022

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

Presiding Officer's Statement

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Good afternoon. Before we come to the first item of business, I note that members will be aware that the Government has answered a Government-inspired question this morning on the judgment of the Supreme Court on the reference that was made by the Lord Advocate. The long-established good-practice guidance on announcements to Parliament states:

“Ministerial statements are appropriate in ... matters of significant and either immediate or ongoing public (and Parliamentary) importance.”

I have asked the Government to reflect on the appropriateness of using a GIQ on this occasion.

Urgent Question

Independence Referendum (Supreme Court Ruling)

14:01

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The first item of business is an urgent question.

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I had hoped that this question might be answered by the First Minister, but she is absent from the chamber.

To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the UK Supreme Court's ruling on the legality of an independence referendum bill.

The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): As the Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture, it is entirely appropriate for me to answer questions about the constitution today. First Minister's question time is tomorrow; I will wait to see whether Douglas Ross has any better questions then.

To answer the substantive question that is before us, the Supreme Court has decided that, under the devolution settlement, a referendum on the question

“Should Scotland be an independent country?”

is a matter that is reserved to the Westminster Parliament. That means that, without an agreement between the Scottish and United Kingdom Governments and the Scottish and UK Parliaments, a section 30 order or a UK act to change the Scottish Parliament's powers, the Scottish Parliament cannot pass the laws that are required to hold a referendum to give effect to the mandate that people in Scotland gave it and to give us a choice about our future.

The Scottish Government accepts and respects that judgment. The Supreme Court was not asked to decide, and cannot decide, whether the Scottish Parliament should have the power to hold an independence referendum. Its job is to set out what the law is—in this case, the devolution settlement in the Scotland Act 1998—and that is what it has done.

The judgment makes it clear how the UK constitution gives the UK Government a veto over the right of people in Scotland to choose. The Supreme Court said in paragraph 81 of its judgment:

“A clear outcome, whichever way the question was answered, would possess the authority, in a constitution and political culture founded upon democracy, of a

democratic expression of the view of the Scottish electorate.”

This is what the constitutional arrangements deny us:

“a democratic expression of the view of the Scottish electorate.”

Why does that matter? The Supreme Court tells us that the question is

“whether Scotland should cease to be subject to the sovereignty of the Parliament of the United Kingdom”.

So, the reason why the Scottish electorate does not get its chance to offer “a democratic expression” is because it would impinge on Westminster sovereignty if its views were known. That tells us what is truly left of promises that were made that the UK would operate as “a partnership of equals” and that we lived in

“a voluntary union of nations”.

No matter how the people of Scotland vote or how often they elect Parliaments that support a referendum or support independence, they cannot be told “No” by the UK Prime Minister. That cannot be right, and there are few stronger or more powerful arguments for independence than that. In a voluntary union, one part does not have to rely on the agreement of another before it is allowed to even think about leaving.

The Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary, I would be grateful if you could draw that particular response to a conclusion, because there is a great deal of interest in this item. I call Douglas Ross.

Douglas Ross: I noted that the cabinet secretary quoted paragraph 81 of the ruling and not paragraph 82, in which the judges said that they were absolutely

“in no doubt as to the answer”

to the question that they were considering.

Given the cost of the case in taxpayers’ money and in time, it is regrettable that the First Minister herself was unable to come to the chamber to answer. She was more than happy this morning to comment from behind a Scottish National Party podium, as SNP leader, but she is now unwilling, as First Minister, to answer questions in this chamber from elected Scottish parliamentarians.

The Scottish people have made it clear in poll after poll—*[Interruption.]*—that they do not want another referendum next year, so—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Members!

Douglas Ross: I welcome the Supreme Court’s clear and unanimous judgment. It is one that we must all respect. I hope that the SNP back benchers do, as well.

We now have an opportunity to focus on the big challenges that Scotland faces right now: strikes, the global cost of living crisis, and a winter storm in our national health service. I ask the cabinet secretary this: will the SNP Government ditch its referendum obsession and get back to tackling those crucial issues for individuals, families and communities right across Scotland?

Angus Robertson: The inconvenient truth for Douglas Ross is that last year’s Scottish Parliament election decided the principle and the electorate decided the mandate—*[Interruption.]*—which was for parties that are in favour of an independence referendum. The SNP and the Greens won the election; the Scottish Conservatives lost the election—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: I think that this session will be a lot more productive if we can hear whoever is on their feet speak. I would be grateful if members could, please, resist any temptation to contribute while members are on their feet.

Angus Robertson: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

The position of the Scottish Government remains the same as what the First Minister announced to Parliament on 28 June. Nothing has changed in that respect. We would prefer the UK and Scottish Governments to agree to a section 30 order under the Scotland Act 1998 to allow a legal and constitutional referendum to go ahead. That is what the people have voted for. It is for the Scottish Conservatives to explain why they are blocking and denying democracy.

Douglas Ross: It is for the cabinet secretary to explain his misleading claim, because actually a majority of votes in the Scottish Parliament election were for parties that support our remaining part of the United Kingdom—more than for parties that support separation.

Let us be clear. The SNP’s political obsession with separation dragged both of Scotland’s Governments into court, but there is now a chance for Scotland and our two Governments to come together and move on. There is a clear choice for this SNP Government: either it continues to divide our country and focus on its political priorities, or it gets on with the job of dealing with the real priorities for Scottish people.

What choice will this Government make? Will it keep pushing for another referendum or will it focus on getting back to work, to deliver for the people of Scotland? Which will it be?

Angus Robertson: What I can say with absolute certainty is that my memory is long enough for me to remember that it was the Conservative Party that blocked Scottish democracy and devolution after the yes vote of

1979. It is long enough for me to remember that it was the Conservative Party that opposed devolution in the 1997 referendum. Perhaps it is unsurprising that the Conservative Party is not keen on Scottish democracy now. Blocking and denying democracy is a serious charge, and it is unfortunate that Douglas Ross and the Tories are leading the charge on it.

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): Douglas Ross spoke about opinion polls. Although opinion polls are interesting, election results are definite, as this chamber proves. This Parliament has the biggest majority for an independence revolution that there has ever been in the history of devolution. What does the UK Government's refusal to respect that mandate say about its view of this Parliament and decisions that are made by the people of Scotland?

Angus Robertson: To be honest, it is difficult to understand why a UK Government, having established the principle of respecting that a referendum should take place when a majority in favour of it is elected to the Scottish Parliament—which is exactly what happened after the 2011 Scottish Parliament election—should now depart from that precedent. I can come to only one conclusion, which is that it is scared—scared of losing the referendum. All the excuses for why democracy should be blocked now are factually inaccurate. They are a fiction, and they are democracy denial. It is not a good look, in a democracy, for political parties to block democracy, but the Tories have had form on that for decades.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): It was right for the Lord Advocate to refer this question to the Supreme Court, and it is welcome that we have the legal clarity on the matter that the Scottish Government sought. I also put on record my thanks to the court for its speedy work in considering the case. It is crucial that we now focus on the problems that our country faces, from soaring bills to the crisis in our NHS. Indeed, Scottish Labour will debate those issues in the chamber this afternoon.

Cabinet secretary, there is not a majority for a referendum or for independence, but neither is there a majority for the status quo. People across Scotland and, indeed, the UK, want change. Does the cabinet secretary agree that we need to get rid of the economically incompetent and morally bankrupt Tory Government, and that the best way to do that would be to help to elect a Labour Government across the UK to bring economic growth, restore living standards, prioritise our public services and deliver a green new deal?

Angus Robertson: I would prefer to get rid of unelected Tory Governments in Scotland for ever—[*Interruption.*—]for ever, but what Sarah

Boyack suggests would not deliver that. I am quite taken by a quote that I have here from a colleague of Sarah Boyack's—I think that she knows him—Anas Sarwar. He said:

“it should be the people of Scotland that decide when the next referendum is.”

That issue was debated last year in the Scottish Parliament election, and it was the defining issue of the election. Look around the chamber and see who is here—the parties that stood on a manifesto commitment to hold a referendum won the election. The party that opposed referendums lost the election. What a bizarre situation it is for Opposition parties to tell the governing parties that they should not do what they were elected to do. That is not a normal functioning democracy, and it is a very sad day to see the Labour Party—a party that was, in its day, a very strong supporter of home rule—joining the Tories in blocking Scottish democracy.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I have lost count of how many times the First Minister has launched a new independence campaign, each with less energy and momentum than the last. While Nicola Sturgeon goes through the motions, people wait days for an ambulance, months for NHS treatment and years for lifeline ferries. Breaking up the United Kingdom is simply not a priority for people who are opening their bills with dread or living in pain. My goodness, teachers are on strike tomorrow. Scotland needs new hope, not old divisions, so why will the SNP-Green Government not finally focus on what matters instead of this arrogant, tired and divisive charade?

Angus Robertson: I say gently that it is neither liberal nor democratic to stand in the way of democracy and people being able to make a yes-or-no choice. No doubt, we differ on whether we support independence. I know that Alex Cole-Hamilton does not want to hear that he represents a party with only four members and the worst election result in its history. That loss was secured on the back of opposition to an independence referendum. Maybe he should listen to the electorate, because the electorate—[*Interruption.*] Indeed, members may point at these benches. Parties that were elected with a manifesto commitment to deliver a referendum have the majority in the Parliament. I am sorry that the Scottish Liberal Democrats are being neither liberal nor democratic, nor standing up for democracy in Scotland.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): I will start off by correcting Douglas Ross. Not only did the SNP and the Greens win more seats than the Opposition at last year's election, but we won 16,057 more votes than all the anti-independence parties combined—[*Interruption.*—]and we did so

on the basis of manifestos that committed to giving the people of Scotland a choice over their future. If this is a voluntary union, the onus is now on the UK Government to explain how a part of that union can decide whether to stay or go.

However, in the absence of any alternative being offered by Westminster, does the cabinet secretary agree that every vote cast for pro-independence candidates at the 2024 general election will count towards the mandate for Scotland's independence?

Angus Robertson: Indeed, they will.

As democrats, it behoves all of us to embrace every democratic opportunity to secure democratic change. However, in a democracy it also behoves other political parties that have different views to uphold the basic tenets of democracy. Overlooking and disregarding election results where one can clearly see—because of the numbers on the Opposition benches being less than the majority of the Parliament—that it is the Opposition parties that are opposing the democratic mandate that sent us all here.

The question does not need to rest on the next UK general election, because the UK Government could meet with the Scottish Government and do what it did in the run-up to the 2014 referendum by saying, "We disagree on the principal question of independence—yes or no—but, as democrats, we agree that the people should have their say."

It is time for the people of Scotland to have their say. They decided, they elected us to do this, and nobody—nobody—should stand in the way of the Scottish Parliament and the views of the Scottish people.

Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Today's ruling from the Supreme Court confirms that this is not a voluntary union. I ask the cabinet secretary what the fact that the Scotland Act 1998 prevents Scotland from having a referendum to escape Westminster control says about the security of the devolution settlement and the state of democracy in the UK.

Angus Robertson: Perhaps surprisingly, I am going to quote Margaret Thatcher in answer to my colleague, because it was Margaret Thatcher who said:

"As a nation"

the Scots

"have an undoubted right to national self-determination."

She also said:

"Should they determine on independence, no English party or politician"

should

"stand in their way".

It was John Major who said of Scotland:

"No nation could be held irrevocably in a union against its will."

As part of the cross-party Smith commission, after the 2014 independence referendum, all parties said:

"Nothing in this report",

which we all agreed on,

"prevents Scotland becoming an independent country in the future should the people of Scotland so choose."

They have chosen to have a choice, but the Conservative Party, the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats are working hand in glove to deny the people their say. We need democracy in this country, and today we have seen the end of the voluntary union as we know it. We will not give up on democracy, and the people will have their say.

Portfolio Question Time

Covid-19 Recovery and Parliamentary Business

14:18

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is portfolio questions. If a member wishes to ask a supplementary question, they should press their request-to-speak button or enter “RTS” in the chat function during the relevant question.

Scottish Child Payment

1. Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how the expansion of the Scottish child payment will impact on the delivery of its Covid recovery strategy. (S6O-01573)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney): The Covid recovery strategy is focused on reducing systemic inequalities, tackling poverty and supporting people most affected during the pandemic. Increasing financial security for low-income households and tackling child poverty are central to achieving our vision of a Covid recovery that is firmly based on a fairer future.

The extension of the Scottish child payment to children under 16 means that more than 400,000 children are now potentially eligible. We have demonstrated our ambition to achieve our challenging child poverty targets by further increasing the value of the payment to £25 per child per week.

Collette Stevenson: I welcome the actions in the Covid recovery strategy to address inequalities and the role that the Scottish child payment will have in supporting families. However, recent analysis from the Institute for Public Policy Research shows that removing the two-child limit and the benefit cap could lift 300,000 children in the United Kingdom out of poverty. Does the Deputy First Minister agree that, in the middle of a crippling cost of living crisis, it is nothing short of a scandal for the UK Government to continue to prioritise bankers’ bonuses rather than use the powers that it has to support families to get out of poverty?

John Swinney: I understand and sympathise entirely with the point that Collette Stevenson has advanced. The analysis that the IPPR has provided has demonstrated quite clearly the negative impact of the benefit cap and the two-child limit as being both unjust and unfair.

All Governments must take action to address child poverty issues. As I said in my opening answer, the Scottish Government has introduced the Scottish child payment, which is available only in Scotland—it is not available in any other part of the UK. However, our efforts to lift substantial numbers of children out of poverty would be substantially assisted by the removal of the two-child limit and the benefit cap. That could be of enormous assistance in addressing the issue of child poverty.

Covid-19 Inquiry

2. Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government when it expects the Scottish Covid-19 inquiry to conclude. (S6O-01574)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney): Section 17 of the Inquiries Act 2005 gives an inquiry chair alone, rather than ministers, responsibility for deciding how an inquiry should operate. It will be for Lord Brailsford to determine how to strike the right balance between addressing the wide range of questions that people have and making sure that the inquiry can be delivered at speed, so that we can learn and benefit from lessons as early as possible. The inquiry will provide information and updates on its website at www.covid19inquiry.scot as it progresses and as the chair considers appropriate.

Douglas Lumsden: From reading the terms of reference, it is not clear to me whether the Government’s response to long Covid and its failure to take that issue seriously are part of the inquiry. Can the Deputy First Minister say whether the Government’s response to long Covid will be part of the inquiry, or will we need to wait for another inquiry after we hear about the handling of this one?

John Swinney: I am sorry that Mr Lumsden takes that view, having read the terms of reference. I answered a parliamentary question on that from Jackie Baillie, if my memory serves me correctly, and I made clear two points in that answer: first, the inquiry remit is set out to not be prescriptive—in that only the words that are in the remit can be addressed by the inquiry—but rather to create the broadest scope to address the issues that are relevant in relation to Covid; and secondly, in my judgment, the issues relating to long Covid are certainly at the heart of the inquiry remit and should be considered by the inquiry.

It will be for Lord Brailsford to decide independently what evidence he hears and considers, but I would be very surprised if the issue of long Covid was not scrutinised by the

inquiry. In my view, the remit is set with sufficient breadth and scope to enable that to be the case.

I hope that that reassures Mr Lumsden.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): When Lord Brailsford was appointed, the Deputy First Minister gave me a reassurance about the centrality of bereaved families to the work of the inquiry. Is he able to give members an update on what steps have been taken to engage families?

John Swinney: I cannot give a specific answer to that question because, clearly, that would require me to have knowledge of the transactions of the inquiry. However, in my conversation with Lord Brailsford in the aftermath of my statement to Parliament, in which I announced his appointment, he indicated to me that he was making early preparations to meet bereaved families, and I am certain that that will be the case.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): We are waiting for the Scottish Covid-19 inquiry to conclude, but would it not be more sensible to have the details and recommendations of that inquiry before ploughing on with social care reform?

John Swinney: Obviously, there are lots of issues to consider in relation to social care reform. As a Government, we look at all the available evidence. A parliamentary process is under way for each committee's scrutiny of the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill. The committees will have the ability to consider all manner of questions in relation to social care, and ministers will, of course, listen with care to the evidence that is put forward.

Freedom of Information Appeals

3. Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the Scottish Information Commissioner's section 46 report for 2021-22, which reported a 29 per cent increase in freedom of information appeals. (S6O-01575)

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (George Adam): The Scottish Government notes with interest the commissioner's 2021-22 performance report, which was recently presented to the Parliament. I recognise that this is a challenging time for the commissioner's team, with a marked increase in the number of requesters seeking information from Scottish public authorities, who are exercising their right to appeal. I note that, in the report, the commissioner set out the steps that his office is taking to address the challenges that are associated with that. The Scottish Government acknowledges the vital role that the commissioner plays as an independent regulator of access to information laws in

Scotland, appointed on the nomination of the Parliament.

Donald Cameron: The Scottish Information Commissioner's report makes it clear that the 626 appeals that were received in 2021-22 were the highest number received since 2005-06 and that 18 per cent of the valid appeals were about a public authority's failure to respond. What action will the minister take now in order to ensure that there is greater public authority compliance with freedom of information requests?

George Adam: I will take the opportunity to add to what I have already said, which is that the Scottish Government is committed to learning from all appeal cases, no matter their outcome. We are working to deliver an FOI improvement plan, which was launched in July 2022, to help Scottish case handlers to recover from the disruption of the pandemic and to adjust to higher numbers of cases that are more complex.

Over the past year, our response rates for FOIs in general have been at an average of 86.5 per cent, despite cases increasing by 48 per cent over a three-year period. We will continue to work with the commissioner and others internally to ensure that we address our response rates so that we can hit the 95 per cent target.

Covid Recovery (Funding)

4. Paul O'Kane (West Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what the reduction in funding for Covid recovery will be as part of the emergency budget review. (S6O-01576)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney): The aim of the emergency budget review was to support those who need most help, while also managing the nation's budget. That meant making hard choices to further prioritise spending and find savings. Many of the difficulties that are facing public finances are the result of the United Kingdom Government prematurely cutting the funding that was intended to support our recovery from the pandemic, despite the Scottish Government warning against that action.

The emergency budget review identified a further £615 million in savings. Those are not decisions that we would wish to make but, in the absence of additional funding from the UK Government, they are decisions that we were compelled to make in order to balance the books this financial year, while prioritising funding to help families, back business and protect the delivery of public services.

Paul O'Kane: The First Minister committed to the build back better approach for Scotland as we recover from Covid, but what has happened to that ambition? We need investment and support for

people whose lives have been fundamentally affected by the pandemic. The Office for National Statistics estimates that there are more than 170,000 people across Scotland who are living with long Covid, yet the support from the Scottish Government to date has been inadequate. The Scottish Government committed £3 million in funding when the number of Scots with long Covid was estimated to be 70,000 people. Even that has not yet been fully allocated. Funding has not increased—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Could I have a question, please?

Paul O’Kane: Will the Deputy First Minister commit to working across Government to protect funding for long Covid sufferers in Scotland to help their recovery with access to physiotherapy and multidisciplinary rehab?

John Swinney: I sympathise very much with the point that Mr O’Kane makes about the importance of ensuring that people with long Covid are able to access the support that they require to assist them in their recovery. In some cases, that will involve clinical support; in other cases, it might involve additional assistance that individuals might require to assist them on their journey into employability. I assure Mr O’Kane that the Government is working across portfolios to ensure that we put in place the support that is necessary to assist individuals in their recovery.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The Scottish Government established a £25 million ventilation fund that businesses can apply to for support. I think that, the last time I checked, just £1 million had been paid out from that fund. Is that the case? Is that fund still available? If not, has that money been reallocated, and, if so, where to?

John Swinney: To my recollection, the figures that Mr Fraser quotes for the funding that was available are correct. If that funding has not been utilised, it will be made available to meet other budget pressures within the Government. Mr Fraser is familiar with the fact that I am wrestling with the challenge of balancing the budget, so any resources that are not needed for the purposes for which they are allocated are being drawn into the centre so that I can meet funding pressures across the Government.

It is impossible to give Mr Fraser a link between the individual money that was allocated for one fund and the other purposes for which it is being used in the Government—Mr Fraser knows the way in which Government funding works—but I remind Parliament that I am still working to balance the budget this year, because of the significant and corrosive effects of inflation, and because of the public sector pay deals. Parliament

was well informed of the challenges that I face by the Auditor General’s statement that was issued last Thursday, which gave a fair and accurate account of the significant challenges that I face in this financial year.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 5 was not lodged.

Institutionalising Participatory and Deliberative Democracy Working Group (Recommendations)

6. Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what progress it has made on implementing the recommendations of the institutionalising participatory and deliberative democracy working group published in March. (S6O-01578)

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (George Adam): In the most recent programme for government, we committed to publishing a response to the report of our working group on institutionalising participatory and deliberative democracy. That will set out how we can involve people and communities, government and children and young people in democratic decision making. We are in the process of carefully considering that further, assessing the new activities and skills that would make it a success, and taking account of the resource demands that that would create.

Alex Rowley: I read the report, and the question is, what happens next? People need to know that.

The minister mentioned the recent programme for government, but the 2021 programme for government stated:

“We are committed to reforming Council Tax to make it fairer, working with the Scottish Green Party and COSLA to oversee the development of effective deliberative engagement on sources of local government funding, including Council Tax, that will culminate in a Citizens’ Assembly.”

There are controversial issues around drugs policy, the raising of extra funds and a lot of other things that a citizens assembly would certainly be able to grapple with in a way that would bring forward the views of people and communities. When are we likely to see some announcements on the issue?

George Adam: I should cut to the chase and say to Mr Rowley that we are probably going to write a response to the IPPD working group’s report before the end of this year. For all of us, that will be the start of our opportunity to consider the issue and move things forward.

As always, I am happy to work with Mr Rowley and meet him to discuss many of the issues, but I can say that the Government is committed to

finding a way to move forward with council tax. We have various other options and participatory groups that are available for people to engage with. It might be a good idea for Mr Rowley and me to have an offline meeting in which we can discuss these issues further.

Covid Recovery Strategy (Impact of Recession)

7. Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government, in light of recently reported warnings by the Bank of England that the United Kingdom is about to enter the longest recession since the 1930s, what assessment it has made of the impact that this could have on its Covid recovery strategy. (S6O-01579)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney): The current economic landscape presents us with significant challenges. The approach of the United Kingdom Government in cutting public spending risks prolonging that recession, hampering efforts to restore the public finances. There are alternatives to austerity that invest in public services and the economy, including inflationary increases to devolved Governments' 2022-23 budgets.

It is, unfortunately, inevitable that some of the savings that we need to make will have negative impacts. There are no easy decisions, but we have prioritised help for those who need it most. The Scottish Government remains committed to delivering the actions that are set out in our Covid recovery strategy, and our internal monitoring indicates that the majority of the strategy actions remain complete or on track.

Gordon MacDonald: There is no doubt that the war in Ukraine is having a significant impact on economies across the world. However, yesterday, we saw the renewed warnings from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development that, next year, as a result of the Tory Government's disastrous Brexit and shambolic economic policies, the United Kingdom will be the second worst performer of the world's largest economies. [*Interruption.*] Does the Deputy First Minister share my concern that, while the economies of countries such as Ireland will grow next year, Scotland can only look on powerless as the UK continues its decline, which has been accelerated by Brexit, making it more difficult to recover from the pandemic?

John Swinney: I am not quite sure why Mr MacDonald's question, which is based on the substantive analysis of the OECD, was met with groans from the Conservative benches, because now, in the United Kingdom, we are wrestling with the economic consequences of Brexit, which was

inflicted on us against our will by the Conservative Government. In September, that was added to by the folly of the mini-budget, which was entirely of Conservative design and will cause significant negative impact for many years to come. In addition, the political inertia of the United Kingdom Government since the revelation of partygate in December last year has resulted in there being no effective functioning domestic government in the UK over that period, and the inflationary pressures that arose from energy cost rises were not interrupted over the course of this summer. Therefore, we are dealing with very acute economic difficulties as a consequence of decisions that have been voluntarily taken by the Conservative Government. The implications are significant.

I will do all that I can to protect people from the effects of the Conservatives' folly, but I cannot protect people from every aspect of the damage that has been done by the United Kingdom Government.

Covid Recovery Strategy (Impact of Inflation)

8. Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the impact that the increase in inflation will have on Scotland's public services, as many are still dealing with the impact of the pandemic. (S6O-01580)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney): The current financial year's budget has been significantly diminished by the corrosive effects of inflation. At the same time, demand for Government support and intervention is, understandably, increasing, and we have not received additional funding to compensate for the reduced buying power of that funding. The emergency budget review aimed to support those who need most help, while also managing the nation's budget, which meant taking difficult decisions to further prioritise spending and find savings.

The Covid recovery strategy, which has been agreed with local government, focuses on reducing systemic inequalities, tackling poverty and supporting the people who have been most affected during the pandemic. Despite the challenges that I have outlined, we remain committed to the strategy and the achievement of its outcomes.

Emma Roddick: From our national health service and social care sector to our local authority colleagues, people who come to live in Scotland are a huge asset and should be welcomed with open arms. However, Labour and the Tories are in absolute lockstep with each other, as they continue to ignore Scotland's needs on every

serious challenge that faces us right now. What powers would the Scottish Government need in order to ensure an open, welcoming system of migration that supports our public sector to deliver on the Covid recovery strategy?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Deputy First Minister, perhaps we could focus on the impact of the increase in inflation with regard to those matters.

John Swinney: I will certainly do that, Presiding Officer, because the effects of inflation are undermining the purchasing power of our economy. As a consequence of that, and as a consequence of the issues that Emma Roddick raised about the migration stance of the United Kingdom Government, there is acute pressure on the availability of individuals to enter the labour market. We have historically low unemployment and historically high employment in the Scottish labour market now. That is creating acute labour shortages and acute inflationary pressures as a consequence.

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): Is that causing inflation?

John Swinney: For Mr Lumsden's benefit, that is causing acute inflationary pressures and, if Mr Lumsden wants to ask me a supplementary question, I will go into a lot of detail about the inflationary pressures that arise from migration challenges, because all of the available evidence highlights that particular point.

The Scottish Government, through the work of our ministerial population task force, tries to develop concepts such as the rural visa pilot proposal, which is designed to address some of the questions that Emma Roddick has raised with me, but we need a fuller range of responsibilities to enable us to address the negative effects of the migration stance of the UK Government.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions on Covid-19 recovery and parliamentary business.

Finance and the Economy

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next portfolio is finance and the economy. If any member wishes to ask a supplementary question, they should press their request-to-speak button or enter "RTS" in the chat function during the relevant question. Again, I make a plea for succinct questions and answers.

Orkney Islands Council (Scottish Budget)

1. **Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with Orkney Islands Council regarding the Scottish budget 2022-23. (S6O-01581)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney):

The Scottish Government continues to meet the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and individual local authorities on a regular basis to cover a range of topics, including current and future budget pressures.

I was pleased to meet Councillor Stockan on 31 August during my visit to South Uist, which observers will note is not in Orkney, but it was on the occasion of a meeting with three island authority leaders, which took place on South Uist. I responded to Councillor Stockan's most recent letter on 21 November, confirming that we will make arrangements to meet again at the earliest opportunity.

Liam McArthur: I thank Mr Swinney, and I confirm that we islanders are known to travel to different islands from time to time.

This week, Orkney Islands Council warned that the precarious state of the internal ferry fleet is risking "life and limb", with the vulnerability of vessels having been exacerbated by recent repairs to ancient hulls and the grounding of the MV Varagen earlier this month.

I understand that Mr Swinney will meet Councillor Stockan shortly to discuss those concerns in the context of OIC's forthcoming budget settlement. Does he accept that ferry replacement is now a matter of public safety? If so, what assurances can he offer my constituents that the Scottish Government is taking the matter seriously and is committed to finding an urgent resolution to this long-running saga?

John Swinney: In relation to the recent grounding of the MV Varagen, I was pleased that everyone was safe after what was a worrying incident.

Councillor Stockan has raised the issue of the strength of the interisland ferry fleet, which I appreciate causes significant concern to Orkney Islands Council and to islanders. Islanders rely on regular services in that respect, and we must make sure that those are operational and safe. That will be one of the points that Councillor Stockan and I will discuss, and I am aware that Councillor Stockan has also discussed the issue with the transport minister, Jenny Gilruth. I assure Mr McArthur that the Government is engaging constructively on the importance of renewing the ferry fleet to serve all our island communities.

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Presiding Officer, I apologise that I will have to leave before the end of this session to meet another commitment, as advised.

The cabinet secretary will be aware that the road equivalent tariff was delivered on ferry routes

in the northern isles by the middle of 2018; however, during the intervening four and a half years, while Shetland has benefited from those arrangements, Orkney has been left behind. That is a failure to deliver on its pledge that will have saved the Scottish Government considerable sums of money.

Will the cabinet secretary confirm how much money the Scottish Government is estimated to have saved by not delivering RET as promised, and how will he ensure that the money will be reallocated in the budget to allow it to be used for the economic benefit of Orkney?

John Swinney: What Mr Halcro Johnston misses out is the fact that the Government has substantially increased investment in ferry services in Scotland. When the ferries plan was developed in 2012, if my memory serve me right, the budget was a bit over £100 million, and it is now well over £300 million. Substantial investment has been made in ferry services and in road equivalent tariff. The Government works constructively with individual island authorities to maximise their economic potential, which will continue to be the case with Orkney Islands Council.

Construction Apprentices and Workers

2. Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions finance ministers have had with the Minister for Higher Education and Further Education, Youth Employment and Training to assess the number of construction apprentices and construction workers needed to support the recovery of Scotland's economy and meet its net zero targets. (S6O-01582)

The Minister for Just Transition, Employment and Fair Work (Richard Lochhead): The Minister for Higher Education, Further Education, Youth Employment and Training and I share the commitment to ensure that our current and future workforce has the skills needed to support the transition to net zero.

The construction sector will need more than 25,000 additional workers by 2026, including workers with skills to support heat decarbonisation and offshore energy projects. The Scottish Government recognises that apprenticeship pathways are key to that and we are working with the skills agencies to increase the number of apprentices back to pre-pandemic levels.

Monica Lennon: I welcome the minister's commitment. I asked about discussions with other ministerial colleagues. The minister might be aware that, last week, in my capacity as the convener of the cross-party group on construction, along with a number of industry stakeholders,

including Unite the union, I met Jamie Hepburn to discuss the serious issues that are affecting construction crafts apprenticeships. The meeting was fairly positive, and we hope that a solution is in sight. However, there is a serious backlog, which is affecting around 1,700 apprentices and impacting on employers and colleges. We need a resolution, and we need to learn lessons.

Will the minister assure me that discussions are going on behind the scenes in Government? Might we get a statement from Government to Parliament by the end of the year to make sure that everyone who is waiting for good news receives it?

Richard Lochhead: I will certainly convey the member's request for a ministerial statement to the skills minister. I know that productive discussions were had, as the member mentioned, in the past week or so.

To assure the member and, indeed, Parliament, I note that, as the member might be aware, the climate emergency skills action plan is being refreshed and will be published in 2023. In addition, discussions are taking place across portfolios with the green skills minister, Lorna Slater, Jamie Hepburn and me, in my role as just transition minister. Talks are planned for the coming weeks, to make sure that the required skills are available.

Yesterday, I was in Aberdeen, visiting North East Scotland College to discuss how it is using £4.5 million that it secured from the just transition fund for north-east Scotland to build a facility to ensure that apprentices are trained up as welders for offshore platforms, electricians for installing electric vehicle charging points and so on.

A lot of activities are taking place across the country and I assure the member that we are co-ordinating them as much as we can.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): We have been waiting for five years for the skills landscape reform, and the minister acted only after Audit Scotland criticised his lack of leadership in that area. The coherence and stability review for the college sector has largely been delayed, which happened in the middle of a crisis in the college sector. What chance do we have of increasing the number of construction apprentices and workers if there is a delay to reforming the skills agenda?

Richard Lochhead: As the economy will transform over the next 10 years to help us get towards our net zero targets, it is clear that we must keep our skills landscape under review, given the 21st-century challenges that we face. James Withers has been appointed to carry out the review.

This Government has an excellent track record of delivering apprenticeships over the past few years. Of course, there has been a bit of a blip, because of the impact of Covid. We are now making up for lost ground. Skills Development Scotland has been instructed to deliver 25,000 apprenticeships from the start of this financial year and then to build back up to 30,000 a year in due course.

Net Zero (Economic Benefit to Scotland)

3. Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the potential economic benefit to Scotland of moving to a low-carbon economy and achieving net zero. (S6O-01583)

The Minister for Just Transition, Employment and Fair Work (Richard Lochhead): There are benefits and many opportunities arising from our transition to net zero, not least in the key energy transition sectors such as renewables and green hydrogen, but also more broadly across the whole economy, as we reduce emissions from transport, industry and our homes and as we build our natural capital resources.

The opportunities are set out in our national strategy for economic transformation and our hydrogen action plan. Those will be further developed as we bring forward our energy strategy refresh, which includes a just transition plan for energy, in the coming weeks, as well as our new climate change plan and our other just transition plans in the coming years.

Brian Whittle: The minister might be aware that NatWest has estimated that moving to net zero could be worth £22 billion to the Scottish economy. However, it warns that Scotland must increase that support to develop services in the supply chain and small and medium-sized businesses by a factor greater than two, which is much more than that required by the rest of the United Kingdom.

According to the NatWest report, we are behind the rest of the UK. What is the Scottish Government doing to support the development of our SME sector to ensure that the opportunities for our supply chain and the support services that are needed to achieve net zero remain here, in Scotland?

Richard Lochhead: I am sure that the member will want to welcome the report that came out last week presenting independent research by Skills Development Scotland, the University of Warwick and the University of Strathclyde, which said that there are now up to 100,000 green jobs in Scotland. Although that is an upper estimate and it is still being researched, it is a very good

indication that the green jobs revolution has started in Scotland.

We are not behind the rest of the UK. Numerous reports from PricewaterhouseCoopers, and a Fraser of Allander Institute report called "International Scotland" that came out just last week, show that Scotland is making excellent progress on that agenda in comparison with the rest of the UK. I do not think that we should talk Scotland down in that regard.

I agree with the member, of course, that there is a lot more to be done. He will be aware of the supply chain work in relation to ScotWind and other projects that have the potential to deliver thousands more green jobs in Scotland.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): The emergency budget review cut £38 million from energy efficiency and £45 million from heat in buildings. Can the minister outline what impact that will have on the delivery of our net zero targets?

Richard Lochhead: The member will be aware, of course, that we face a very difficult budget environment because of inflation. Indeed, the acting finance secretary outlined some of the challenges in his answer to questions just a few moments ago.

However, we are making good progress. There is a lot of planning in the pipeline. The just transition plans for energy, in the first instance, will address some of those issues. Those plans will be published with consultations in the coming weeks, after which members of Parliament can submit their views over a 12-week period.

There are good, positive signs that we are making progress in terms of green jobs being created, with the potential for many more in the near future.

West Scotland and Greater Glasgow (Economic Investment)

4. Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on how it is investing to support the economy across the West Scotland and Greater Glasgow areas. (S6O-01584)

The Minister for Just Transition, Employment and Fair Work (Richard Lochhead): The Scottish Government is a full partner in the Glasgow city region city deal, contributing £500 million over 20 years to the infrastructure investment fund. The deal empowers Glasgow and its city region partners to identify, manage and deliver a programme of investment to stimulate economic growth and create jobs in their area.

Similarly, the Scottish Government is investing £103 million in the Ayrshire growth deal, which will see transformational investment in projects across Ayrshire over the next 10 years to support long-term inclusive growth there.

Pam Gosal: If Glasgow city region were to be awarded the Clyde green freeport, it would be a massive boost to the local economy in Glasgow and the wider region. It would provide high-quality jobs and investment opportunities, in addition to accelerating net zero ambitions.

Several Scottish Greens and a Scottish National Party member of the Scottish Parliament have supported motions urging the Parliament to oppose the Clyde green freeport bid and all other Scottish freeport bids. Will the minister state his support for the Clyde green freeport bid? Does he welcome that positive co-operation between the Scottish and United Kingdom Governments?

Richard Lochhead: Understandably, the member makes the case for her own region in terms of the green freeport bids. She will be aware that they are under consideration by the Scottish and UK Governments, and announcements will, I hope, be made in due course. There are a number of bids from across the country. The member has made her point well, and she will have to wait until the final announcements are made.

Natalie Don (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP): Will the Scottish Government provide an update on the advanced manufacturing innovation district Scotland site in my constituency, which will include two new world-class innovation centres—the national manufacturing institute Scotland and the medicines manufacturing innovation centre—and on the projected impact on the economy of the west of Scotland and the greater Glasgow area?

Richard Lochhead: Natalie Don has outlined many of the benefits of that work, and the Scottish Government is fully supportive of it. The advanced manufacturing innovation district Scotland site is part of the £39 million city deal that is funded by the Glasgow airport investment area project. Work is well under way to deliver on the ambitious innovation district project.

The impact of the Glasgow city region deal will be transformational for local communities in attracting investment. Building on that investment, as Natalie Don will be aware, the Glasgow city region deal has created a regional economic strategy to help shape the long-term, post-deal economic future of the region.

Rural Broadband (Investment)

5. Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government how it is investing in rural broadband. (S6O-01585)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call the minister, Tom Arthur.

Oh—I am wrong. I apologise. It is Richard Lochhead.

The Minister for Just Transition, Employment and Fair Work (Richard Lochhead): Yes—I am still Richard Lochhead.

Future-proofed digital connectivity is vital for our rural communities, and Scottish Government delivery programmes have already connected around 1 million properties across Scotland to faster broadband. We are investing more than £600 million through the R100—reaching 100 per cent—contracts, to extend full-fibre broadband access to some of the hardest-to-reach rural communities in Scotland. Our Scottish broadband voucher scheme also provides funding to connect those who are not part of our R100 contracts or of commercial build plans.

It is also imperative that we urge all the relevant United Kingdom Government departments to extend Gigabit Networks services to Scotland's rural communities, given that—of course—telecommunications is an entirely reserved matter.

Alexander Stewart: The Scottish National Party pledged to have the R100 scheme completed by 2021, but now, after the failure to meet that target, the new estimated date is 2026. I have a response to a freedom of information request that shows that the R100 scheme has cost £21 million since it should have been completed last year. That is an enormous cost to the taxpayer and shows that the SNP pledge for 2021 has not taken place. Does the minister agree that that failure will ruin rural communities' chances of ever getting the broadband connections that they deserve, just as the ferries fiasco did with transport connections?

Richard Lochhead: Maybe I should have asked Tom Arthur to answer this question.

If the member's Tory colleagues in the UK Government, who have exclusive competence for telecommunications, had acted a few years ago and got their act together, it would not have been down to the Scottish Government to step in with hundreds of millions of pounds of investment to make up for lost time.

The R100 project is game changing for many parts of rural Scotland. According to thinkbroadband, which the UK Government also uses to gauge the success of its programmes, 95.1 per cent of premises across Scotland are now able to access superfast broadband speeds of 30 megabits per second and above, which is up from just 59.3 per cent in 2014, when deployment began. That is superb progress. The investment by the Scottish Government is making a real

difference to rural communities in the south of Scotland and throughout the country.

Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): The disruption to EE's 4G mobile service, which my constituents in Uig have now been enduring for six weeks, has effectively cut off a huge geographic area from all broadband access and severely impacted on medical and other essential services. Given that, does the minister agree that EE's response has been truly woeful? Will he commit to facilitating a meeting in Uig between the R100 team and the community?

Richard Lochhead: That is clearly a very serious issue in Alasdair Allan's constituency. Although ensuring that 4G mobile connectivity is maintained is a reserved part of UK telecommunications legislation—which means that the Scottish Government does not have a mechanism to intervene directly in such matters—we will certainly consider the member's request and I will ensure that he is written to shortly.

Responsibility falls on Ofcom, as the UK's telecoms regulator. However, as with the recent telecoms outages that were suffered on Shetland and Coll, we urge operators to ensure that they rectify such issues as a matter of urgency.

For our part, we are investing £28.75 million in the Scottish 4G infill programme, which is delivering 4G mobile infrastructure and services throughout rural Scotland, including the Western Isles.

Land Value Tax (Discussions)

6. **Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the finance ministers have had with ministerial colleagues regarding any plans to investigate the feasibility of a land value tax. (S6O-01586)

The Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth (Tom Arthur): Although there have been no recent discussions on the feasibility of introducing a land value tax in Scotland, we will continue to look closely at the Scottish Land Commission's recommendations on land reform and taxation, review any evidence in detail and assess that as part of our wider approach to tax policy. As ever, we are open to exploring how the Scottish Government can support land reform objectives, using its limited powers over taxation to generate revenues to invest in our public services and support a sustainable and inclusive wellbeing economy.

Katy Clark: It is estimated that 432 people own 50 per cent of the privately held land in Scotland. In 2021, a record £447 million was invested in the purchase of private Scottish estates, which was a 333 per cent increase from 2018. Given that financial backdrop, does the Government accept

that it is now essential that we introduce a land value tax as a matter of urgency?

Tom Arthur: As I said in my original answer, we are considering recommendations carefully. Clearly, the introduction of a new tax is a substantial matter. Although the Parliament enjoys powers to introduce local taxes, new devolved national taxes require the agreement of the United Kingdom Government and the Westminster Parliament. We are considering the details carefully; if we take forward any measures, we will do so in a way that is consistent with our framework for tax.

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): It is clear from stakeholders and constituents that high land prices can impede regeneration efforts and hinder attempts to assemble land for community-led development. That is why the Bute house agreement commits to delivering an effective and fair mechanism for capturing for public benefit a share of the increase in land value when a development is supported through the planning system. What benefits does the minister see coming from that commitment? Will he give an update on progress in that regard?

Tom Arthur: We have, of course, been focused on preparation and delivery of our revised national planning framework 4, and I very much look forward to appearing before the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee next week to give evidence on it.

As we move into the new year and when, I hope, Parliament approves and adopts the new national planning framework, we will turn our attention in earnest to delivery of the framework. That work will encapsulate a range of actions, including continued roll-out and implementation of the provisions in the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019, our on-going review of planning obligations and taking forward the Scottish Government's and the Scottish Green Party's commitment on the matters that the member raised.

Autumn Budget Statement (Impact on Scotland's Finances)

7. **Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment has been made of the impact that the United Kingdom Government's autumn statement will have on Scotland's public finances. (S6O-01587)

The Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth (Tom Arthur): The autumn statement has shown that households across Scotland are paying a steep price for the economic mismanagement of the UK Government, with the Office for Budget Responsibility warning that average household disposable income will drop by 7.1 per cent next year.

Inflation is eating away at the Scottish budget, which has fallen by 10 per cent in real terms between last year and this year. Due to the lack of additional funding in 2022-23 and the fiscal constraints of devolution, we have had no choice but to have already made unplanned savings of more than £1 billion. The corrosive impact of inflation and the turmoil that has been caused by the UK Government's economic choices mean that the Scottish Government is facing very difficult choices on public spending over the next few years.

Jenni Minto: Earlier this month, the Bank of England warned that the UK might be facing the longest recession in a century. Does the minister share my concern that the UK Government's plans to cut public spending risk prolonging the recession? Will he advise what alternative priorities could be pursued if the Scottish Parliament had full financial powers?

Tom Arthur: I share Jenni Minto's concern. The Office for Budget Responsibility has painted a grim picture, with the UK economy now forecast to be no bigger at the end of the current UK parliamentary term than it was at its start. That means that there will have been five years of economic stagnation. That, combined with yesterday's forecast from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, which is predicting that the UK economy will be the worst hit of all G7 nations, is a devastating indictment of the UK Government's management of the economy.

We have made no secret of our frustration about the limitations that are imposed on us by the current fiscal framework. Our reserve funding is capped, our tax powers are limited and we have no legal ability to borrow to fund day-to-day spending. Not one of the three main Westminster parties supports giving the Scottish Parliament the fiscal flexibilities that it requires. Consequently, the only means by which we can assume those financial powers, which are so necessary, is by the Scottish Parliament assuming the powers of an independent country.

Privatisation of Public Assets

8. Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what assets currently in public ownership it plans to privatise. (S6O-01588)

The Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth (Tom Arthur): The Scottish Government works on a case-by-case basis to secure the best outcomes for assets in public ownership. The Parliament would be notified of any future agreement to return a commercial asset to the private sector.

Richard Leonard: Three weeks ago, the First Minister told the Public Audit Committee that

"the Government's position is that, ultimately, we want all the commercial assets that we have taken ownership of to be back in the private sector".—[*Official Report, Public Audit Committee*, 4 November 2022; c 42.]

I ask again, in the interest of openness and democracy: will the minister tell Parliament this afternoon what assets the Scottish Government wants to privatise?

Tom Arthur: I can only refer the member to my previous answer, which was that we work case by case to secure the best outcomes for assets in public ownership, and that Parliament would be notified. It is thanks to the Government's intervention that many jobs have been saved, and the contributions that the relevant industries are making to the economy are being made only because of the actions of the Government.

Siobhian Brown (Ayr) (SNP): Ferguson Marine (Port Glasgow) Limited is clearly not without its challenges, but, by stepping in the Scottish National Party Government saved Scottish shipbuilding on the Clyde and hundreds of jobs that went with it. We now also see that Glasgow Prestwick Airport Limited is turning a welcome profit. Does the minister agree that moving assets and businesses into public ownership when they are failing in the private sector can and does work?

Tom Arthur: I agree. We have shown how we can, through our strategic investments, realise benefits to communities and businesses. Taking businesses into public ownership is a complex issue and in each case we work to understand the legal, financial and policy implications. I am delighted that Prestwick airport continues to grow steadily and is making a positive contribution to the local and regional economies as it supports 300 direct jobs and many more indirect jobs.

Through our intervention at Ferguson Marine, we have shown that we are standing by our commitment to the shipbuilding communities in Inverclyde, where we have rescued more than 300 jobs and supported our island communities that rely on the vessels.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions on finance and the economy. Before we move to the next item of business, there will be a short pause to allow front-bench teams to change positions, should they wish to do so.

Primary Care

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-06899, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on protecting primary care. I invite members who wish to participate in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons, or to place “RTS” in the chat function if they are joining us online, as soon as possible.

15:08

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): For most people across Scotland, the first point of call when it comes to their health is their general practitioner. GPs are very much at the front line of our national health service. Without functioning GP services, our health system would collapse.

In some areas of Scotland, however, GPs are closing their doors and handing back their contracts, and thousands of patients are being left without a GP. In other areas, lists are closed to new patients, and practices are simply unable to cope with the volume of patients that they have and to fill vacancies as GPs retire. I have letters from GPs in Lothian and Aberdeenshire and from a medical practice in Falkirk that is struggling to survive.

The Scottish Government must act to address the looming crisis in primary care, or more patients will struggle to get the help that they need. I will illustrate that point with some of the facts. GPs are seeing 500,000 people a week, which is a lot more than they were seeing before the pandemic. Most of them are working additional hours to try to meet the demand, and many can provide emergency appointments only due to short staffing as a result of vacancies or illness.

In a recent British Medical Association survey, 81 per cent of GP practices said that demand exceeded capacity, 34 per cent reported GP vacancies, and practices estimated that they are about 1,000 GPs short at present. The Royal College of General Practitioners says that there will be a need for even more GPs by 2027. Despite that, there is a lack of clarity about GP numbers. The Government bases its numbers on head count, but the truth is that many GPs work part time, and the flagship target of 800 GPs is well short of what is actually required. I ask the cabinet secretary to outline the urgent action that he intends to take to improve practice staffing and to say whether he will be transparent about GP numbers.

The SNP makes claims about the increase in multidisciplinary teams, but they are contradicted by GPs. Despite the recruitment activity, the Royal College of Nursing reports that 12 per cent of

district nurse posts are unfilled. When we consider the numbers of allied health professionals, we see that there are 346 physiotherapy vacancies.

Faced with those challenges, it is extraordinary that the SNP has cut the health and social care budget by £400 million. Some £65 million has been cut from the primary care development fund alone, and £5 million has been cut from the GP sustainability fund. Our tone deaf health minister, Humza Yousaf, announced that at the same time as he is telling people to stay away from accident and emergency departments and to go to their GP instead.

That is just about the most wrong-headed decision that I have seen: cutting resources for GPs when they most need them, during a winter crisis. It represents breathtaking incompetence on the part of this SNP health minister. GPs are on their knees, and if the Scottish Government fails to address their serious concerns, more people will end up in already overwhelmed acute services when they could have been dealt with locally in primary care.

I urge the cabinet secretary to reverse the cuts and listen to the British Medical Association and the Royal College of General Practitioners. They are telling him that there is a crisis, so I say to him, “For goodness’ sake, please act.” Perhaps he could use for that purpose the £20 million that has been earmarked for a referendum. It never fails to astonish me that, when the nation is focused on a crisis such as the one that our NHS faces this winter, the SNP is focused on the constitution.

At the start of the week, there were extraordinary revelations that senior NHS executives were discussing the privatisation of our NHS. The discussion was green lit by Caroline Lamb, the most senior civil servant in charge of health for the SNP Government. Either the cabinet secretary knew about that and is complicit or he did not know about it, in which case he really cannot be trusted to be in charge. Either way, we can usually judge how close to the mark we are by the volume of abuse and aggression from SNP members and supporters, not just on social media but in the chamber.

This is a damaging story for the SNP, because it tells us that the NHS is not safe in SNP hands. Inside or outside the United Kingdom, the SNP—

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Jackie Baillie: I will not. The member should listen to this.

Inside or outside the UK, the SNP would contemplate a two-tier NHS where those who can afford to pay would get faster and better treatment and those who are not wealthy would receive a

poorer service from a residualised NHS. However, the SNP is already presiding over a two-tier system. More and more people are paying for private consultations, diagnostics and operations. Those are some of the 700,000 people on waiting lists—the one in seven Scots who are being failed by the SNP and by Humza Yousaf.

Gillian Martin: Will the member take an intervention?

Jackie Baillie: The minutes of the discussion are also interesting as they confirm something that we already know—that the cabinet secretary does not listen. He does not listen to clinicians or to civil servants. He is paralysed and he does not make decisions. People across the NHS have lost confidence in him.

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Jackie Baillie: As for the £1 billion black hole in the NHS budget, we should look no further than Nicola Sturgeon. When she was the health minister, she failed to pass on funding from the Labour UK Government to the health budget.

I will finish with two quotations. The first is from the *Scotsman* leader yesterday, which said:

“Whether or not this was part of a brainstorming exercise, it is deeply concerning that it has come to this.”

That is right. Secondly, Neil Mackay wrote in *The Herald*:

“If the NHS is a benchmark, then the SNP is unfit for government.”

Those are damning words indeed. This cabinet secretary is unfit for office, the SNP is unfit for Government, and Humza Yousaf should do the right thing and resign.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the recent warnings by BMA Scotland about the pressures on general practice, with 81% of practices surveyed reporting that demand was exceeding capacity and it estimating that an extra 1,000 whole time equivalent (WTE) GPs are needed now; understands that not all practices have access to full multi-disciplinary teams, limiting GPs’ ability to focus on the patients that need them most, and therefore regrets the Scottish Government’s decision to cut £65 million from primary care services and £5 million from the Sustainability Payment to practices; considers that this diminishes the ability of GPs to respond to winter pressures and will exacerbate the crisis in primary care, with serious consequences for staff and patients and the wider NHS this winter; is alarmed by reports that NHS board chief executives are considering the implementation of a two-tier system of access within the NHS, and considers this to be privatisation through the back door; remains committed to the founding principle of the NHS of being freely available at the point of need; calls on the Scottish Government to reconsider the cuts to primary care and to give an urgent update on where the 800 additional GPs it pledged in 2017 will be located, and regrets that the Scottish National Party administration is considering the

privatisation of the NHS in Scotland.

15:14

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Humza Yousaf): Does it not show insecurity in her own argument that Jackie Baillie was not able to take a single intervention? This is meant to be a debate, but Jackie Baillie—

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Humza Yousaf: At 14 seconds into my speech, I am happy to give way to Daniel Johnson.

Daniel Johnson: If the cabinet secretary is so keen on interventions, will he answer this question? Did he know about the meeting and agree to it or did it happen without his consent?

Humza Yousaf: It was a meeting of five people with one chief executive present. Believe it or not, with the more than 160,000 healthcare workers that we have, I do not know about every meeting that takes place. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Johnson.

Humza Yousaf: When I have met chief executives and the chairs of health boards, not one of them has ever floated the idea of charging patients. If they did that, I would, to be frank, tell them that that is not up for discussion under this Government.

I say to Jackie Baillie and Scottish Labour, who have brought to the chamber this serious debate on a serious issue—which was not given any serious consideration by Jackie Baillie in a speech that was, to be frank, ludicrous—that we should start by thanking all our primary care teams: not just our general practitioners, those who work in reception and our multidisciplinary staff, but primary care staff across the piece. I thank every one of them.

On Jackie Baillie’s concerns about the founding principles of the NHS and thanking our healthcare workforce, I give a categorical assurance that our Scottish NHS will never be sold off into private hands under this Administration.

The Government holds true to the founding principles of the NHS and Nye Bevan’s vision of patient care that is free at the point of need. We should be judged on our track record on that, which is, of course, one of abolishing prescription charges, removing dental charges for young people and continuing to fund free eye tests. Let us have it recorded that this Government will keep the NHS in Scotland publicly owned, publicly operated and free at the point of use.

Jackie Baillie decries the Government having to reprofile health spending to combat sky-high

inflation due to Conservative mismanagement of the economy or to afford record high pay deals. There is one place that I would love to be able to save money: in the £250 million that Scottish people are still paying for Labour's disastrous private finance initiative and public-private partnership projects to build hospitals in Scotland. Jackie Baillie was only ever trusted in government for the briefest of periods, but she should take the opportunity to apologise to every person in Scotland that they are still paying the price for Labour's privatisation of our NHS.

Our general practice and primary care services have been impacted by Brexit, the pandemic and the cost of living crisis, but we will continue to invest in our multidisciplinary teams. Jackie Baillie seemed to talk them down, but 3,220 multidisciplinary staff and professionals have been recruited since 2018. Therefore, when people walk into their general practice, not only are they likely to be able to see general practitioners who do a phenomenal job, but they may well be able to see physiotherapists, advanced nurse practitioners and a multitude of multidisciplinary staff across the piece. Those individuals are there not only to give the best possible service to the public that they see, but to ensure that the incredible workload in general practices is spread more evenly.

Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab): I have previously raised with the cabinet secretary my constituents' concerns about the declining quality of patient care at some general practices in Aberdeen. He has given a commitment that his officials will determine improvement plans for practices to put in place, but I am yet to receive an update from him. I seek confirmation that that will be forthcoming.

Humza Yousaf: I will give that update. Mercedes Villalba is absolutely right. She has raised the issue with me on several occasions. It is, of course, an issue for the local health and social care partnership, but I will endeavour to get her an update.

Several initiatives are under way to address GP recruitment challenges. We have recruited 277 GPs as part of the target of 800, and figures will be published soon that will provide an update to that. There is no single silver bullet when it comes to GP recruitment and retention, and a number of interventions are under way. I make no apology whatsoever for doing what I can to ensure that timely access to GP services for patients up and down the country is a top priority for this Government.

I move amendment S6M-06899.2, to leave out from "notes" to end and insert:

"recognises the pressures on primary care and right across the NHS and social care due to the effects of Brexit, the global pandemic and the cost of living crisis; notes that

the overriding priority for the delivery of healthcare must be to deliver the best outcomes for patients; supports the actions of the Scottish Government to abolish prescription charges and recognises that, under the current administration, they will remain free for all; believes that prescription charges are a tax on illness and that healthcare must be based on the clinical needs of patients and not their ability to pay; recognises that primary care provision extends beyond the work of general practice and welcomes that free eye care tests continue to be protected, that dental charges have been abolished for young people, and that, through NHS Pharmacy First, more first-line care is being provided for free through community pharmacies; recognises, in general practice, that Scotland currently has a record high level of GPs and that Scotland has proportionately more GPs than any other nation in the UK; welcomes that efforts to recruit 800 additional GPs by 2027 are on track, with 277 already in post by 2021; understands that, to support GP practices, over 3,220 multidisciplinary healthcare professionals have been recruited since 2018; acknowledges that primary care funding has increased again in the current financial year and understands that integration joint board reserves provided for primary care are to be utilised for primary care; recalls that it was the current administration that took the legislative steps necessary to stop the privatisation and commercialisation of GP services that was permitted by the previous Labour-led administration; further recalls that it was the current administration that brought Stracathro back into the NHS after its work was put into private hands by the previous Labour-led administration, and shares the Scottish Government's unswerving commitment to the founding principles of the NHS to be publicly owned, publicly operated and free at the point of need."

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There is a little time in hand, so I can give members a bit of time back for taking interventions. I would far prefer that to people shouting from a sedentary position.

15:20

Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): Jackie Baillie's debate today is timely, because this week we learned about damning minutes of meetings of senior management of Scotland's health boards, which, ultimately, are under the control of the Scottish Government's health secretary. The minutes tell us that the health secretary's NHS bosses have been weighing up charging wealthier patients to access NHS services.

After 500 days of failure in charge of Scotland's NHS, that is a new low. The cabinet secretary is on record as saying that he would never consider charging anyone to use the NHS and that he finds the idea "abhorrent". I wonder whether he also finds his record in office abhorrent. Here is a snapshot: the worst cancer waiting times on record—

Humza Yousaf: It is better than England.

Sandesh Gulhane: —and the worst delayed discharge record, with an average of 1,832 beds occupied each day due to delayed discharge. I heard the cabinet secretary say "better than

England” from a sedentary position—we live in Scotland.

We have the worst NHS backlogs. Almost 700,000 patients are waiting for NHS treatment, according to the latest figures. That is the highest number since those stats were recorded in their current form.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): Sandesh Gulhane said that “we live in Scotland.” Yes, we live in Scotland, but the Tories are presiding over the English NHS. Is it not right that we criticise your policies in England, where you are privatising by stealth, day in and day out? People will not want you in government in Scotland, because you will do the same here.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Through the chair, please, Ms Martin.

Sandesh Gulhane: The first thing to say is that you should be representing your constituents—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Through the chair, Dr Gulhane.

Sandesh Gulhane: The member should be representing her constituents here.

The second thing to say is that we cannot trust SNP statistics, as we have found when it comes to energy, because the SNP does not make a proper comparison with England. If we look at the stats, it is clear that the SNP stats are false.

Let us be clear. The situation is not in any way the fault of hard-working front-line NHS staff. Perhaps the cabinet secretary, instead of offering platitudes, should fund us properly.

Such is the seriousness of this week’s revelations that the First Minister weighed in to say emphatically that the founding principles of the NHS are not up for discussion. Well, they are being discussed on the SNP’s watch. What else could be being discussed?

Humza Yousaf: Will Sandesh Gulhane take an intervention?

Sandesh Gulhane: Yes, if I can get the time back.

Humza Yousaf: I wonder whether Sandesh Gulhane will recognise and apologise for his party’s economic mismanagement, which has meant that my health budget is worth £650 million less? If he thinks that there are other places where we should reprofile the health and social care budget, he should name them. At the very least, he should stand up and apologise for his party’s economic mismanagement.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can give you up to five minutes, Dr Gulhane.

Sandesh Gulhane: First, when errors were made by Liz Truss and Kwasi Kwarteng, they resigned, unlike SNP ministers, who never take responsibility for anything. Secondly, I am not sure whether the health secretary looks around the world and sees that inflation is a global issue. Finally on the question that the cabinet secretary asked—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary!

Sandesh Gulhane: The cabinet secretary should listen to his own questions. He is spending £1.5 billion on setting up a bureaucratic national care service. There we go—I have found his money.

We hear that senior management are concerned about a disconnect between political decision makers and clinicians. They speak of siloed conversations behind the Government’s closed doors, without the chief medical officer and chief nursing officer. The language is stark: senior management appear to have little confidence and little trust in this health secretary and think that his input and suggestions are

“divorced from reality of life and purpose of service.”

Members should let that sink in.

Primary care is the backbone of our health service and the NHS is at breaking point. There are increasing, unsustainable demands, there is limited capacity, and GPs are experiencing burnout and demoralisation. More and more doctors are at the end of their tether and are choosing to leave the profession.

Last year, the Scottish Government pledged a £30 million sustainability support package, but we instead saw a cut of £5 million to this year’s budget. Instead of grandstanding and talking about money that it does not have, or using money on its pet projects, the Scottish Government should fund the NHS properly.

Let me reiterate: every additional day that the cabinet secretary remains in office makes him and the SNP-Green Government that he serves even further divorced from reality. The SNP cannot be trusted on health. NHS staff and patients do not trust this cabinet secretary, and it seems that neither do senior NHS managers—he should do the right thing and step down.

I refer members to my entry in the register of members’ interests, as I am a practising NHS doctor.

I move amendment S6M-06899.1, to insert at end:

“, and finds it extremely concerning that there are siloed conversations within the Scottish Government occurring without the Chief Medical Officer or Chief Nursing Officer,

and that there is a lack of clinical input into political decision-making, leading to Scottish Government announcements being divorced from the reality of life and purpose of the service.”

15:25

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): Presiding Officer, if you will permit me, I would like, as many of the contributions that we have heard so far have done, to focus my remarks on the crisis that general practitioners currently face. I was recently contacted by a group of GPs who work at a practice in my constituency, and I know that others have had similar approaches. One told me:

“Things in primary care are bleak. Everyone is simply exhausted, and working harder is not possible.”

Last month, that same practice received a letter from the SNP-Green Administration confirming a cut of £5 million in promised funding to Scottish GPs in this financial year. The Government has blamed that broken commitment on budget pressures that have been caused by inflation. That is also a slap in the face to our GP practices, as it completely ignores the fact that those practices are under the same inflationary pressures—they are getting it from both sides.

It is also another grim case of the Government playing games when it comes to announcing funding. The new figure was announced as part of the winter resilience package, giving the appearance that it was somehow new funding, when it is plainly a funding cut. This week, we saw the first frosts of winter, and cuts at this juncture will have a direct negative impact on practices’ ability to meet the inevitable increase in demand that the cold weather will present. Those cuts will make it even harder for heroic healthcare staff to provide the timely high-quality care that they desperately want to provide.

There has long been a workforce crisis in general practice, with a lack of GPs, practice nurses and other clinical staff, and, as we have already heard, 81 per cent of practices have reported that demand is exceeding capacity, with 1,000 GPs needed to plug the gap. In 2017, the SNP promised to increase the number of GPs in Scotland by at least 800 over the next decade, but five years on, the improvement in numbers has been glacial. GPs are forced to pay the price for yet more ministerial disinterest in that regard.

Levels of burnout are among the highest in the health service, and Lib Dem research has found that almost every GP who is leaving the profession is retiring before their planned retirement date. Many others are leaving for other reasons at a time that we need them most, and who can blame them?

Our health service is being overwhelmed. No matter how many times the cabinet secretary denies it, SNP mismanagement set us on this course long before anyone had heard the word “Covid”. I mention again that Paul Gray, the former head of NHS Scotland, said that this crisis was inevitable and that Covid only hastened its arrival. The SNP and the cabinet secretary need to cut out the excuses, stop abdicating responsibility and get on with the day job. It is a damning verdict on the SNP’s handling of the NHS that senior health bosses have been discussing extreme proposals such as charging for treatment. It is clear that they are alarmed at just how bad things have become.

However, I feel duty bound to highlight the intense hypocrisy of Conservative members raising the alarm on threats to the NHS when Rishi Sunak is registered with a private GP practice that guarantees same-day appointments. Let us not forget that a Tory Government failed to take the NHS off the table during Brexit negotiations. It seems that Scots currently have the worst of both worlds when it comes to protecting our most precious national treasure.

It goes without saying that my party is utterly committed to the core principles of our healthcare system—that it is available to everyone and free at the point of need. It was, after all, Liberal Democrats who brought free eye and dental checks and free personal care to Scotland. We are also committed to supporting—

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Alex Cole-Hamilton: Well, in coalition with the Labour Party we did.

Monica Lennon: It is on a different point.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I am in my final minute. We are also committed to supporting all those on the front lines of our NHS; they have been asked to go beyond the call of duty for far too long. Their service warrants far better treatment than this.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate.

15:30

Paul O’Kane (West Scotland) (Lab): Primary care is the front door of our national health service. It is the cornerstone that allows intervention as early as possible to ensure that people can be successfully treated in the community. It refers people to the support that they need in the right place, and it should be able to do that at the right time. It is that early intervention that keeps people out of hospital by diagnosing, referring or treating them before their condition deteriorates. It is a vital service that people have trusted over many years.

Our relationship with our GP is crucial in all of our lives, and supporting general practice is crucial to reducing pressure on acute and emergency services. However, a survey from the British Medical Association has revealed that four in every five—more than 80 per cent—of GP practices in Scotland have reported that demand for their service is exceeding their capacity and almost half have reported that the level of demand for their service is substantially exceeding capacity.

As colleagues have said, I am not alone in looking at my mailbox and seeing that it is full of people who are struggling to see their GP and full of GPs who feel at their wits' end trying to do the job that they love fully. Indeed, Dr Andrew Buist, chair of the BMA Scottish GPs committee, issued a stark warning by saying that the situation in primary care is at a "tipping point" because of the Government's decision to slash funding for GP practices by £65 million.

The target to recruit 800 GPs by 2027 is short of what is required, and it kicks the issue down the road. The SNP has had 15 years to get NHS workforce planning right, but it has failed miserably year after year.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): Will the member accept that the ScotGEM—Scottish graduate entry medicine—programme, which is unique to Scotland and was introduced by the SNP, is welcome and is specifically looking to address GP vacancies in rural areas?

Paul O'Kane: Of course, it is important that we look at the needs of every community in Scotland, but it is clear that the issues go far beyond that and that we need sustained investment.

For 15 years, there has been a lack of a strategic plan on NHS staffing not only for GPs but across acute settings and all other healthcare settings.

Humza Yousaf: Will the member take an intervention?

Paul O'Kane: I would like to make some progress, if the cabinet secretary does not mind, because I am conscious of time.

The NHS is the Labour Party's proudest achievement. It has transformed the health of our nation and is envied across the world for its defining principle of providing healthcare that is free at the point of use. However, this week, it has been revealed that the possibility of creating a two-tier healthcare system through privatisation has been explored under the watch of the cabinet secretary. This week, the First Minister and the cabinet secretary scrambled to state that they do not support any shift toward privatising the NHS, and SNP back benchers and members were

scrambling to add BBC journalists to the list of things that are to blame for the current state of the NHS in Scotland. However, perhaps we should not be surprised by what we heard this week, because the SNP has form on this. Indeed, in his book "*Grasping the Thistle*", the current SNP president and former MSP, Mike Russell, who was appointed to the Cabinet by Alex Salmond and Nicola Sturgeon, said:

"We would encourage the private sector to compete with established NHS, hospitals, clinics and other services. We would encourage NHS management and staff to buy out existing NHS facilities and services under favourable financial terms and join the private sector."

Humza Yousaf: The member is normally good, but this is desperate stuff.

Paul O'Kane: The cabinet secretary did not want to hear that from his colleague.

Our NHS is on its knees and its front-line staff are suffering. They have had enough of the failing health secretary not listening to what they need. That is why the RCN is striking for the first time in its history and why Scottish Ambulance Service staff, including paramedics, are striking for the first time in over 30 years. The cabinet secretary should deliver

"A decent and acceptable pay rise for NHS and social care staff",

which

"is essential, not just to avoid strikes but to retain and recruit the staff we need to make essential improvements to our health service"

Those are not my words; they are the words of another former SNP cabinet secretary, Alex Neil. Perhaps the health secretary should heed the advice of his former colleague and get back round the table and listen to what staff are telling him, because it is clear that the health secretary had lost the confidence of front-line staff, patients and their families. His record speaks for itself in comparison to those of his predecessors, and he has no idea, plan or support to offer.

Patients and staff deserve so much better than this Government and this cabinet secretary.

15:34

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): I am not sure about grasping the thistle—I think that the Labour Party is clutching at straws, with this debate.

The challenges that face Scotland's NHS are plain for us all to see, but so is the clear, focused and considered action of the Scottish Government in seeking to address those challenges—some of which I will return to later in this short debate. It is, of course, right that our Scottish Government's

NHS recovery plan be properly scrutinised. In that context, this debate could serve Parliament well.

However, what does not serve our Parliament well is the Labour Party presenting, in a motion on the Scottish NHS, false accusations as though they are factual, when they are patently and demonstrably untrue. It is an exercise of significant deceit and, indeed, hypocrisy to suggest that the Scottish Government is considering privatising the NHS. With regard to Scotland's NHS being free at the point of use, it was our SNP Government that abolished prescription charges, which were in place when Labour was last in control of this Parliament. It is our SNP Scottish Government that has maintained free eye tests in this country; it costs over £20 for an eye test in Labour-controlled Wales.

It was, of course, the Labour Party that brought private finance initiatives to our NHS in Scotland, and PFI and public-private partnership contracts still cost the Scottish Government £250 million every single year—liabilities that were run up under the Labour Party. It was the Scottish Government, however, that sought to unpick Labour's PFIs. Indeed, in my city of Glasgow, that was done at a cost of £26.3 million to abolish at Glasgow royal infirmary parking charges that were put in place by the Labour Party. Therefore, there will be no NHS privatisation on our watch. Thank heavens that the Labour Party is not in charge of the NHS, here, in Scotland.

I agree with Jackie Baillie in relation to the pressures on GP services. That is why I am pleased to see that efforts to recruit 800 additional GPs by 2027 are on track, with 277 already being in post by 2021. Of course we need to strive to go further; we must do more.

However, I will tell members what does not help. It does not help that, when we, in Scotland, look to attract additional GPs or to fill vacancies elsewhere in health and social care, we have a Labour Party and a Labour Party leader, in Keir Starmer, that are doubling down against freedom of movement of people and are talking about there being too many immigrants in the NHS, then deploying cheap, gutter-level right-wing rhetoric about immigration dependency. That is just shameful, Presiding Officer. It is shameful.

On the contributions that overseas workers make to our healthcare system, we need to ensure that overseas-trained GPs in Scotland do not leave because of UK visa problems. I mention that because I noted, in my preparation for today's debate, that the chair of the BMA Scottish GP committee, Dr Andrew Buist, said:

"We are desperately short of GPs as it is, so the last thing we need is to be in a position where fully qualified clinicians are being left with no choice but to leave Scotland

because of an issue with the terms and conditions of their visa."

When the minister is summing up, I would like to hear more about our negotiations with the UK Government to resolve some of those issues.

Labour also made another important point in relation to multidisciplinary teams. Yes—we want more workers and so on, but denying the fact that since 2018, there are 3,120 more of them in our NHS just does not cut it. Yes—we need more people, but look at the progress that we have made. The year 2018 is very important because it predates the pandemic. What has happened shows that the Scottish Government was well aware of the demographic challenges in Scotland's healthcare and social care system and was taking steps pre-Covid-19 to address them. It is a work in progress.

This year, the budget for primary care in Scotland is actually on the increase; and I note that, according to the cabinet secretary's amendment, integration joint boards are also going to use their reserves to invest in primary care. It would be helpful to get more information from the cabinet secretary on that proposed change.

Let us try to work collegially to improve Scotland's NHS, but let us base the demands of the challenges that the doughty NHS faces here, in Scotland, on the facts and not on Labour fantasy.

15:39

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): I thank Labour for bringing the debate to the chamber. The only time that we get to hold the Government to account on health is during Opposition time. Even then, we know that we and Labour will lose the vote, because the SNP and the Greens will band together to defiantly say that we have somehow got this all wrong.

Humza Yousaf often talks about challenges and recovery from the pandemic while forgetting that, under the SNP, the NHS was creaking before the pandemic.

Of course, as we have already heard, the background to the debate is the leaked discussion among health chiefs at which various ideas were floated, including charging people who can afford to pay. We already have a two-tier health service under the SNP. Constituents who cannot even get to speak to a GP have contacted me to say that they have gone private. One case, in particular, stands out: it is of a person who ended up paying thousands to see a GP privately, then paid for a minor procedure. That is just not acceptable. Quite apart from the "Thinking the unthinkable" leaked discussion, we already have a health service in

which people who can pay get health treatment and those who cannot, or will not, do not.

We are all proud of our national health service, but, under the SNP, it is becoming the national have-not service. That is the reality on the ground. What happens in general practice affects what happens elsewhere in the health service. If people cannot see a doctor, they might well end up at an A and E department instead, or get sicker and go to hospital when that could have been avoided.

We need to know what is happening on the ground. However, we currently have no idea which GP practices are offering phone calls, no calls or face-to-face appointments. That would not be acceptable at the best of times, because data is needed in order to plan, and it is certainly not acceptable now.

In my area of Lanarkshire, things are particularly bad.

Monica Lennon: I tried to intervene on the cabinet secretary, but perhaps he did not hear me. In NHS Lanarkshire the situation is especially bad. Since October last year, it has spent 315 days at code black, and we are facing a second Christmas at that status. Graham Simpson knows that that is frightening stuff for patients and staff in our area. Does he agree that we need an urgent plan from ministers to get NHS Lanarkshire out of code black? The cabinet secretary is right to say that we should thank the staff—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Be brief, please.

Monica Lennon: —but we cannot thank them if they are working in unsafe conditions.

Graham Simpson: I thank Monica Lennon for her intervention. She is absolutely right that NHS Lanarkshire is in a state of crisis, as it has been for too long. We need to see an action plan to get our area out of that completely unacceptable situation.

We have all been inundated with constituents who are desperate for help. I have a couple of personal testimonies. One is from an East Kilbride resident who said that they found themselves requiring support from a GP. They went to their medical practice and requested an appointment for a painful foot. They were told that there were no appointments available that day and that there were no pre-booked appointments available. That kind of thing is commonplace.

I have other examples, but I will not go through them because I am aware of the time. The situation that we face is not good enough—not just in Lanarkshire, but across Scotland. Frankly, the buck stops with the cabinet secretary and no one else. He should do something about it, or fall on his sword.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call John Mason, to be followed by Gillian Mackay. There is no time in hand, Mr Mason.

15:43

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): I told Mr Kidd that that would be the case before I got up to speak.

Members might not be surprised if I start from a financial angle. Whether we are independent or not, and whether we have borrowing powers or not, we still need to set budgets and live within our means, and we will never have as much money as we would like.

Labour and others have complained in recent years that local government has not had the funding that it deserves. One of the reasons for that is that we have prioritised health and the NHS. If the Labour Party was in power, it could do things differently. However, it could not give more to local government and also give more to health services and the NHS.

First, we could agree that the NHS will always have a budget and that that budget will never be able to meet all the demands that every person in Scotland wants it to meet.

Secondly, once we have decided on a figure for the NHS and health, we need to decide how to split it up. How much should go to GPs and other primary care, and how much should go to hospitals, A and E and so on?

I think that most of us here would agree that we should focus more on preventative care and less on reactive care. However, what we have not agreed on so far is how to make that switch. If we cut funding to hospitals, including A and E, in order to invest more in primary care, including GPs, waiting times for hospitals will probably increase more. I wonder whether the Opposition parties would be willing to support that, or would still turn up at First Minister's question time every Thursday to complain about hospital waiting times. Let us be honest: every time there are demands to reduce hospital waiting times, it discourages investment in preventative services, including GPs.

Even within GP funding, there are choices to be made. The 100 or so deep-end practices, which work in our most deprived 15 per cent of areas, would argue that funding should be more skewed to the poorer areas. I wonder whether Jackie Baillie would support a reduction in GP services in a better-off area such as Helensburgh in order to increase funding for GPs in a needier area such as Dumbarton. Like it or not, those are the kinds of choices that we have to make.

Mercedes Villalba: Why are the member's expectations of and ambitions for our health service so low?

John Mason: We can all talk about ambition, and I am happy to do so, but the angle that I am taking today is that we have a fixed budget that has to be split up one way or another.

Although parts of the NHS are under severe pressure, much of it is providing excellent services. I certainly hear good reports directly from constituents and in Care Opinion emails. I will quote a recent example. It says:

"At my 34-week midwife appointment my midwife noticed a stop in"

the baby's

"growth ... so sent me to the Princess Royal for a ... scan. The growth scan showed the baby was smaller than she should have been. From this minute the care I received from the PRM was amazing.

I was sent to either maternity assessment or day care every day for monitoring and every single member of staff was amazing. I was admitted one night into Ward 72 and again the staff were amazing. It was decided I would be induced at 37 weeks, throughout this long and scary process again the staff on Ward 72 plus the doctors were so reassuring and kind.

I was took to the Labour Ward after 2 days in Ward 72 and had Hannah as my midwife, a real asset. I had a problem at the end of my labour and had to have doctor intervention, again the doctor was amazing.

After birth I was took to Ward 63 where again the staff were all so nice and caring. After getting home my community midwife noticed my little one had some jaundice so back up we went, we were readmitted for 2 days back into Ward 63. This was very upsetting for me at the time and the compassion I received from all the staff was just amazing.

Throughout our whole journey every single person we met—healthcare workers, cleaning staff, midwives, doctors—were all second to none. I know the NHS is having a hard time and you can tell these people are overworked and understaffed, but that doesn't take away anything from the care they give. I would like to thank every one of them."

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Mason, you need to close.

John Mason: We have an NHS to be proud of.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I see my earlier plea fell on deaf ears, and we now have no time in hand, so I will hold everyone strictly to their time limits.

15:48

Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): There is no doubt that primary care is under immense strain. Survey results from the BMA warn that 81 per cent of practices said that demand for their services was exceeding capacity. We know that, as a result of the pandemic, people

are presenting later, often with more complex conditions and sometimes with more than one complex condition. Receptionists, who are often simply trying to get patients the treatment that they need in the quickest way possible, bear the brunt of the responsibility for telling patients about alternative pathways.

The Health and Social Care Committee's report on alternative pathways highlighted that those need to be better communicated and that we need to move away from the expectation that every primary care appointment needs to be with a GP.

We need to diversify appointment types and ways of booking to make it easier for people to access an appointment at a convenient time. Many practices do late nights in order to facilitate appointments for people who are working, but, by facilitating phone or video appointments, we might be able to make better use of appointments and reduce the constant pressure to work longer hours.

The Royal College of General Practitioners has said:

"We urgently need a national conversation to manage public expectations of what people can reasonably expect from the health service in these conditions. Better public understanding of how to use our public services is needed, including the new ways of working in general practice."

We need to make sure that GPs have the technology to be able to facilitate those appointments. We also need electronic prescribing, because GPs' valuable time being taken up with signing individual prescriptions should be a thing of the past. Information technology systems can take time to roll out, but, if the cabinet secretary could look at a solution to reduce the number of repeat prescriptions that need to be physically signed, that would go some way to reducing the workload. Many people will be on medication for the rest of their lives and, aside from medication reviews, many of those prescriptions are just signed monthly with no contact with the patient. We seriously need to consider whether that is a good use of GP time and how we can make the process less cumbersome.

In its briefing, the Royal College of Nursing highlighted the vital work that district nurses and other nursing staff, as part of multidisciplinary teams, do to keep patients as well as possible, often visiting them in their homes and in community settings. The contribution that they make to the primary care teams should never be underestimated.

The RCGP highlighted that, as well as talking about resilience, we need to have a conversation about why GPs and other primary care staff become overwhelmed in the first place, and we

must fix or mitigate those issues. The college also said that

“Short-term fixes to the health system must be paired with long-term strategic planning”

to address workforce and workload issues. We must aim towards a point where GPs do not feel overwhelmed through working for their patients.

I have previously mentioned in the chamber the need to support out-of-hours services, which are a key part of primary care. They also help to relieve pressure on A and E by providing an alternative route, but we are relying on dedicated staff to provide those services in addition to other roles, and we need to make that more sustainable.

We need to tackle the acute problems this winter and make sure that the situation does not worsen for staff and patients. At the same time, we need to work to make general practice more sustainable and put it on a good footing to be able to promote and support good health rather than the current cycle of constantly being a national sick service.

I thank all the organisations that sent briefings and every one of the people who work in health and social care. They are doing their utmost to support those who need it through the winter and the rest of the year.

15:52

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): We rightly take pride in our NHS and its founding principles of universality of care, respect and dignity. The last thing that we need is a two-tier service, but that is already happening in Scotland.

Today’s amendment from the SNP Government is appalling. It does not acknowledge the massive pressures that our NHS is facing, which are increasingly impacting on people’s health. Our hard-working NHS staff are under huge pressures, not just because of Covid, but because of long-term systemic understaffing and a lack of action to recruit, support and retain staff.

I will bring to the chamber’s attention the experience of my constituents in the Lothians. We see pressures right across our NHS, including in A and E, among GPs, and in dentistry and care services. Waiting times for accident and emergency services in NHS Lothian are damning. Since May this year and up until November, there was only one week during which the percentage of people who were seen within the Government’s four-hour target was more than 70 per cent. Last week, more than 1,700 people were stuck in A and E for more than four hours. Only 63 per cent of those attending NHS Lothian’s emergency departments were seen within four hours. In the same week, more than 200 people were stuck in A

and E for more than 12 hours. Members should imagine for a moment what it is like for someone to wait for 12 hours when they have gone to accident and emergency.

Jackie Baillie’s focus on GPs was absolutely right—people are going to A and E because they cannot access their GPs. For the first time, GP surgeries have started contacting my office to talk about the real pressures that they are experiencing, which are exacerbated by the reduction in funding. I am told that, in NHS Lothian, we lost £9 million because GP services in Lothian were unable to recruit the GPs that we had lost. That money is not coming back.

Constituents have reached out: one had to wait a month to see his GP; another one said that he finds it extremely difficult to register with a GP, because there is a queue outside the practice every week; and, in Musselburgh, people have been experiencing issues with access to a GP for years, to such an extent that an independent review had to be set up.

Our front-line services are under massive pressures, with our GPs being

“depleted and demoralised”.

Those are not my words but those of the Royal College of General Practitioners.

It is not only GPs—the pressures on our NHS dentists in Lothian are shocking. A Labour freedom of information request revealed that, between 2021 and 2022, 92 dentists withdrew from NHS Lothian’s dental list. At the beginning of this year, out of 163 general dental practices in Lothian, only 51 confirmed that they are accepting new patients, with some only accepting children. That creates the two-tier system that I talked about at the start of my speech. Those who can afford it go private while the rest are forced to wait months, borrow money from friends or family to get private treatment, be in pain or lose teeth. That is not acceptable.

The First Minister has said that the founding principles of our NHS are “not up for discussion,” but we are already losing our NHS dentistry. That is not acceptable.

It was the Scottish Labour Party that launched the call for a national care service, so we welcome the proposals from the SNP to deliver it. However, the reality is that, rather than focusing on the experiences of our carers and providing decent terms and conditions across the country and career development opportunities, we are seeing SNP centralisation—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You need to conclude, Ms Boyack.

Sarah Boyack: That is adding to delayed discharges. In September this year, more than 6,500 beds in NHS Lothian were occupied by patients who could have been sent home. That is not good enough. We need an NHS that is invested in and that the patients deserve.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Boyack. I now call Jeremy Balfour.

Sarah Boyack: The staff do everything that they can—they need our support now.

15:56

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): The national health service is an institution of which the United Kingdom can be immensely proud. The provision of medical care that is free at the point of need fundamentally demonstrates our commitment to the idea that means should not determine access to healthcare. On numerous occasions, I have spoken about my personal experience of that life-saving service. Throughout all of our debates on the issue, we should remember that that is our goal, and it is our hard-working healthcare professionals on the front lines who should be supported in any way possible.

It is evident that the NHS in Scotland is going through a difficult time. My older brother has just retired as a GP, and his generation is walking away due to practices that are going on now. The number of GPs in Lothian is falling. I know of numerous practices here, in Edinburgh, where, if a patient does not phone between 8 and 5 past 8, they will not get an appointment on that day or in the week ahead.

As Sarah Boyack pointed out, dental treatment in the Lothians for NHS patients is collapsing. My dentist has decided to go private, and my family and I are still waiting to find a dental practice that we can register with, because no dentists are taking on that work. We already have a two-tier system in Lothian. I ask the health secretary to visit places in my region rather than sit in his office, thinking that everything is fine.

The situation is bleak—that is the only word for it. We are proceeding through this most difficult of winters without a properly functioning primary care service. It is true that we are recovering from the pandemic, but to claim that all the problems in our health services began in March 2020 is fanciful. For too long, the SNP Government has hidden behind the pandemic as an excuse for its failings when, in reality, the situation in which we find ourselves has been years in the making. We need action.

The cabinet secretary will say that he has not got the money to do that. I will suggest a way that at least three or four committees in this Parliament

that took evidence last week can also suggest: the Government can save £1.3 billion by getting rid of its fanciful plan for a national care service. That plan simply will not work. The trade unions are telling us that the Government plan will not work, the professionals on the front line are telling us that it will not work and the third sector is telling us that it will not work. The Government should put that idea to one side and put the money into primary care and hospital care. That would do so much more for the patients of Scotland.

Front-line services such as A and E and GP practices rely on other services to run smoothly. The deep-running problems in our health and care services date back long before the pandemic and are deeply rooted in the mismanagement by this SNP Government.

Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Jeremy Balfour: I do not have time.

That is not an abstract problem; it is not just numbers on a page or debating points for this chamber. The health secretary is putting at risk people's lives and their wellbeing. The Government must act now to stop the stress on the system. Perhaps a good place to start would be for the health secretary to take some responsibility and for the First Minister to replace the man at the top.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Stuart McMillan is the final speaker in the open debate. You have up to four minutes, Mr McMillan.

16:01

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): First of all, it says something about Labour that it has lodged a motion that is factually inaccurate and is based on a *Daily Mail* headline. It appears to me that Labour's journey to becoming red Tories is well under way.

I know that it has been a while since Labour was last in power here and in London, but it is certainly worth reminding it of its record on privatisation in the NHS. In 1999, it transitioned the NHS from a public sector provider to one that included the private sector under the guise of choice and competition. We also have Labour's costly PFI contracts, which my colleague Bob Doris mentioned earlier. Those have taken hundreds of millions of pounds out of the health budget in profit payments every single year. That money could and should be going to patients. When Labour comes to the chamber making a claim that it knows is false, it needs to be reminded of its distant but not yet forgotten past.

As for the blue Tories, their amendment states that

“Scottish Government announcements”

are

“divorced from the reality of life and purpose of the service.”

It takes a huge amount of brass neck to come to this chamber to make such a claim.

Gillian Martin mentioned the issue of privatisation in her intervention. The public know that the Tories want to privatise the NHS.

Jeremy Balfour: Will the member give way?

Stuart McMillan: I have only four minutes, Mr Balfour.

Thankfully, this SNP-led Government does not agree with either of those parties. I am pleased that the health secretary announced—although he did not need to—that the founding principles of the NHS are not up for discussion and that the service will remain free at the point of need.

I welcome the Scottish Government’s investment in recruiting more than 3,220 healthcare professionals since 2018. The Government is committed to investing at least £179 million a year on growing primary care multidisciplinary teams.

However, we have heard from the Opposition today about costs, finances and cuts. I am not sure whether they understand a few simple economic facts. Brexit has been a disaster. As I stated in Christine Grahame’s members’ business debate last night—I mention this for the interest of Sandesh Gulhane—Adam Posen, who is a former member of the Bank of England monetary policy committee, suggested earlier this year that Brexit was responsible for up to 80 per cent of the increase in prices in the UK.

Currently, inflation is running at 11.1 per cent. That has largely been caused by Brexit. *[Interruption.]* Added to that are the European Union nationals who have left their employment in Scotland, some of whom would have been working in Scotland’s NHS. Those are undeniable facts that the Opposition must listen to and accept.

On top of that is the current race to the bottom on immigration in which the Tories and Labour are competing. Do those two parties not realise that that might make it harder to encourage people to come to live and work in Scotland, whether in the NHS or for any other employer?

If those parties want more money to go into the NHS—we all do—they must indicate from which budgets that money would come, because of the limited financial situation that this Parliament, sadly, faces.

We have heard some members make comparisons with the NHS elsewhere. I mention, once again for the benefit of Sandesh Gulhane, that prescriptions are free in Scotland but they are £9.15 each in England.

Dental care is free in Scotland for under-26s, without an opt-in. NHS eye tests remain free in Scotland, in comparison with England and Wales, where they cost £21.31 a time. Also, Scotland has 95 GPs for every 100,000 people, compared with 70 in England, 80 in Wales and 75 in Northern Ireland.

In contrast to that positive progress, in June 2022 the Health Foundation criticised the UK Government’s lack of action and said that it was unlikely to meet the target of adding 6,000 GPs for 2023-24. I know that the NHS has its challenges—it always has and it always will—but I also know that this SNP-led Government is focused on making, and is determined to make, our NHS stronger for generations to come.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to closing speeches. I would be grateful if we could have less shouting across the chamber while people are speaking.

16:05

Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con): How many warnings from the front line of our NHS will it take for this health secretary not just to listen but to act? Primary care is at breaking point. Members have laid bare the fact that there simply is not the capacity to meet demand.

Sadly, Graham Simpson highlighted the fact that, under the SNP, we now have a national have-not service. Jeremy Balfour outlined the alarming stats and bleak picture. Dr Sandesh Gulhane highlighted the lack of trust in Humza Yousaf and shed light on conversations that are taking place behind closed Government doors. Jackie Baillie stated that GPs are on their knees while Humza Yousaf says, “Go to the GP rather than A and E”. What does Humza Yousaf do? He deflects and he blames Labour. He makes personal attacks on Jackie Baillie. He sneers at Dr Sandesh Gulhane. Alex Cole-Hamilton talked about a “slap in the face” to GP practices and the heroic healthcare staff. Paul O’Kane talked about GPs being at their wits’ end.

Research by the British Medical Association clearly shows that it is not just some practices that are struggling but the vast majority and that, if primary care buckles, it will be catastrophic not just for general practice and patients, but for the whole healthcare system.

There are two overriding issues affecting primary care: a lack of GPs and a lack of

resources. Bob Doris referred to Humza Yousaf's plan to recruit 800 additional GPs by 2027. However, the BMA says that we do not need 800 additional GPs—we need 1,000 and we do not need them by 2027; we need them now.

Bob Doris: Will the member give way on that point?

Tess White: We also need to stop the haemorrhaging of existing GPs—

Bob Doris: Will the member give way on that point, as she mentioned me by name? Will she give way on that point?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Bob Doris, would you resume your seat! The member is obviously not taking the intervention.

Tess White: We need to stop the haemorrhaging of existing GPs in search of better conditions abroad or early retirement, and to stop those who are considering cutting the sessions that they currently work.

Mr Doris talks about blame, and he is blaming Brexit for these dire situations. We cannot plug the gaps when the system is a sieve. More than a third of practices report having at least one vacancy, which is a higher figure than at this time last year. It takes years to train a doctor. The SNP Government must focus on retaining the talent that we have.

Humza Yousaf says, "Judge me by my record". On resources, the cuts of £65 million from the primary care budget and £5 million in support payments mean that GP practices will have to try to meet patient demand with even fewer resources than before, and the kicker? The slashing of £65 million from primary care was announced on the same day that the Crown Office confirmed that almost £51 million of taxpayers' money has been spent on a range of malicious prosecutions.

If the health secretary left his bunker and his spin doctors and listened to our doctors and nurses on the NHS front line, he would understand that establishing multidisciplinary teams in primary care is vital if we are to scale up our patient care. We know that there are problems with putting in place multidisciplinary teams that can help to spread the GP workload.

We have an NHS recovery plan that has seen things getting worse, not better. We have a winter resilience plan that tells the public to access urgent care only if the situation is life threatening, which piles even more pressure on primary care. Things are so dire that NHS leaders have considered introducing a two-tier system for treatment, which would charge the wealthy.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You need to conclude, Ms White.

Tess White: Humza Yousaf must step aside and let someone else step up who has the confidence of the medical profession.

16:10

The Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport (Maree Todd): I am grateful to members for the many considered contributions on this absolutely vital subject. I believe that there is support across the chamber for the Government's steadfast position on maintaining Scotland's NHS as publicly owned, publicly operated and free at the point of need.

Far from denying the challenges that primary care faces, the first thing that our amendment does is recognise those pressures. Earlier this month, in the debate on alternative pathways to primary care, I was very open about the challenges that the NHS is facing. It will take time to recover from the Covid pandemic, and we have yet to see the worst of the cost of living crisis. However, I also believe that primary care is in a better place to respond to those challenges as a result of our investment and reforms.

Evaluation from local areas shows that our reforms are working. The expanded multidisciplinary team—the 3,220 whole-time equivalent healthcare professionals whom Tess White appears not to know about—support the effective use of time and expertise by reducing multiple appointments for the same issue and freeing up time for longer appointments where required, and are associated with high staff and patient satisfaction.

The reforms are also helping to cut GP workload and make general practice a more attractive career by allowing GPs to focus on complex rather than routine care and leadership, which in turn is improving patient outcomes, community health and practice sustainability.

Monica Lennon: The minister heard me say to Graham Simpson that NHS Lanarkshire has been in code black for 315 days, since October of last year. The minister's plan is not working. When will we see a plan that will work and when will we get out of code black in Lanarkshire?

Maree Todd: I absolutely understand and acknowledge the pressures that are being faced in NHS Lanarkshire. We are in regular contact with NHS Lanarkshire, and we have increased the level of staffing right across the board there.

GPs are rightly passionate about their vocations, and they want to encourage new medical graduates into the profession. So do we all, and what we say to the world matters. In the public discourse, our support for the sterling work of general practice teams must be crystal clear

and unequivocal if we are to attract new undergraduates to choose general practice as the worthwhile and rewarding career that we know it to be.

I will tell members a little more about some of the initiatives that we have under way. We are listening to what GPs tell us, and the Government is responding. In June, we launched a new recruitment drive to attract qualified GPs to move to Scotland. Initiatives such as rediscover the joy of general practice assist some of our most remote areas to bolster GP coverage. We are increasing medical school places by 100 each year during this session of Parliament. Recruitment into GP specialty training in 2022 has so far been better than in any other year on record, with a 98 per cent fill rate. In October, we announced 35 additional places for GP specialty training and, as of November 2021, there were 1,184 established GP training places in Scotland. As Emma Harper mentioned, ScotGEM, which is our four-year graduate entry medical degree with a focus on general practice, is proving successful, with the first cohort of 52 students graduating earlier this year.

It is perfectly valid to compare the SNP-run NHS in Scotland to the Tory-run NHS in England and the Labour-run NHS in Wales. It is perfectly valid to look beyond the Opposition rhetoric to see what those parties actually do when they are in power. I reiterate my immense gratitude to our dedicated workforce, who work day in, day out to deliver the care that our citizens need in general practice and elsewhere in our NHS.

16:15

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): In closing for Scottish Labour, I want to be clear that our motion has been brought to the chamber to ensure that the voices of patients, carers, GPs and all primary care staff are heard loud and clear—oh boy, has that been necessary. It is obvious that the SNP Government and SNP back benchers are ignoring the pleas for help from all corners of our healthcare system.

It is unfortunate that, in his amendment to our motion, the cabinet secretary suggests that the pressures on primary care are due only

“to the effects of Brexit, the global pandemic and the cost of living crisis”.

Granted, those issues contribute to the pressures that exist—of course they do—but there is a glaring omission, because those pressures are also due to his, the First Minister’s and the entire Government’s shocking mismanagement of the health service in Scotland, their lack of openness to scrutiny and their constant harking back to what happened many years ago. My colleague Paul

O’Kane pointed out that the SNP has been in government for 15 years. Given the cabinet secretary’s closed approach, it is disappointing—although not surprising—that allies of the SNP are considering options such as privatisation of the NHS in Scotland.

Humza Yousaf: I will mention something more recent, not something that happened 15 years ago. Does Carol Mochan want to apologise for Keir Starmer talking down overseas workers in our national health service? Anti-immigration rhetoric will certainly not help our NHS in this time of need.

Carol Mochan: It is old and tired rhetoric that the Government uses. The Government constantly ignores its own position in Scotland.

I actually wanted to say that I was heartened by the opposition in the chamber to the notion of privatisation of our much-loved NHS. I believe the Government in that regard, but I ask Stuart McMillan whether he actually believes that the BBC was lying to us about what happened. We should not understate how concerning the broadcast reports of creeping privatisation were; they truly sent a shockwave through the NHS and the public when the story broke.

Humza Yousaf: That is desperate.

Carol Mochan: I see that the cabinet secretary is laughing about that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please resume your seat for a second, Ms Mochan. During the debate, I have made a number of pleas to members across the chamber for a degree of decorum and respect for the member who is speaking. It does not help if we get barracking from Government members and from Opposition members to the point at which the member who is speaking has to almost yell into the microphone. Can we have a bit more respect for the remainder of the debate?

Carol Mochan: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

The fact that so many people were sent out to trash the story made it more real to us, because the Government was obviously concerned. I have had a lot of respect for Bob Doris during my time in the Parliament, but I thought that his speech today was not a fair representation of what is going on.

Gillian Martin: Can Carol Mochan name just one sitting SNP MSP who has said that they want to privatise the Scottish NHS?

Carol Mochan: We have a change of heart there from the member.

Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): Mike Russell!

Carol Mochan: Of course, there was Mike Russell.

I wonder whether the convener—*[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Sarwar!

Ms Mochan, please continue and conclude.

Carol Mochan: I wonder whether the convener of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee would like to add to the committee's work programme; we should perhaps scrutinise the information that we have heard today.

I realise that I must come to a close. The people of Scotland, the workforce and the health service need the Scottish Government, the cabinet secretary and, if I am honest, back benchers to be much more open about what is actually happening in our health service. We need to look at the cuts that have been made and at what we can do to make a difference. We must ensure that the Government will put up with scrutiny from the Opposition, because good opposition makes good government, and I want the people of Scotland to have a good and fair public health service.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on protecting primary care. There will be a brief pause while the front bench members change over.

Cost of Living: Mortgage Rescue Scheme

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-06898, in the name of Mark Griffin, on the cost of living: mortgage rescue scheme. I invite members who wish to participate to press their request-to-speak buttons now or as soon as possible, or to put "RTS" in the chat function if they are joining us online.

We are tight for time, so I encourage members to stick to their time allocation.

I call Mark Griffin to speak to and move the motion. You have around six minutes.

16:22

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): This past month, Parliament used its powers to support renters who are struggling with the cost of living by freezing rents and banning evictions, which provides a lifeline to thousands of families this winter. Because it is our job to prevent a tidal wave of repossessions, homelessness and financial misery, we are calling on the Government to revamp its mortgage to shared equity scheme, thus supporting homeowners with mortgages.

Thirty per cent of all Scots—half of homeowners—still have a mortgage. Prices for energy, food and fuel have gone through the roof for them, as they have for everyone else. Now, homeowners face a Tory premium on interest rates too. The Scottish Government should not need convincing that more help is needed to keep people in their homes. To its credit, it has kept open its mortgage to shared equity scheme, which could help.

Evidence from Citizens Advice Scotland—which the Government cited in support of the Cost of Living (Tenant Protection) (Scotland) Act 2022—shows that, by last June, views of its "What to do if you can't pay your mortgage" web page had increased by more than 1,600 per cent in a single year.

It is not just people looking for advice when fixed-rate deals end. For the estimated 200,000 Scottish homeowners on variable rate mortgages, this will have been a terrible year so far, and that pain is not over. Just last week, the Office for Budget Responsibility forecasted that effective rates on existing mortgages would rise to 4.3 per cent by summer 2023.

Shelter Scotland and Crisis put the cost of rehoming a household at around £50,000, with escalating costs for those households with greater support needs. However, the cost to families'

livelihoods, their wellbeing and mental health, and the impact on children of losing their homes are far greater.

The mortgage to shared equity scheme is a scheme of last resort. It is the final option for a family that is at risk of losing their home, after all other options have been exhausted. The family can reduce their monthly costs by asking the Government to take a stake in their home, which can be bought back when their finances allow.

However, the scheme is not delivering—it does not serve home owners in today's market. There has not been a successful application to the scheme since 2016, and property thresholds have not been updated since 2017. Applications to the sister mortgage to rent scheme took at least a year to process in the past financial year, with only 41 per cent being successful. All the while, ministers have renewed budgets of millions that have gone unspent for years. It seems to be a slush fund that is to be raided for wider budget pressures each year.

The cabinet secretary's amendment notes that the scheme is demand led, which is absolutely true. However, the scheme itself seems to design out demand. We propose that the mortgage to shared equity scheme be overhauled to deliver a true safety net for those who are at risk.

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government (Shona Robison): The member is well aware that we are reviewing the fund, including the eligibility rules for the mortgage to shared equity and mortgage to rent schemes. Therefore, the very issues that he raises are already being looked at. Does he not accept that?

Mark Griffin: I fully accept that there is a review, and I will come on to talk about that in a minute. However, in that case, and given that the review has been going on since the summer, I suggest that it should be fairly simple for the Government to accept our proposals and expand that safety net. We propose that the mortgage to shared equity scheme be overhauled—it needs to be overhauled urgently—to deliver a true safety net for those who are at risk of losing their homes amidst the Tory economic crisis. When circumstances change, so must the policy, and those circumstances have most definitely changed. Ask anyone out there and you will find out how stretched family budgets are.

As an absolute minimum, the overhaul needs to cater to a wider group in today's market. You would be hard pressed to find a single property in the Lothians, the Highlands or rural Scotland—the areas with the highest price-to-income ratios—that could get help under the scheme. First, property value thresholds must rise. The Government's

existing thresholds, which are based on house size, are complex. If they cannot be revised quickly, the scheme should instead rely on median house price data for each local authority.

Secondly, the equity requirements exclude far too many. The minimum of 20 per cent means that just 58 per cent of mortgages would be eligible. A revised scheme must ensure that recent first-time buyers who have far less equity and who might be rolling off their very first fixed rate can still access support.

Thirdly, the scheme must be resourced to be responsive and turn around applications in two months, not years. People have already lost their home by that time.

Shona Robison: Will the member take an intervention?

Mark Griffin: Yes.

Shona Robison: I do not know whether—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No—the member is winding up and cannot take an intervention.

Mark Griffin: Thank you, Presiding Officer. In her amendment, the cabinet secretary misjudges the level of financial trauma that is already taking place across Scotland. It is not just the households with the lowest incomes that are struggling. The system needs to be ready to deal with people's financial hardship.

The review has been on-going for months, so I hope that the Government will set out the scope of that review and the deadline for implementing changes and rule out a closure of the mortgage to shared equity scheme.

The Tories absolutely need to fix the mess that they have made, but it is not enough for the Government to just criticise from the sidelines. We need to use the powers that we have in Scotland to help families to keep their homes.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the increase in mortgage costs due to the sharp rise in interest rates following the UK Government's disastrous mini-budget; believes that, combined with wider cost of living pressures, higher mortgage repayments will push some households into poverty and that action is needed to prevent a spike in arrears and homelessness; recognises that the Scottish Government's Mortgage to Shared Equity scheme has not had a successful application since 2015-16, and calls for the Scottish Government to relaunch and revamp the scheme so that it is not limited to only those with existing high levels of equity, that eligibility thresholds reflect true house price values and that there is a maximum application turnaround time of two months.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Griffin. I apologise, but, as ever with these debates, we are tight for time, so members will

need to accommodate interventions broadly within their speaking allocations. I call the minister to speak to and move amendment S6M-06898.2. Mr Macpherson, you have up to eight minutes.

16:29

The Minister for Social Security and Local Government (Ben Macpherson): As Mark Griffin mentioned, we are living through a cost of living crisis exacerbated by the impacts of United Kingdom Government decisions and policies including Brexit and the economic mismanagement through the summer, which are resulting in soaring inflation and interest rates, including on mortgages, which is affecting many home owners. In that context, we welcome today's constructive debate and the fact that Labour has chosen to use its time for it.

Our demand-led home owner support fund is the only such scheme in the UK. It provides support to low-income householders who have fallen behind on their mortgages and face repossession. The fund consists of the mortgage to rent and mortgage to shared equity schemes, which sit alongside advice services and legal aid support for home owners. I clarify that, as has been mentioned, it is a scheme of last resort. Every application is carefully considered to offer tailored support, which allows us to provide the most suitable option to home owners who are experiencing financial difficulties.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): There has not been a successful application since 2016. Is there any insight as to why that has occurred, and does the Government have any reflection on that point?

Ben Macpherson: We will, of course, cover that in the review that the cabinet secretary mentioned. However, to maximise the support, we are currently considering eligibility rules and property value thresholds, and we will conclude those considerations in the spring.

I clarify that the scheme also relies on the co-operation of landlords, lenders and those undertaking conveyancing. That is really important to Labour's suggestion of a two-month turnaround, which is unachievable regardless of resourcing or funding from the Government because it relies on other partners, particularly the legal profession, which has had high pressure on it in recent years because of the demand in the housing market. That wider context is important.

Our priority is to help the people who are most in need. Evaluation of the help-to-buy scheme showed that 80 per cent of participants would have been able to purchase a property that met their needs without financial assistance. With regard to the Conservative amendment, which we

urge the Parliament to reject, cuts to financial transactions by the UK Government mean that reopening the help-to-buy scheme would have to be at the expense of delivering other affordable housing. That is not a choice that we are willing to make.

What is more, we recognise the huge pressure that the cost crisis is placing on households who rent their homes. That is why we took action as a Government through our emergency legislation, which Parliament supported. As members know, the Cost of Living (Tenant Protection) (Scotland) Act 2022 provides a temporary rent freeze and moratorium on evictions. It protects tenants by putting in place measures to stabilise immediate housing costs and enable them to stay in their homes.

Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab): Will the minister give way?

Ben Macpherson: I am a bit pushed for time, but I am sure that Mercedes Villalba will be able to speak in the debate.

Moreover, for many households who are struggling to meet their housing costs, discretionary housing payments are a lifeline that the Government funds by providing £86.6 million to local authorities this year. That provision mitigates the benefit cap and the bedroom tax. We wish that we did not have to undertake those mitigations, but we take that action to support people, and we have done for several years with regard to the bedroom tax. The fact that we have to invest that money at all shows that the UK Government's welfare system continues to be badly designed and wrong-headed. That is why we continue to push for it to reverse those policies and stop putting people at risk of homelessness.

In contrast, Social Security Scotland is now successfully delivering 12 devolved benefits, including seven that are available only in Scotland and not elsewhere in the UK, among them the Scottish child payment. From next year—February 2023—our 13th benefit, our new winter heating payment, which will be backed by £20 million, will provide around 400,000 people on low incomes with a reliable annual £50 towards the costs of heating their homes in the winter. That is part of the allocation of almost £3 billion in this financial year to help to mitigate the increased costs of living, with over £1 billion of that support available only in Scotland.

The Government welcomes the debate and looks forward to listening to the contributions from members.

I move amendment S6M-06898.2, to leave out from "Scottish Government's" to end and insert:

"Home Owners' Support Fund is a demand-led mortgage

rescue programme to support low-income homeowners facing difficulty meeting payments to stay in their property through moving to either a rent or shared-equity scheme; notes that the Scottish Government is already reviewing the eligibility criteria of the Fund in light of the cost of living crisis; acknowledges the actions taken by the Scottish Government to also support people in the rented sector during the current cost crisis through the actions in the Cost of Living (Tenant Protection) (Scotland) Act 2022 and through up to £86.6 million in Discretionary Housing Support; calls on the UK Government to ensure that there is an adequate social security net to support people in time of hardship, including homeowners with mortgages; believes that the current nine-month wait for loan-only support with mortgages within Universal Credit is too long, and agrees that this is one of the many areas where Universal Credit is not fit for purpose."

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Miles Briggs. You can have up to four minutes.

16:34

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): I thank the Labour Party for bringing this debate to the Parliament today. I always welcome the opportunity to debate housing policy, and, given the housing crisis that we face in Scotland, it is clear that we need action from the UK and Scottish Governments to support home owners and people who seek the dream of home ownership.

Like other countries around the world, the UK faces a profound economic challenge as a result of President Putin's illegal invasion of Ukraine and the recovery from the Covid pandemic. That seems to have been overlooked in the Labour motion and in the minister's speech, which is disappointing.

The fact is that this SNP Government has failed to address Scotland's housing crisis, which has made it harder for people to get on to the property ladder. The Scottish Government's most recent housing statistics reveal that housing completions across all tenures in Scotland are still below pre-Covid levels. We are not building the homes that Scotland needs. We should all be concerned about that.

At the same time, SNP and Green ministers have closed off two crucial support schemes for first-time buyers by scrapping help to buy and the first home fund. First-time buyers in England can still access support and shared ownership to help them on to the property ladder. That is important.

Shona Robison: Ben Macpherson said that around 80 per cent of beneficiaries of help to buy would have been able to purchase a property without Government support. Given that, is Miles Briggs saying that we should take money out of the affordable housing supply programme, which helps people who could not afford to buy their own

home or rent a home, and put it into help to buy? We need clarity from Miles Briggs on that.

Miles Briggs: It is quite clear whom the cabinet secretary does not want to help: it is the people she sees as the super-rich—people like nurses, police officers and teachers in our country. They want support.

Shona Robison: Will the member take another intervention?

Miles Briggs: I do not have time. I have only four minutes.

We need the Government to look at the situation. It used to support helping Scots to get on to the property ladder, but it has changed its mind and turned its back on the very people it used to support.

Scottish Conservatives want home ownership to be affordable for every Scot. That is why we are proposing a rent-to-own scheme, which will help people to save for a deposit by giving them a percentage of their rent back when they decide and are ready to purchase their own home.

It is clear that more and more potential first-time buyers in Scotland are being priced out of the market, especially in the capital. Scottish first-time buyers must be at the heart of a Scottish Government housing strategy. It is sad that the Scottish Government seems to have forgotten about them.

That is why my amendment for today's debate calls on the Scottish ministers to reinstate help to buy and to develop a new rent-to-own scheme. We need a bold new initiative to help people to get on to the property ladder in Scotland. Rent to own can do just that.

A generation of potential first-time buyers are at risk of being completely left behind by this SNP-Green Government. That is not acceptable.

It is also clear that we are starting to see the unintended consequences of the SNP-Green-Labour Cost of Living (Tenant Protection) Scotland Act 2022, as they filter through into the social rented sector. Members who meet the sector are seeing how it is redrawing financial plans, scrapping business plans for new socially rented homes. Ultimately, fewer homes will be available. That will be the legacy of this SNP-Green Government.

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Miles Briggs: I am sorry, but I do not have time. I have only a few seconds left.

That is why members on the Conservative benches think that it is time to take forward new schemes to provide the support that our tenants of

socially rented properties need. For too long, such tenants have been neglected.

The 2022 act will also mean that there are fewer privately rented properties. Here, in the capital, that will be a total disaster. All parties in this Parliament who supported the rent controls legislation should take responsibility for that.

Scottish Conservatives have a robust plan to support our first-time buyers. It is time that the SNP, the Greens and the Labour Party matched that ambition.

I move amendment S6M-06898.1, to leave out from “following” to end and insert:

“due to Vladimir Putin’s illegal invasion of Ukraine and the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic; welcomes the billions of pounds in cost of living support packages announced by the UK Government to support the most vulnerable households during this difficult period; recognises that Scottish Government decisions have contributed to the cost of living crisis by failing to address the housing crisis that exists in Scotland; condemns the Scottish Government for scrapping the Help to Buy scheme that helped prospective homeowners to get on the property ladder, and calls on the Scottish Government to reintroduce a Help to Buy scheme and develop a Rent to Buy scheme.”

16:38

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I am pleased to speak for my party in this important debate and I congratulate Mark Griffin on securing time for it.

It is undeniable that the cost of living crisis is having a huge impact on the budgets of households throughout the country. The Conservative Government’s disastrous mini-budget under Truss and Kwarteng brought chaos to the markets and exacerbated the crisis at the worst possible moment.

It is left to ordinary people to pick up the pieces and pay the price. Dreadful Conservative mismanagement of the economy has caused mortgages to skyrocket. Recent estimates—we heard some today—suggest that a typical family will see a staggering annual increase of around £3,000 in their mortgage payments when they come to renegotiate their deals.

Struggling households face a crippling triple whammy in the form of rising food costs, energy bills and housing costs, particularly for mortgages. This month, a poll revealed that home owners are worried about defaulting on their mortgage payments or being forced to cut down on food, while one in four even fear losing their homes due to unpaid bills. It is hard to overstate the toll that that sort of worry must take.

When people are struggling so much that some even face the threat of homelessness, it is appalling that we are, yet again, in the middle of

an unwanted independence merry-go-round. Instead of making sure that vulnerable Scots make it through the winter with their homes and health intact, the SNP-Green Government is yet again wasting its energy and our time and focus on more failed attempts and efforts to break up our United Kingdom. That is tedious, arrogant and morally indefensible. The people of Scotland are trapped between Tory incompetence at Westminster and SNP-Green disinterest at Holyrood. People need to know that they can heat their homes, feed their children and afford their bills. We should offer them some help by extending the reach of the home owners support fund to ensure that it is fit to address inflation and the rise in interest rates.

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I do not have very much time, but I will give way to Fulton MacGregor.

Fulton MacGregor: I know that the member does not like independence and would not vote for it, but does he accept that an independence referendum would give people a choice to escape from the policies that he criticises?

Alex Cole-Hamilton: The great snake oil that the SNP tries to sell us is that independence would somehow be an antidote to all the problems that we face. It would compound all the misery and economic cost to hard-working families across the country. It is well past time that the UK Government brought in a proper windfall tax on the banking sector’s profits. We, along with others, successfully dragged the UK Government to the point where it levied a windfall tax on the super-profits made by oil and gas producers. We must now look to the banking sector because, at a time when people are at risk of losing their homes because of the mortgage repayments that are being exacted on them by the banks, the UK Government has initiated a tax break of £18 billion through a cut to the bank levy on those profits. That is unconscionable and should be reversed.

That is how to pay for the measures that we have been calling for since October last year, but the UK Government has not gone far enough. Instead of making sure that banks pay their share, they are happy to impose years of painful stealth taxes on ordinary families.

People deserve much better than that. We, in the Parliament, are duty bound to ensure that our focus is squarely on the issues that make a material difference to the lives of the people who we are here to serve. That is why Liberal Democrats believe that all those who have seen their mortgage payments increase by a significant amount should be able to access a welfare support fund for grants to help cover some of the cost of that rise. That would protect families from

falling into arrears or losing their homes, and it is the right thing to do.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate.

16:43

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): We again find ourselves debating the cost of living crisis. It is critical to people across Scotland and it is the most important topic of conversation, bar none. It impacts on each and every one of our constituents, regardless of their financial circumstances, but there can be no doubt that the poorest and most vulnerable will be disproportionately affected.

We have an economy that has flatlined, a Government that has run out of ideas and a UK policy landscape that takes us back to George Osborne's austerity agenda. As we look set to embark on austerity 2.0, it is important that we consider what that will mean for our economy and our people in the years to come.

The OBR estimates that the measures that were outlined in the chancellor's budget last week will result in a 7 per cent drop in household incomes over the next two years, culminating in the biggest fall in living standards since records began, which is six decades ago. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development predicts that the British economy will contract by 0.4 per cent of gross domestic product next year and that it is already in recession. It also predicts that Russia will be the only advanced economy in the world to perform worse.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has issued a stark warning that, next year, some people in the UK could be up to £538 worse off than they are this year. There have also been warnings that unemployment could be about to surpass half a million by the end of 2024, with the economic and social consequences that that will have for our communities.

The worst part of it all is that we have already tried austerity economics; the Tories embarked on it in 2010 only for it to deliver flatlining growth and stagnating productivity while eroding the wages and conditions of working people. We know the human impact that it had, too. We saw it first hand in Glasgow, with recent research from the University of Glasgow and the Glasgow Centre for Population Health concluding that more than 330,000 excess deaths could be linked to the austerity programme that was pursued by the British Government during its 2010 to 2017 agenda. That is a grotesque failure of public policy that cannot be allowed to be repeated.

We are also in the, frankly, perverse situation in which those who lauded the tax-cutting, high-spending mini-budget of Truss and Kwarteng are the exact same people who are triumphantly applauding the tax-raising, austerity-imposing autumn budget of Sunak and Hunt. It is politicking at its most cynical, and voters will not forget it.

Labour has proposed a series of alternatives for our economy and a policy platform that stands in direct contrast to the one that has been outlined by the current Conservative Government. We want to see a publicly owned energy generation company, which both the Tories and the SNP have failed to implement despite having more than a decade to do it. We want to see the threshold for the top rate of income tax in Scotland dropped from £150,000 a year to £120,000 a year, which the Government has yet to agree to. We want to see a return of the mortgage to shared equity scheme, to which today's motion refers.

For all the reasons that we have discussed—many of which I think the majority of us agree on—we need tangible action in both the short and longer term. For too long, we have looked at our economy as though we are accountants, by shifting money from one portfolio to another portfolio without any real understanding of the economic impact and the economic multiplier effect that some of our decisions have.

We need a focus on public sector investment that will produce long-term growth and innovation. It is abundantly clear that more of the same economic austerity and doom loop of decline that has been handed down to our communities for too long simply will not work. It has never worked, it will not be accepted by working people and it should not be accepted by the Parliament. It is time to say that enough is enough.

16:47

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): Once again, as my colleague Paul Sweeney said, we are in the chamber to speak about a Tory-made financial crisis that is affecting people all across Scotland.

The uncertainty and fear caused by the disastrous Brexit that Scotland did not vote for and the catastrophic Tory mini-budget have had numerous financial consequences across the UK. Inflation has now risen, yet again, to 11.1 per cent, up from 10.1 per cent last month, which is the highest that it has been in my lifetime. The Bank of England has raised the base rate of interest by 0.75 percentage points to 3 per cent, which is the single biggest increase in over three decades, and not only did the budget crash the pound sterling, it put pensions at risk and, as we are here to discuss, sent mortgage payments sky high.

Not for the first time, the Scottish Government has had to enact policy to mitigate the ways in which the UK Government has hit the most vulnerable in society. Free prescriptions, free higher education and free concessionary bus travel—which now includes under-22s—free school meals and the recent Scottish child payment are all examples of Scottish Government policies that have helped those who need it most.

The Scottish Government's home owners support fund scheme is another such scheme, which is unique to Scotland. The fund helps home owners who run into financial difficulty and are at risk of losing their homes. Under the mortgage to shared equity scheme, the Scottish Government buys a stake of up to 30 per cent of an individual's property, which allows the home owner to reduce their secured loan. The scheme is dependent on the applicant meeting the eligibility criteria but, as the cabinet secretary said, the Scottish Government is looking at reviewing the fund, including those criteria.

Miles Briggs: Will the member take an intervention?

Fulton MacGregor: I do not think that I will have time. Sorry.

In addition to those supports, the Scottish Government is investing an additional £12.5 million to provide free advice services to help people with income maximisation and welfare and debt advice.

In the short time that I have had so far, I have only scratched the surface of the ways in which the Scottish Government is doing everything that it can to help those who are affected by the cost of living crisis but, unfortunately, it is evident that Scotland does not currently have the independent fiscal powers that are required to address this crisis more appropriately.

To build a more prosperous Scotland and a fairer future for the country, independence is not only desirable but essential. That is where I completely disagree with Alex Cole-Hamilton.

Daniel Johnson: Will the member take an intervention?

Fulton MacGregor: I will not take any interventions just now.

Today's ruling from the Supreme Court puts beyond any doubt we had that we are not in a voluntary union, which many of us have been saying for a while.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: Will the member take an intervention?

Fulton MacGregor: No.

One of the reasons why I have not taken any interventions—though I will see whether I have time when I get close to the end of my speech—is that I want to spend the rest of my time paying tribute to some of the amazing local charities and individuals in my constituency who are working to help people deal with this Tory-imposed cost of living crisis. It is important that we come to the chamber and do that, so my thanks go to Julie and her team at Cool School Uniforms; to Angela and her team at the Coatbridge food bank, in conjunction with the Xaverian Fathers; to Mags and all involved at the Moodiesburn food bank; to Father Kane and those involved in the St Augustine's stay connected project and the pantry; to Willie and all those at the Kirkshaws neighbourhood centre team; and to Theresa and her team at Glenboig Life Centre.

Those services provide food, clothing, support activities and even warm hubs, and all those organisations tell me that they are getting more and more referrals but, ironically, fewer donations. What is important in the context of the motion is that they are getting more and more people who are struggling with mortgages and more and more people who are in employment and in poverty—in working poverty.

Mark Griffin: I appreciate that the member will have many constituents who are struggling with their mortgages. Does he think that those constituents who are struggling can wait until the review, which runs up until the spring, finishes to get any help?

Fulton MacGregor: I appreciate Mark Griffin lodging the motion, because I think that it is important.

I think that the Scottish Government is doing a lot. I have already listed just some of the things that it is doing. However, it feels as though all that this Parliament is doing at times is mitigating what the Tories are introducing. Labour should be standing beside us at every opportunity and calling them out.

That brings me to my final points. I want to thank all those organisations that I mentioned, but they should not need to do that work. The Tory Government is taking us all for granted, relying on the Scottish Government, councils and kind-hearted charities and individuals to pick up the mess that it has created. I will end exactly where my colleague before me did and say that enough is enough.

16:51

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): Once again, we come to Parliament to discuss a vital issue. It is right that we are spending a great deal of time on it, because it is

the matter that is uppermost in the minds of our constituents as we move into the winter.

I agree with much of the Labour motion—something needs to be done and the SNP-Green devolved Government has not done enough to help people in Scotland. In fact, its latest rent freeze will add to the problem, as social landlords put their capital plans on hold.

We would all much prefer to see the focus of the Government being on the cost of living and not on the grievance politics of independence. We can always tell a Government's focus by its budget priorities. In Westminster, we have a Government that is investing in health, education and capital projects. In Scotland, we have a Government that sets money aside for independence and fake foreign embassies.

Our UK Government is focused on protecting the most vulnerable people, protecting services and ensuring that the tax burden is shared among us all, but is borne most by the highest earners, so I welcome the measures in the autumn statement.

Daniel Johnson: Will the member take an intervention?

Douglas Lumsden: I will if there is time later.

The key to helping mortgage payers in Scotland is to bring down inflation, to build growth and to ensure stability in our economy. That is what Rishi Sunak and Jeremy Hunt are focused on and that is what the autumn statement demonstrates.

Inflation is rising across the world. The UK's latest inflation rate is 11.1 per cent. That is lower than countries including the Netherlands, where the inflation rate is 16.8 per cent; Belgium, where it is 13.1 per cent; Germany, where it is 11.6 per cent; and Italy, where it is 12.6 per cent. In fact, the European Union as a whole has an inflation rate of 11.5 per cent, according to Euro indicators that were published last week. Of course, the nationalists do not like to hear that inflation is a global problem; it suits their separatist agenda to tell people that it is a UK problem and that only separation is the answer.

Daniel Johnson: Douglas Lumsden is right about the nationalists and their record, but he has to acknowledge the consequences of gilts going up to 4.5 per cent and what that rise has done to mortgage rates, which is a direct result of Liz Truss's decisions. I believe that he supported her in the Conservative Party leadership race.

Douglas Lumsden: I accept part of that, but what Daniel Johnson has to admit is that interest rates and inflation rates are rising all around the world, so to try to lay the blame at the foot of Downing Street is just not on.

Of course, part of the issue with rising house prices and rising rents is the SNP Government's abject failure to ensure an adequate supply of new housing in our communities. When I was leader of Aberdeen City Council, we launched the biggest council house building scheme in a generation, while the SNP Government missed its targets year after year.

More must be done—and the devolved SNP-Green Government has the powers to help. After today's Supreme Court ruling, it has an extra £20m in next year's budget to help.

Stuart McMillan: Will the member take an intervention?

Douglas Lumsden: I do not have any time.

From its launch in 2013, the help to buy (Scotland) scheme was used by thousands of new home buyers and in June 2020—only two years ago—the then housing minister Kevin Stewart announced that the Scottish Government was pledging a further £55 million to assist in a further 2,000 home purchases. However, when the news broke that the scheme was to be scrapped, Nicola Barclay, who is the chief executive of Homes for Scotland, described the move as “devastating”.

All we hear from the Government is blame politics: it is always someone else's fault. Apparently, independence would solve all of our ills as well as the cost of living crisis. That is living in cloud-cuckoo-land. Housing is a global problem that requires Governments to work together to solve it. The looming crisis in our housing sector comes after years of neglect by the SNP Government, so the failed SNP-Green coalition of chaos must do more. It must start investing in Scotland, our housing stock, our local communities, our hard working local government, and in the future of Scotland as part of the United Kingdom.

16:56

Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): I am pleased to speak in the debate about the Westminster-imposed cost of living crisis. It is a time of great concern for many of my constituents who are struggling to get by and to provide the basics for their families.

The Tories' disastrous mini budget, which it called on the Scottish Government to copy, has created a terrifying situation for many people. That budget made a difficult financial outlook even worse. As the motion points out, the situation is putting immense pressure on people in households with a mortgage. Recently, I spoke to a constituent who has a variable-rate mortgage. She described the fear that she experiences each time a letter from her mortgage provider arrives.

Of course, those letters never have good news—it is always bad, and there are a few options available to assist her.

We must do everything that we can to help people who have mortgages, which is why I welcome the fact that the Scottish Government is already reviewing the eligibility criteria for the home owners support fund. The support for mortgage interest scheme from the Department for Work and Pensions does not provide adequate help to people who are on universal credit. It is welcome that the Westminster budget statement announced that the waiting period for universal credit claimants before they can make claims will be reduced from nine months to three months. The removal of the earnings bar for making claims is also welcome. However, none of that is due to happen until next spring. It makes no sense to wait until spring to do that, when home owners need our help now.

I call on Labour and Tory members to join me in calling for the changes to be brought in immediately, which would allow help to be accessed now.

Mark Griffin: Will the member give way?

Marie McNair: No. I have a lot to get through.

The budget statement should have done so much more; it was a missed opportunity to provide the help that is needed to mitigate the cost of living crisis. Instead, it kept the five-week waiting time for universal credit, which is forcing people to go into debt. Millions of pounds need to go towards mitigating the two-child policy, the Tories' abhorrent rape clause, the bedroom tax and the benefits cap. Instead—to just give one example—the budget should have matched our Scottish child payment. The Child Poverty Action Group said:

“If the Scottish Government can make this kind of serious investment in protecting our children from poverty, then so too can the UK Government.”

However, it was more of the same from the Westminster Government: no compassion and no radical game-changing policies. In fact, Torsten Bell from the Resolution Foundation said that the Tories had delivered a budget with the “policies of Gordon Brown”.

My party is usually accused of saying that there is no difference between the Tories and Labour; we are seeing evidence that that might be true. We know that the cost of living crisis has been made worse by Brexit. The extreme Tory Brexit, which is now a policy of the Scottish Labour Party, is an unmitigated disaster for our country. Scotland's economy has been hammered by Brexit, which is hitting people's pockets badly. Just last week, MPs were told by a member of the Bank of England's monetary policy committee that Brexit has added 6 per cent to food prices. Back in

June, respected think tank the Resolution Foundation said that the average worker was on course to suffer more than £470 in lost earnings each year by 2030.

That is what the Tories and the Scottish Labour Party have to offer in the cost of living crisis—further misery and hardship, fuelled by their Brexit policies. The UK economy is in crisis and the new age of Tory austerity is on its way. Scotland deserves better than that, which is why Scottish independence is now essential.

16:59

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): The cost of home ownership is severely out of kilter with reality when it comes to the money that people earn and the amount that they are able to save.

Over the past year, the Bank of England base rate has increased from 0.1 per cent to 3 per cent. That is the sharpest increase in a generation and the highest rate since the 2008 financial crisis. When interest rates were briefly 14.8 per cent, in October 1989—also under Tory economic mismanagement—the average Scottish home cost around £35,000. That figure is now £195,000, but average weekly wages have barely doubled over the same period.

At the same time, individuals who have inherited wealth or property have seen their net worth accumulate at pace without property values being taxed, which has led to ever-higher prices, despite there being depressed wages. That has embedded wealth inequality and means that, especially in rural areas such as the Highlands and Islands, the prospect of owning a home—or even renting one affordably—has become ever more distant for young people.

For years, Labour and Tory Governments have insisted on fuelling buyer demand while failing to address the severe reality of the housing crisis by building more affordable homes, which has pushed house prices to record highs. If we add in the inflationary effects of years of cheap buy-to-let mortgages, banking deregulation and the decimation of social housing that was caused by the disastrous right-to-buy policy—which is, thankfully, now ended in Scotland—it is not hard to see why house prices have spiralled.

Daniel Johnson: Will the member take an intervention?

Ariane Burgess: I do not have time to give way. I am sorry.

If we factor in inflation, low wage growth, wealth inequality and rising rates, the outlook becomes even more bleak.

The pain that has been caused by skyrocketing bills, soaring prices, record inflation and the reckless Brexit that Labour and the Tories support is just starting to be felt in people's wallets when they go to the shops, consume energy in the home or fill vehicles up with fuel. It is bad now and it will, sadly, get worse.

Douglas Lumsden: Will the member take an intervention on that point?

Ariane Burgess: I am sorry, but I need to keep on.

In Scotland, with Greens in Government, we are choosing a different path. As well as the recently passed Cost of Living (Tenant Protection) (Scotland) Act 2022, which supports renters, we are addressing the housing crisis through discretionary housing payments to mitigate the financial triple whammy that is faced by people on low incomes as a result of the unfair bedroom tax, reductions in housing allowance and the introduction of the benefit cap.

We are also looking to the future, with our ambitious commitment to build 110,000 homes by 2030—with 11,000 in rural areas, and 70 per cent of the total being affordable—and to provide support for homeowners to reduce their fuel bills through energy efficiency measures.

I welcome the Scottish Government's review of eligibility for the fund, but we must all acknowledge the sad reality that, as more homeowners come to the end of fixed-rate deals, the impact of the Tory Government's reckless behaviour and financial illiteracy will only increase.

It is clear that Westminster is not working for Scotland or our economy and that, without the full fiscal levers of an independent country, we can barely begin to challenge the enormous social inequality that the housing and fiscal policies of Labour and Tory Governments have created.

17:03

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I have heard a few misguided statements in this debate. For example, Marie McNair attacked Labour, but she seems to forget that, when Labour was in power, it lifted more than 2.5 million children and pensioners out of poverty. If she goes back and looks at that record and Labour's approach, she will see that there was a greater redistribution of wealth in that period than occurred at any other time.

It is easy to stand in the chamber and make comments attacking other people without talking about the facts, but we should focus on the facts, because, out there in the real world, the big issue today is not Scotland's constitution but the fact that people are sitting worried and terrified about

how they are going to get through this winter and the cost of living crisis.

Talking about being deluded, I note that Douglas Lumsden made deluded comments that completely deny the situation that we find ourselves in. The crisis has been created by the Tories in Downing Street. They crashed the economy with a budget that was clearly going to drive up interest rates, is driving up mortgages and is frightening people. That is why Labour is saying that we need action now, not in the future.

Shona Robison said that her Government is conducting a review, and Ben Macpherson also referred to that. That is great, and I hope that the Government will include other parties in that discussion. However, we do not have months and months to wait for a review—we need to take action now. If those people who are sitting terrified reach the point at which, as Mark Griffin said, their only option is to lose their house, that is the point at which we should step in.

Shona Robison: The review is on-going; it is already under way and will be concluded in the spring. It is important to get it right to make sure that it will actually help that wider group of people who might need help over the coming months.

Alex Rowley: I agree that it is important to get it right, but I hope that the cabinet secretary will agree that there is a certain urgency to that.

If the Scottish Tories really want to do something to stand up for the poorest in Scotland, they should reject Tory austerity, because we have not got over the last round of Tory austerity, which led to many of the problems that we have in Scotland.

Miles Briggs: The member started his speech by looking for facts. The UK Government budget provides an extra £1.5 billion for Scotland's public services. Does he not acknowledge that that is additional money for the services that we all care about?

Alex Rowley: As a direct result of the UK Government's crass budget, inflation has shot up, which has immediately taken £1.8 billion out of the Scottish budget. That problem came directly from failed Tory policy.

We are talking about housing, and we are not building enough houses. I am sure that I am not the only MSP who has people coming to their office week after week, unable to get housing. Is that not heartbreaking? We need to build far more houses. We need a national house-building programme for Scotland. That would be helpful—

Stuart McMillan: Will the member take a brief intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No—Mr Rowley is winding up.

Alex Rowley: The Mental Health Foundation sent a briefing that every MSP should read. People are frightened and concerned. We need this Parliament to come together, not to put counter-motions and amendments, but to start talking about what the immediate priority should be in Scotland. The priority should be that nobody loses their house. Part of that was addressed through Mercedes Villalba pushing for the rent freeze, which has been put in place, but the next part is the proposal that Mark Griffin has put forward. Let us work together to ensure that nobody is evicted this winter and that nobody loses their house because of failed Tory economic policies.

17:08

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am grateful for the opportunity to debate once again the on-going cost of living crisis. I support the amendment in the name of Miles Briggs.

The motion talks about the challenges that many people are facing, including higher mortgage repayments, as well as challenges in relation to social rented properties, first-time buyers and home support funds. It also points out, quite rightly, that the Scottish Government should be using every lever and power at its disposal to help people through many of those challenges. Along with my Conservative colleagues, I have been clear that the cost of living crisis must be tackled from all directions and is a responsibility for all levels of government.

Last week, the UK Government set out its plans for how it will continue to support people through the crisis. I am sure that members on all sides of the chamber agree that countries around the world are facing significant challenges in the current economic climate and are having to take difficult decisions as a result. In spite of those challenges, last week's autumn statement showed us that the UK Government is continuing to do what it can to provide further support.

As my party's—

Stuart McMillan: Will the member take an intervention?

Alexander Stewart: Of course.

Stuart McMillan: Does Alexander Stewart agree that the inflation issue will not help any registered social landlord to build more homes? That problem has mostly been caused by his Government in London.

Alexander Stewart: As we have already heard today, inflation is an international issue, and inflation in other parts of Europe and across the world is higher than it is here, in the United Kingdom.

As I said, I am sure that we all agree that we are facing significant challenges and have decisions to make. The autumn statement showed that the UK Government is managing matters as we go forward.

As my party's spokesman for older people, I echo comments made by Age Scotland that there is much to welcome in the autumn statement. The pensions triple lock will bring much-needed security to households. People rely on state pension income, and the further cost of living payments to all pensioner households will also provide key support.

It should also be welcomed that the energy price guarantee has now been extended to April 2024. Although the price of energy over the coming years remains somewhat uncertain, current estimates predict that extending the support will cost to the tune of around £12 billion. Such universal support is closely monitored, and we will have to see what happens as we move forward. As the economic situation continues to develop, it will be important for the UK Government to keep an eye on that support and keep it under review, and I look forward to ensuring that that is the case.

I have already made clear that the SNP Government should also be using every power at its disposal to ensure that people receive support. It is welcome that the Scottish child payment finally includes all eligible children up to the age 16 at the new higher rate of £25 per week. That payment will be a great support to many families over the coming months, which is why it was supported by all parties in the chamber.

However, it is clear that more can still be done on the part of the Scottish Government. A further cost of living support fund for the most vulnerable families could be a great help to many over the winter. It could, no doubt, be funded in part by the £20 million that is earmarked for an independence referendum.

It is clear that the solution to this on-going crisis will be one that sees both Scotland's Governments working together—and they need to work together. The Scottish Government has no shortage of powers to lean on, and, as we have heard today, there is no shortage of ideas when it comes to ensuring that individuals are supported. People across Scotland expect those powers to be used to tackle the issues that really matter to them, and it is high time that their expectations became a reality.

17:12

Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): I thank Mr Griffin for bringing this debate to the chamber on what is an important issue. However, let me say at the beginning that the motion seems a strange one for the Labour Party to lodge at the Scottish Parliament, which has no locus over mortgage interest rates, which are a reserved matter. The Parliament can only offer very limited support to home buyers within a severely constrained budget.

Perhaps members would benefit from a quick refresh of the history of where this crisis really started. The current situation that is faced by mortgage holders lies in the disastrous financial crash that was presided over by the Labour Party from 2008 to 2010. Gordon Brown, as a long-serving UK Chancellor of the Exchequer and later as Prime Minister, followed a Tory-style laissez-faire attitude to the nation's finances, and allowed unbridled greed and naked rapacity to run amok and unchecked. The result was inevitable: a financial crash, which we the taxpayers bailed out at huge expense.

In 2008, the national debt stood at £800 billion, and by 2010 it had risen to £1.2 trillion. It now stands at £2.4 trillion. The Tories, who took over from Labour, failed to focus on economic recovery. Since then, we have faced tough austerity measures, as a result of which many across the country have suffered.

However, let us be clear: the Tories have only built on the foundations that Labour laid. Economic incompetence has been prevalent under both Labour and Tory Governments to an extent that is breathtaking. That is why we are here today: that is why households are being pushed into poverty with sky-high mortgage interest rates and having to make tough decisions between heating and eating this winter.

I emphasise that Scotland does not have the full financial powers that it needs, but it is still doing more than any other Government in the four nations in the UK to offer the best support to low-income households. It offers the home owners support fund, which is the only scheme of its kind in the UK. The fund supports those who face difficulties paying their mortgage or who face repossession. I welcome the Scottish Government reviewing the fund, including the eligibility rules, in light of the cost of living crisis.

Just recently, the Scottish Government again lead the way when it increased its Scottish child payment, which is available only in Scotland, to £25 a week for eligible households. Anti-poverty campaigners described that as

“a watershed moment for tackling poverty in Scotland, and the rest of the UK should take notice.”

Unfortunately, it appears that the chancellor chose to ignore those calls in his autumn statement. That shows a clear choice not to help the most vulnerable households, which is an incredibly cruel decision.

This year, the Scottish Government has committed almost £3 billion to mitigate the burden of the cost of living crisis on household budgets. Those measures have been taken at the same time as maintaining free prescriptions, free school meals and free concessionary bus travel, which was extended to the under-22s this year. Households in Scotland benefit from the most generous social contract in any part of the UK.

Scotland should not have to suffer because of the damaging choices that Labour and Tory Governments have made over too many years. It is only with full fiscal powers that the Scottish Government can tackle the cost of living crisis fully. It is clear now more than ever that Scottish independence is the only viable option to ensure that we put a complete end to the destructive path that this UK Tory Government is leading us down, ably assisted by its Labour Party acolytes.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): We move to the closing speeches. I call Liz Smith.

17:17

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I thank Labour for bringing this debate to the chamber, as I believe that the public wants us as a Parliament to concentrate on the issues that matter most to them. Undoubtedly, the cost of living is the biggest priority, as was set out in the research that the David Hume Institute published yesterday.

I say that in the middle of a two-week period of parliamentary business in which I understand that concerns have been expressed on all sides about the lack of Government statements on crucial issues such as the teachers' strike, ambulance staff and two-tier NHS dental provision. I also say that on a day when, yet again, the focus has been on the constitution. Therefore, even if my party has vastly different political views from those of the Labour Party, we support it in bringing this issue to the chamber.

Several members have rightly expressed their concerns about the current state of affairs with regard to the economy. The OBR has been blunt in its analysis of the fragility of the economy, particularly when it comes to the erosion of living standards and the projections of low growth and productivity, and about the fact that, sadly, there is little optimism that the situation will be short lived. The chancellor has also been blunt in his

analysis—I welcome his honesty in comparison with previous budget statements—and he is clear that there must be a completely different focus so that those on the lowest incomes are protected and that a greater tax burden is placed on those with broader shoulders. I do not find that easy to say as a Conservative, but I believe that that is the right thing to do.

I think that Alexander Stewart commented on the cautious welcome that was given to that focus in the autumn statement by Age Scotland, particularly when it comes to retention of the triple lock and the energy price guarantee being extended to 2024.

It is fair to make the point, as I think that Fulton MacGregor did, that the Scottish Government has uplifted the Scottish child payment to address issues. He is absolutely right, as doing so can be extremely helpful.

However, on the perspective of Labour and the SNP in this debate—particularly that of Alex Rowley for Labour and Marie McNair for the SNP—I say that the interest rates aspect of the cost of living situation is not solely down to problems with the UK Government. As I acknowledged in the previous cost of living debate, those problems are part of the issue, but they are not the sole problem at all.

The interest rates are down to global trends, which stretch back to the early part of—

Daniel Johnson: Will the member give way?

Liz Smith: If the member does not mind, I will just finish this point. They are down to global trends that stretch back to the early part of 2021, when the central banks in many emerging markets made clear that they were not going to do anything other than raise their interest rates. They were followed by the more advanced economies in the latter part of 2021.

I know that the member will have looked at the International Monetary Fund analysis that clarifies that point. It is not solely down to the UK Government that we have this problem. It is a global situation. I give way to the member.

Daniel Johnson: I am very grateful. However, the member would have to acknowledge that gilts at the start of this year were up 1 per cent, they spiked to 4.5 per cent, and they have not yet come below 3 per cent for five years. That is a major component of the cost of mortgages, and it is exclusively an issue for the UK.

Liz Smith: I acknowledged that in this debate and also in the previous debate. It is part of the issue, but it is not the sole issue, and I think that it is incumbent on the other parties in this chamber to recognise that it is not the sole issue, because this is a global situation. When we look at all the

economic analysis, which Mr Johnson and I have plenty of opportunity to do in the Finance and Public Administration Committee, it is very clear that these inflationary pressures were not made just in this country—that is not true at all.

Stuart McMillan: Will Ms Smith take an intervention?

Liz Smith: I think that I am past my time.

The Presiding Officer: Ms Smith is past time, unfortunately.

Liz Smith: I just want to finish on this point. This is a serious issue. I believe firmly that the public want us to be focused very much on this problem. However, let us keep it in perspective given the facts that are available and the economic analysis that we have to hand. This is not just a problem that has been made in the UK—far from it.

I am very happy to support the amendment in the name of Miles Briggs.

17:21

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government (Shona Robison): Let me first welcome this debate, and ideas from across the chamber. Alex Rowley was quite right to call for us to work together where we can, and I will certainly attempt to do that, whether on this issue or others.

I will start with the record on affordable housing delivery. The Scottish Government has, according to all the available facts, led the way across the UK, with almost 113,000 affordable homes having been delivered since 2007. That is important, because all the poverty bodies that analyse these things say that the key reason why child poverty levels are lower in Scotland is the delivery of affordable housing. More than 79,000 homes have been delivered for social rent, including more than 19,000 council homes. A £3.6 billion package of investment has been made available this parliamentary session for the delivery of affordable homes, so that we can continue the important work that we started in 2007. We have also helped 19,000 households into home ownership since 2007.

Daniel Johnson: I acknowledge the points that the cabinet secretary makes about affordable housing, but in its totality, house building across all sectors has still to recover from the 2008 crash. In terms of the affordability of housing, the overall supply is important, is it not?

Shona Robison: The overall supply is important. Daniel Johnson will be aware that part of the issue is that the post-Covid recovery of the construction sector, inflation and interest rates all impact on all sectors of house building. That

makes it really difficult to ensure that we get as much value from that £3.6 billion, which is, of course, grown by registered social landlords and local authorities in making that package go further.

However, it is an understatement to say that the Tories lack credibility in this area, with their total denial of responsibility. Clearly their briefing sheets for this debate said something like, "Talk about global issues and global factors. Shift the blame." Well, the blame cannot be shifted. Whether because of their responsibility for soaring interest rates and what that means for mortgage holders, or because of the UK Tory Government's delivery of affordable housing, the truth is that they have no credibility in this area. This is a Tory-caused cost of living crisis and people will have to pick up the pieces.

Miles Briggs: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Shona Robison: In just a minute—I will let Miles Briggs in once I have outlined what his Government has been delivering on affordable homes. In the past four years, Scotland has seen 62 per cent more affordable homes delivered per head of population than in England where the Tories are in power. Nine times as many social rented homes have been delivered in Scotland per head of population. That situation has led to some terrible cases being raised recently about appalling housing conditions in England. If Miles Briggs wants to explain why that is, in comparison with the record of delivery here, I will let him in on that point.

Miles Briggs: When it comes to appalling housing standards, the cabinet secretary should start looking in the mirror because, here in the capital, we have a record number of children living in temporary accommodation. That is on her watch, and she should hang her head in shame for that alone.

Let me tell the cabinet secretary what the UK Government is doing. We have provided £1.5 billion in additional money for public services. We have protected the triple lock and we are increasing benefits in line with inflation. We are raising the national living wage to £10.42 per hour and capping energy bills until 2024. That is a record to be proud of. The cabinet secretary should start thinking about her own responsibilities.

The Presiding Officer: Briefly, in closing, cabinet secretary.

Shona Robison: The UK Tory Government has an appalling record on affordable housing delivery, and Miles Briggs knows it.

As for investment, inflation has ripped £1.7 billion-worth of investment out of the Scottish

Government's budget availability. Miles Briggs talks about investment in affordable housing and temporary accommodation, but he wants to take money out of the affordable housing supply programme and put it into helping the better-off to purchase their homes. He needs to explain to people in this city why he wants to do that at their expense, because essentially that is what will happen.

Miles Briggs rose—

The Presiding Officer: You must conclude, cabinet secretary. I am sorry, Mr Briggs, but the cabinet secretary must conclude now.

Shona Robison: So—

The Presiding Officer: I am sorry, but we are well over time, so you must conclude.

Shona Robison: Okay. In conclusion, this cost crisis is impacting on everyone—

The Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary, I must ask you to conclude.

Shona Robison: We will review the home owners support fund, and we will be happy to work with others in doing that.

17:26

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): At the beginning of the debate, I was reflecting with my colleague Mark Griffin that it was somewhat more even-tempered than the previous one. However, it livened up towards the end, and rightly so, because there is no more important issue than housing. Much of what we do here ultimately hinges on access to affordable housing.

I can think of no better contribution to which to point members than that of Alex Rowley, who gave an impassioned statement of why the issue is urgent. People are facing real pressures, and for many people they are new. We brought the debate to the Parliament because the cost of living crisis is affecting all sorts of people, including people who might not have expected to face the challenges that they now face. I have to say that, when I returned home yesterday, I found to my horror that my smart meter was registering £12 for my total utility charges for the second day running, because of the effect of the weather. I can afford that, although it is not pleasant or something that I look forward to. However, that situation is being replicated all over the country. What does it mean in terms of people keeping a roof over their heads?

We have an opportunity, because we have a ready-made policy that is sitting on the books and can help people but that right now is doing nothing. As Mark Griffin pointed out, the mortgage to shared equity scheme has not had a successful

application since 2016. I appreciate the constructive comments from Ben Macpherson and Shona Robison about our proposition, but I ask them to act with more urgency. I say that for the simple reason that, based on Bank of England data, it seems that, in the next two quarters, approximately 60,000 Scots will see their two-year fixed-rate mortgages come to an end and will have to remortgage. That will mean 60,000 people suddenly facing the reality of increased utility bills and increased mortgage bills.

Those people need help urgently, and they might not be able to wait until the spring. We absolutely need a review, but a review has been going on since the summer. We could make changes right now that might be able to help those people, which is what we are asking for today.

I have to say to the Conservatives that, although I appreciate the candour of some of their comments, they really need a reality check. We have listened to some members banging on about inflation, and I accept that there are global issues around inflation, but let us look at the facts, as Alex Rowley asked us to do. Yields for five-year gilts spiked by the largest single daily increase since black Wednesday. That cost of borrowing directly impacts on the ability of mortgage providers to provide products, which is why almost 1,000 mortgages were taken off the market on the day of the mini-budget.

We have heard a lot about the autumn statement, but we have not heard so much about the mini-budget, and I think that a little bit of contrition from the Tories would go a long way, because I would like to praise them for doing some things. Miles Briggs was absolutely right to talk about total housing supply. To be frank, we have struggled to achieve the levels that we were achieving consistently in Scotland prior to the financial crash, when there were between 27,000 and 28,000 completions per year. Quite simply, we have never achieved those levels since then. We saw some signs of encouragement before Covid, but the issues relating to housing supply existed before Covid, and we must look at supply in totality.

Miles Briggs: Like me, the member will be speaking to housing associations across the region that we represent. Due to the rent control legislation, they are now looking at their investment portfolios and taking affordable housing out of their future capital projects. That will result in fewer homes for our constituents. Does the member acknowledge that that legislation was a mistake?

Daniel Johnson: It was vital that we took urgent action to protect people who rent their housing, who faced an affordability crisis. We will need to look at what happens in the spring—

Miles Briggs: Will the member take another intervention?

Daniel Johnson: I have acknowledged the point that Miles Briggs made. We needed to take urgent action, but we also need to have in place long-term solutions.

Do I need to wind up, Presiding Officer?

The Presiding Officer: You have half a minute left.

Daniel Johnson: Fulton MacGregor was absolutely right to mention local charities in his constituency. I have had those same conversations with food banks and even with local football clubs. They are seeking to provide direct financial advice because they recognise that people need it, and we are often talking about people who have not had to seek such advice previously. Therefore, the situation is urgent.

However, I gently say to SNP members who offer independence as a solution that, if we were independent, in relation to mortgages that were held in sterling, our new currency would face an immediate devaluation. The SNP's own advisers are saying that that is a real risk. How would that help with the affordability of mortgages?

We need realistic propositions, not fantasy ones. We need action now, not in the spring.

NHS Forth Valley

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is a statement by Humza Yousaf, who will give an update on NHS Forth Valley. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of his statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

17:32

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Humza Yousaf):

There is no doubt whatsoever that the past two and a half years have, in the face of a global pandemic, been easily the most difficult that the national health service has ever faced. It is my belief that the vast majority of the public are understanding about the difficulties but, equally, they quite rightly expect their health board to provide the required leadership to navigate through these really difficult waters.

Over the past year, a number of elected members from across the chamber have raised a variety of concerns relating to the services that are being provided by Forth Valley NHS Board. Today, I am providing an update on the actions that we have been taking, and will continue to take, to address those concerns.

I confirm that the Scottish Government has taken the decision to escalate NHS Forth Valley to stage 4 of the NHS Scotland performance escalation framework. We are doing so for reasons relating to governance, leadership and culture.

The Scottish Government has been engaging with NHS Forth Valley for some time on a range of performance-related issues. Members might be aware of recent reports that were published by Healthcare Improvement Scotland in relation to safe delivery of care in Forth Valley royal hospital. This year, HIS has carried out several unannounced safe delivery of care inspections due to on-going concerns about safe delivery of care. HIS has escalated its concerns to the Scottish Government because it has not seen the required improvement in NHS Forth Valley since the initial inspection that it undertook. HIS is expected to publish its most recent report in the coming few weeks.

There are also concerns about the sustainability and integration of general practice out-of-hours services in the region; indeed, we have had a members' business debate on that very issue. In accident and emergency departments, there has been consistently poor performance against the four-hour standard, and there are issues related to integration of social care services.

Although poor performance in any of those discrete areas is of concern, I expect effective governance, strong leadership and improved culture to deliver sustainable change. Unfortunately, I have not seen the leadership that is required to drive improvement in those areas of concern, which is why the focus of the escalation is on governance, leadership and culture.

Stage 4 escalation comes into effect from today, Wednesday 23 November, and brings direct formal oversight and co-ordinated engagement from the Scottish Government in the form of an assurance board, which Christine McLaughlin, who is the director of population health, will chair. The purpose of the assurance board is, first, to support NHS Forth Valley in determining what steps are necessary to ensure delivery of high-quality governance, leadership and culture, and in doing so to support improvements in a range of performance and quality-related issues.

Secondly, the assurance board is to advise the director general for health and social care, through agreed governance routes, that such steps have been taken. The DG will update me regularly.

Through delivery of that work, the assurance board will seek to ensure that appropriate governance is in place—in particular, with regard to providing scrutiny of performance, leadership style and practice.

The assurance board will scrutinise the NHS Forth Valley improvement plan and hold the leadership to account for effective delivery of improvement actions in the agreed timescales. In doing so, we will work to ensure that the leadership is operating effectively and inclusively—particularly in respect of understanding and managing performance issues—and that a positive and inclusive culture exists in NHS Forth Valley.

The group will also consider any lessons learned that could be shared across NHS Scotland, and it will provide advice on the future escalation status of NHS Forth Valley, including criteria for de-escalation.

The first meeting of the assurance board will take place next week to ensure that improvements are delivered as quickly as possible. I have asked Professor Hazel Borland, who is the former nurse director and interim chief executive of NHS Ayrshire and Arran, and Dr John Harden, who is the deputy national clinical director, to lead the senior-level external support for the board. HIS will provide tailored support, too, in order to deliver on the actions that it set out following recent inspections.

Professor Borland brings a wealth of experience. She will work jointly with Dr Harden, Scottish Government directors, HIS and other

delivery partners to support the senior leadership team in its delivery of the required improvements. That work includes supporting NHS Forth Valley in the development, agreement and delivery of a co-ordinated improvement plan across the affected service areas.

As I have already set out, the Scottish Government has been engaging with NHS Forth Valley for an extended period across a range of issues, as part of standard board sponsorship work and in response to on-going concerns. That engagement and on-going support have been crucial in providing the board's leadership with the time and space to take responsibility for change in its own organisation.

Escalation is a last resort. We have not taken the decision lightly, and we have had to take it following consistent demonstration that the NHS Forth Valley leadership team is unable to follow through with the required transformational change without additional formal support and monitoring.

To that effect, John Burns, who is the chief operating officer for NHS Scotland, and Caroline Lamb, who is the director general for health and social care, met the chair and chief executive of NHS Forth Valley. I, too, have spoken to the chief executive and the chair today to convey my concern, and to articulate clearly my expectations for immediate and sustained improvement in the period ahead. They have agreed that the assurance board will review and scrutinise the improvement plan that the NHS Forth Valley leadership team will develop, which will set out short-term, medium-term and longer-term actions.

I expect the improvement plan to be developed and presented to the assurance board for scrutiny at its first meeting next week, with a focus on completion of immediate actions in a matter of weeks, as opposed to months. Although lasting change will take time, it is crucial that we see urgent and tangible improvement in the coming weeks and months.

NHS Forth Valley already has a number of clear actions and recommendations against which we expect it to deliver, which include work to strengthen the integration of health and social care and out-of-hours services, and to make improvements in unscheduled care and mental health services.

I expect NHS Forth Valley's leadership to work collaboratively with its council and integration joint board partners to deliver the necessary changes, including the development of a shared narrative that expresses its ambition for integration of health and social care services in the territory. I also expect NHS Forth Valley to take the findings of the Healthcare Improvement Scotland inspections extremely seriously. It is imperative that the

leadership team delivers immediate improvements against the recommendations and requirements that are set out in those reports. Of course, I will closely monitor progress in that regard.

NHS Forth Valley is also one of the poorest-performing boards with regard to psychological therapies and child and adolescent mental health services, and there has been less progress than we had hoped for in those services, compared with other areas. We have been providing tailored support, to help to meet the standard, as well providing access to professional advice. We have also been ensuring that the board has robust improvement plans in place. Again, those are all being closely monitored.

The actions that I have described today are not exhaustive, but they provide an insight into the type of change that is required in the health board, and they will support NHS Forth Valley to remove the barriers that are impacting on its operational performance and pandemic recovery.

I put on record my thanks to, and appreciation of, the staff who are working tirelessly across NHS Scotland and, indeed, in NHS Forth Valley, to deliver the high-quality care that we expect. The stage 4 escalation that I have announced today is not a reflection on staff, who are working tirelessly to provide care for the population of Forth Valley. However, we must recognise that there are continuing concerns about the ability of the leadership in NHS Forth Valley to respond effectively to those issues when they are raised.

Although it will take time for NHS Forth Valley to assure the public and the Scottish Government that sustained improvement has been made, I hope that this statement provides some assurance that significant work is already under way to address the legitimate concerns that have been raised. I will continue to update Parliament as progress is made. I am happy to continue to engage with elected members across the chamber.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. The cabinet secretary will now take questions on the issues that were raised in his statement. I will allow around 20 minutes for questions, after which we will move to the next item of business. I will be grateful if members who wish to ask a question press their request-to-speak buttons now.

Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): I welcome the announcement, and I fully support the bullied, broken and burnt-out front-line staff of NHS Forth Valley, but I also urge patients to continue to attend when required, because the staff are still excellent.

As shocking as the allegations at Forth Valley royal hospital are, this is only one example of how the health service under the Scottish National

Party simply is not working. Five consultants quitting in NHS Forth Valley admits to a culture of bullying; £2.8 million paid out in compensation in NHS Highland admits to a culture of bullying; and complaints of harassment in NHS Tayside tripling over five years is due to a culture of bullying. Yet a freedom of information request that I submitted to NHS Forth Valley revealed that no NHS Forth Valley managers have faced any sanctions.

A bullying culture seems to be widespread throughout our NHS. Insiders at Forth Valley royal hospital have called it “unsafe”, “toxic” and a “war zone” and said that staff are working in “intolerable conditions”. However, what struck me the most was a quotation claiming that there has been an

“irretrievable breakdown of necessary working relationships”

between staff and leaders. Therefore, my question to the cabinet secretary is whether, given that allegations of a toxic culture date back to July last year, he will guarantee that action will be taken against those responsible and whether he can commit to a root-and-branch investigation of that toxic culture in NHS Forth Valley but also across Scotland.

Humza Yousaf: I thank Sandesh Gulhane for his question and I associate myself with his remarks. I also reiterate my remarks at the end of my statement, namely that this process is not a reflection on the hard-working, exceptional staff right across NHS Forth Valley. Regardless of what job they have in NHS Forth Valley, they are an integral part of that health service and that health board.

I included culture in the escalation framework because of many of the concerns that the member is right to raise and which other members have raised in the chamber. Therefore, immediate improvement and sustained improvement—it is important that I emphasise the word “sustained”—in the culture in NHS Forth Valley are key.

I do not agree with the member’s assertion that there is a widespread bullying culture in the NHS. In an organisation the size of the NHS, which is the largest employer in the country, unfortunately, there will be issues around culture. It is important that we address those and, therefore, I am absolutely committed to doing that.

Having met every whistleblowing champion across the boards in Scotland, I say categorically that I not only support whistleblowing as an important mechanism to raise concerns but hope that every member of the NHS feels confident in the whistleblowing processes. Their complaints will be taken with the utmost seriousness.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I will start on a point of consensus with the cabinet secretary.

Today’s decision is not a reflection of the dedication and hard work of staff, who are working day and night to care for patients. Instead, it demonstrates beyond doubt that the cabinet secretary has let down the staff and patients in Forth Valley.

The facts speak for themselves: the health board is repeatedly the worst performing for A and E waiting times, despite the valiant efforts of A and E consultants and nurses. The most recent figures show that, in September, only 58.8 per cent of patients were seen within four hours. The Royal College of Emergency Medicine is clear: it has warned that long waits result in poorer patient outcomes and risk lives. In June this year, Healthcare Improvement Scotland published its inspection report, which flagged up serious concerns about patient safety due to a lack of nurses.

This is not a health board problem; it is a system-wide NHS problem over which the cabinet secretary presides. Will he explain why, given the clear risk of harm to patients, it has taken six months for him to act?

Humza Yousaf: The concerns about A and E that Jackie Baillie expresses are not only ones that I share but ones that, I suspect, are shared across the chamber and the population of Forth Valley. That is one of the reasons why I have asked Dr John Harden, who, as well as being the deputy national clinical director, works as an A and E consultant in NHS Lanarkshire, to assist. He will bring specific expertise in that regard.

It is reasonable for Jackie Baillie to ask why it is taking so long. Being in the midst of a global pandemic, our A and E departments across the country are challenged. Escalation is genuinely a last resort, so we have been working with the board to see where improvement can be made. There have been weeks where there have been fluctuations and we have seen some improvement but that has not been sustained. That word is incredibly important. We want to see not just immediate improvement but sustained improvement.

The reason why we have got to this point and why it has taken some time is that we do not take the decision to escalate lightly. It is an absolute last resort, particularly when we are escalating to level 4. I am happy to keep Jackie Baillie updated, particularly on A and E services.

Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): I thank the cabinet secretary for his statement. The situation that he outlines is serious. I know from my previous career, including managing large transformational change programmes, that organisational culture is set from the top.

I understand that the chair of the board is very experienced and I am sure that she is aware of how serious the situation is. Will the cabinet secretary confirm that the board, and the chair in particular, understands the relationship between its overarching governance, leadership and culture? Is the board ready to demonstrate that it has what it takes to turn the situation around?

Humza Yousaf: Michelle Thomson is right in what she says. Leadership comes from the top and people take a view from the leadership in relation to the culture that permeates throughout the board.

In my discussions today with the chair and chief executive, I made my expectations very clear. We have many strategies and documents, but they are only as good as their implementation. That is why I have asked the assurance board, which will be chaired by Christine McLaughlin, to ensure that we are not just hearing words of comfort and reassurance but seeing tangible improvements from the top—from the leadership—that permeate throughout the organisation.

However, the proof of the pudding will be in the eating. Therefore, we will wait to see what the improvement plan says and the timescales that are involved. As Michelle Thomson would expect, I will personally monitor that. I will be absolutely clear: I expect to see some immediate improvements and those improvements to be sustained over a period.

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): NHS Forth Valley moving into level 4 is a damning indictment of the board, which is required to ensure that facilities across NHS Forth Valley are safe and fit for purpose.

In his statement, the cabinet secretary said that he will ensure that leadership operate in an effective and inclusive manner, particularly when understanding and managing performance issues. Numerous whistleblowers have contacted me to express concern that they are not being listened to by management and are experiencing workplace bullying and poor working conditions. They complain of a toxic environment. How will the cabinet secretary address whistleblowers' concerns and ensure that that toxic culture is stamped out, once and for all?

Humza Yousaf: I thank Alexander Stewart, who has often raised with me concerns about NHS Forth Valley—most recently, just last week—in a very constructive manner. As I said to his colleague Sandesh Gulhane, the issues that they raised are why the escalation framework relates to leadership and culture.

On the back of what Alexander Stewart said, I will meet the whistleblowing champion and some of the people who are involved in whistleblowing at

NHS Forth Valley, to see whether there is further support that we can offer.

I will also speak to Christine McLaughlin, who will head the assurance board. She already knows my thoughts on this, but I will reiterate the importance that we place on effective whistleblowing in NHS Forth Valley.

The Presiding Officer: There is much interest in the statement. I would like to get all members in, and I would be grateful if speakers would bear that in mind.

Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): Patient safety is key in all this, so Healthcare Improvement Scotland's independent inspections of Forth Valley royal hospital are welcome. Will the cabinet secretary provide an update on the next steps that we can expect, following the inspections?

Humza Yousaf: I agree whole-heartedly with Stephanie Callaghan that HIS's inspections and unannounced inspections provide a great source of information and, at times—including these circumstances—cause for great alarm, particularly when improvements have not been made between inspections. When a number of inspections have taken place but we have not seen the requisite improvements, that gives me great concern, and that is one of the significant reasons why we decided to escalate to level 4.

I understand that HIS will publish an update in relation to its most recent inspection at the beginning of next month.

Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests.

While we all await the outcome of a follow-up inspection by Healthcare Improvement Scotland, patients are still being nursed in overcrowded wards, consultants are leaving in droves and workers are not being paid properly, because of management interference in a job evaluation scheme. Why has the health secretary not acted before, given that state of affairs and that level of risk?

Humza Yousaf: I do not agree with the premise of Richard Leonard's question. This Government stands on a good record in relation to staffing of the NHS. There are areas where that has been challenged, but we have record high levels of staffing, including record high levels of nursing staffing.

On fair pay, our nurses and agenda for change staff are the best paid in comparison with anywhere else in the UK. We are still in the midst of those negotiations, as I suspect Richard Leonard knows very well. I am grateful to trade unions for directly raising with me concerns about

staffing, and I hope that we will get to a positive outcome.

Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I am sure that members agree that it is vital that we ensure that plans for improvement include a focus on reducing pressures on the valued staff of NHS Forth Valley, as we would wish for NHS staff anywhere in Scotland. Can the cabinet secretary say more about the steps that are being taken to engage with front-line staff and their unions, to address their concerns and support the delivery of care in the current circumstances?

Humza Yousaf: Emma Roddick is absolutely accurate in mentioning the workload pressures on staff in NHS Forth Valley and right across NHS Scotland, which is still dealing with the impact of the pandemic. We know that people are presenting at A and E departments and entering the acute sector with a higher level of acuity, for example. That is why I will continue my engagement with trade unions in that regard.

We will also do what we can to increase staffing. As the member knows, in my most recent winter update, I announced further funding to recruit 750 nurses, midwives and allied health professionals from overseas. We will continue to invest in staffing to help our NHS during what will probably be one of the most difficult winters that it has ever faced.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): The issues that have been brought to the Parliament by the cabinet secretary this evening are deeply alarming, and I know that staff and patients will want a positive outcome from the steps that he outlined in his statement.

One of his most concerning points was that Forth Valley is one of the poorest performing boards on child and adolescent mental health services and psychological therapies. That will undoubtedly impact on the children and young people who live there and are waiting for treatment. Will any specific steps will be taken to improve Forth Valley's performance in that area, and is the cabinet secretary still confident that the target of 90 per cent of patients being seen within 18 weeks will be met in March 2023?

Humza Yousaf: That remains the target, and we will do everything that we can to try to meet it for March 2023. I will not pre-empt the improvement plan, but we would absolutely expect there to be specific and detailed action, alongside timelines and timescales, in relation to psychological therapies and CAMHS.

I can ensure that I provide a written update to all members by the end of the calendar year, and I can also commit to regular updates if there are

specific issues that members wish to raise with me.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): Can the cabinet secretary expand on what help the Scottish Government can provide to support the health board to develop an action plan to deliver improvement?

Humza Yousaf: I will be relatively brief. The assurance board will be critical to that improvement, and the external support that I referenced in my statement will also, I hope, be able to provide support. I want the assurance board to be a supportive yet critical friend that will challenge Forth Valley's leadership to make sure that it is ambitious but also realistic in its timescales for improvement. I have mentioned Professor Hazel Borland, the former nurse director and interim chief executive of NHS Ayrshire and Arran, and Dr John Harden, the deputy national clinical director, who will also provide that support. Tailored support from HIS will also be very helpful in that regard.

Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): I recently met with the Royal College of Nursing to discuss its concerns about the leadership and culture of NHS Forth Valley, which is in my region, and I thank the RCN for its open and honest discussion.

A and E has rightly been noted in many questions. Can the cabinet secretary assure me that the improvement will be sustainable and that the input of staff from all sites, not only the acute site at Forth Valley royal hospital, will be taken into account when discussing improvement?

Humza Yousaf: This is an NHS Forth Valley escalation; it does not relate only to Forth Valley royal hospital as the major acute site. I can give that categorical assurance in relation to Gillian Mackay's latter point.

Gillian Mackay is also absolutely right that the improvement has to be sustained. One of the areas of concern is A and E performance, but social care integration is related to that. She has raised her concerns about Forth Valley very constructively with me over a number of months, and we know that improvements in social care will help with bed capacity and the flow through our hospitals. Ultimately, it is better for an individual whom it is clinically safe to discharge, for example, to be out in their home or in a care home as close to their home as possible. I give her the guarantee that a whole-system approach is being taken to the escalation framework.

Siobhian Brown (Ayr) (SNP): The cabinet secretary will be aware of recent reports about strained relationships among managers at Forth Valley. Can he say any more about steps that

could be taken to support culture change for leaders at all levels?

Humza Yousaf: I will perhaps write to Siobhian Brown with a detailed written update, because we have a lot of programmes that help to foster positive, compassionate leadership. For example, leading to change is the Scottish Government's national leadership development programme, which I was pleased to launch earlier this year, and we have a range of other initiatives.

I go back to the point that I made to another member, which is that we can have all the strategies and programmes in the world, but we want delivery and implementation on the ground. That is where the assurance board, headed by Christine McLaughlin, will hold NHS Forth Valley's leadership's feet to the fire in order to ensure that that leadership change is implemented in a timely and sustainable manner.

Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I will continue on a point that was made by Alex Cole-Hamilton.

On 22 September 2016, in the chamber, the First Minister said of child and adolescent mental health waiting times that

"The performance of NHS Forth Valley is unacceptable, and that has been made clear".—[*Official Report*, 22 September 2016; c 21]

Today, on 23 November 2022, we have a statement that says:

"Forth Valley remains one of the poorest performing boards in terms of psychological therapies and child and adolescent mental health services",

and that the Government has

"been providing tailored support"

and is monitoring closely. How has the Scottish Government allowed the situation to go on for so long, and does the cabinet secretary agree that our young people deserve way more than close monitoring?

Humza Yousaf: There will be more than just close monitoring. As I have said in a number of answers, I expect to see tangible improvements on the ground. I will also say, absolutely candidly—I have said this on many occasions—that we know there were challenges in relation to the pressure on CAMHS pre-pandemic. Further, I do not think that there is any doubt from anybody here that that has been exacerbated by the global pandemic. Of course, we want to ensure that we meet the targets that we have set out in relation to psychological therapies and CAMHS, and we will also invest in pre-crisis interventions.

I give an absolute guarantee—as I have done to a number of members who have asked very important questions on mental health—that the

improvement plan for NHS Forth Valley will include tangible steps for improvement in relation to CAMHS and psychological therapies.

Sandesh Gulhane: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My apologies. I would like to draw members' attention to my entry in the register of members' interests, as I am a practising national health service doctor.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Gulhane. Your comments are on the record.

Point of Order

18:01

Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. During the urgent question, my colleague Ross Greer referenced the number of votes that were won by ourselves and the Scottish National Party and the corresponding number for the Tories, Labour and the Lib Dems in the last election. During that question, from a sedentary position, Douglas Ross was heard by several members shouting, "He's lying."

I would like to provide a small maths lesson for Mr Ross, despite the fact that he is not in the chamber. Of all of the votes cast—both regional and constituency votes—the total for the Greens and the SNP was 2,640,892, and for the Tories, Labour and the Lib Dems the total was 2,624,835.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Ms Mackay, as I said yesterday, points of order must refer to matters of procedure that relate to the standing orders.

Gillian Mackay: That was my next sentence.

Given that this is the second time in a week that Mr Ross has used language to either imply or directly accuse others of lying, could you tell the chamber whether that is a breach of the code of conduct and what mechanism can be used to address such poor behaviour?

The Presiding Officer: Within months of the Parliament's establishment, the first Presiding Officer, Sir David Steel, set out the position that, while

"Challenges to the accuracy of opinions and facts are ... perfectly in order"—

and I will always respect the right of members to make such challenges—

"the chair will not tolerate an accusation that a fellow member"—[*Official Report*, 16 March 2000; c 752.]

has been deliberately untruthful. I will always protect the rights of members to scrutinise and challenge each other. However, where I am clear that an accusation of that nature has been made, I will intervene.

Business Motion

18:04

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item is consideration of business motion S6M-06914, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business motion. I call George Adam to move the motion.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 29 November 2022

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Scottish Government Debate: EU Retained Law

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 30 November 2022

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
Rural Affairs and Islands;
Health and Social Care

followed by Scottish Government Debate:
Recognising the Vital Role Men Must
Play in Challenging and Eradicating
Violence Against Women and Girls

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 1 December 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:
Social Justice, Housing and Local
Government

followed by Scottish Government Debate: World
Aids Day

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
 Tuesday 6 December 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 Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee Debate: Proxy Voting
followed by Committee Announcements
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business
 Wednesday 7 December 2022
 2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Constitution, External Affairs and Culture; Justice and Veterans
followed by Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party Business
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)
 5.10 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business
 Thursday 8 December 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: Education and Skills
followed by Scottish Government Business
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 28 November 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.

Decision Time

18:04

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

The first question is, that amendment S6M-06899.2, in the name of Humza Yousaf, which seeks to amend motion S6M-06899, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on protecting primary care, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: We will move to a vote. There will be a short suspension to allow members to access digital voting.

18:04

Meeting suspended.

18:07

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We will proceed with the division on amendment S6M-06899.2. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is closed.

Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I would have voted yes. The system would not work.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. We will ensure that that is recorded.

Màiri McAllan (Clydesdale) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app would not refresh. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: I can confirm that your vote was recorded.

Màiri McAllan: Oh, good.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)

Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)

Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-06899.2, in the name of Humza Yousaf, is: For 67, Against 54, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-06899.1, in the name of Sandesh Gulhane, which seeks to amend motion S6M-06899, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on protecting primary care, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is now closed.

Alasdair Allan: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I would have put a shilling in the meter and voted no.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. We will ensure that that vote is recorded.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)

Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)

Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-06899.1, in the name of Sandesh Gulhane, is: For 53, Against 67, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-06899, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on protecting primary care, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)

Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caitness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-06899, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on protecting primary care, as amended, is: For 66, Against 55, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament recognises the pressures on primary care and right across the NHS and social care due to the effects of Brexit, the global pandemic and the cost of living crisis; notes that the overriding priority for the delivery of healthcare must be to deliver the best outcomes for patients; supports the actions of the Scottish Government to abolish prescription charges and recognises that, under the current administration, they will remain free for all; believes that prescription charges are a tax on illness and that healthcare must be based on the clinical needs of

patients and not their ability to pay; recognises that primary care provision extends beyond the work of general practice and welcomes that free eye care tests continue to be protected, that dental charges have been abolished for young people, and that, through NHS Pharmacy First, more first-line care is being provided for free through community pharmacies; recognises, in general practice, that Scotland currently has a record high level of GPs and that Scotland has proportionately more GPs than any other nation in the UK; welcomes that efforts to recruit 800 additional GPs by 2027 are on track, with 277 already in post by 2021; understands that, to support GP practices, over 3,220 multidisciplinary healthcare professionals have been recruited since 2018; acknowledges that primary care funding has increased again in the current financial year and understands that integration joint board reserves provided for primary care are to be utilised for primary care; recalls that it was the current administration that took the legislative steps necessary to stop the privatisation and commercialisation of GP services that was permitted by the previous Labour-led administration; further recalls that it was the current administration that brought Stracathro back into the NHS after its work was put into private hands by the previous Labour-led administration, and shares the Scottish Government's unswerving commitment to the founding principles of the NHS to be publicly owned, publicly operated and free at the point of need.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-06898.2, in the name of Shona Robison, which seeks to amend motion S6M-06898, in the name of Mark Griffin, on the cost of living: mortgage rescue scheme, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)

Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)

Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O’Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-06898.2, in the name of Shona Robison, is: For 67, Against 54, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The question is, that amendment S6M-06898.1, in the name of Miles Briggs, which seeks to amend motion S6M-06898, in the name of Mark Griffin, on the cost of living: mortgage rescue scheme, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I lost connection, and I would have voted no.

The Presiding Officer: We will ensure that your vote is recorded.

For

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)

Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)

McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-06898.1, in the name of Miles Briggs, is: For 30, Against 91, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S6M-06898, in the name of Mark Griffin, on the cost of living: mortgage rescue scheme, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is now closed.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Shirley-Anne Somerville): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app has failed. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. We will ensure that that is recorded.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)

Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-06898, in the name of Mark Griffin, on the cost of living: mortgage rescue scheme, as amended, is: For 72, Against 49, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament notes the increase in mortgage costs due to the sharp rise in interest rates following the UK Government's disastrous mini-budget; believes that, combined with wider cost of living pressures, higher mortgage repayments will push some households into poverty and that action is needed to prevent a spike in arrears and homelessness; recognises that the Home Owners' Support Fund is a demand-led mortgage rescue programme to support low-income homeowners facing difficulty meeting payments to stay in their property through moving to either a rent or shared-equity scheme; notes that the Scottish Government is already reviewing the eligibility criteria of the Fund in light of the cost of living crisis;

acknowledges the actions taken by the Scottish Government to also support people in the rented sector during the current cost crisis through the actions in the Cost of Living (Tenant Protection) (Scotland) Act 2022 and through up to £86.6 million in Discretionary Housing Support; calls on the UK Government to ensure that there is an adequate social security net to support people in time of hardship, including homeowners with mortgages; believes that the current nine-month wait for loan-only support with mortgages within Universal Credit is too long, and agrees that this is one of the many areas where Universal Credit is not fit for purpose.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time. We will now move on to members' business.

International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-06299, in the name of Pam Gosal, on recognising international day for the elimination of violence against women. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women on 25 November, and the 16 Days of Activism following this, which run from 25 November to 10 December 2022, Human Rights Day; recognises that the 2022 global theme is "UNITE! Activism to end violence against women and girls"; notes the view that this is an opportunity to come together with the global women's movement to call for an end to gender-based violence; further notes reports that the COVID-19 pandemic has intensified all forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG); believes that VAWG remains the most pervasive human rights violation worldwide; understands that it affects more than an estimated 1 in 3 women; notes that it is estimated that on average a woman or girl is killed by someone in her own family every 11 minutes across the globe; welcomes that, during the pandemic, UN Women, women's rights organisations and others acted with urgency to secure policy changes aimed at eradicating VAWG; believes that there is growing evidence that VAWG is preventable; commends the hard work of organisations and individuals that aim to eradicate any and all forms of violence against women, and notes the view that Parliament should do everything in its power to contribute to the work to stop violence against women and girls.

18:21

Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con): It is an honour to bring to the chamber this debate to mark the international day for the elimination of violence against women and girls, which will take place on Friday 25 November, followed by the 16 days of activism. This year's theme is "UNITE! Activism to end violence against women and girls".

Thanks to our dedicated police force and our endlessly dedicated third sector organisations, women in Scotland have a voice. The drive to make the world a safer place for women and girls gains more momentum every year, and this year is no different. As always, there remains a hard battle to be won, whether that is against anti-feminist movements, human traffickers or lone abusers, but women will not back down. We can look, for example, at the bravery and resilience of the Iranian women who are protesting following the suspicious death of Mahsa Amini. They are fighting for their freedom, and today we all stand in solidarity with them.

The United Kingdom is a leader in women's rights, and we cannot afford to go backwards or to be complacent.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): Is the member aware of comments that were reported today from a leading United Nations official, who warned that the Scottish National Party's gender self-identification bill risks endangering women and called for it to be put on hold?

Pam Gosal: I thank the member for her intervention, as that is a very serious point. It is deeply concerning that the United Nations expert on violence against women has expressed her concerns about legislation that is passing through this Parliament right now. After months, if not years, of the SNP telling women that their concerns about the Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill were imaginary, the United Nations has confirmed that the bill could

"potentially open the door for violent males ... to abuse the process of acquiring a gender certificate"

and that it

"presents ... risks to the safety of women".

I take the opportunity, in this debate about eliminating violence against women, to urge the SNP, if it will not listen to the concerns of women, campaigners or even its own members, to listen to the United Nations experts and not bring in any law that might harm the rights or safety of women. As I said, we cannot afford to go backwards.

The "Recorded Crime in Scotland" statistics for 2021-22 provide a bleak snapshot of the dangers facing women and girls in Scotland. For example, they show that the number of sexual crimes soared by 15 per cent on the year before, and there has been a 96 per cent rise since 2012. Worse yet, fewer of those sexual crimes are being solved. I acknowledge the efforts that have been made to develop policy to tackle violence against women and girls. However, that policy clearly does not go far enough.

Women should not have to walk home with their keys rammed between their knuckles in case they come across an assailant, but we do. Women should not have to walk the long way home to avoid quiet areas and blind spots, but we do. Women should not have to watch for shadows cast on the path as they walk home, but we do. Until we do not, we cannot stop looking for new ways to tackle violence against women and girls.

That brings me to my next area of focus: domestic abuse, which often takes place much closer to home. Last year's domestic abuse statistics were shocking. In 2020-21, more than 65,000 incidents of domestic abuse were recorded by Police Scotland. Even more tragically, about

half of those incidents were committed by reoffenders. Throughout the year, I have engaged with countless domestic abuse organisations and individuals, one of whom said to me that they cannot understand how an abuser is able to ruin so many lives and get off so lightly for their crimes.

That is exactly why I brought forward my proposal for a domestic abuse prevention bill. If one thing is clear, it is that a register must be created to stop perpetrators moving from area to area, and from victim to victim. We need to do more to ensure that rehabilitation is no longer a postcode lottery. We must also improve the data that we collect on domestic abuse in order to understand the support and services that are required in different communities, because one size does not fit all. That is the case for black and minority ethnic individuals and disabled individuals in particular. The final thing that we need is education. Children must be taught at a young age that domestic abuse is wrong. They need to know what an unhealthy relationship looks like, and they need to be aware of the support services that are available to them.

I thank every organisation and individual who has taken the time to complete my consultation, which has now closed. As I have outlined, there is a clear-cut case for doing more, and I hope that all members will give my bill proposal due consideration.

I end with this. First, I recognise the endless activism of the third sector organisations that are there to fight the corner of victims. Secondly, I call on members to unite together, in the knowledge that our efforts will make a difference to the lives of women and girls around the world. Last but not least, we must all commit today to do more to be their voices. We cannot give up—we must eradicate violence against women and girls.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: It will not surprise members to learn that there is an awful lot of interest in this evening's debate. I would be grateful, therefore, if members could stick broadly to their time allocations. With that, we move to the open debate.

18:28

Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): I am grateful to Pam Gosal for bringing to the chamber this debate on recognising the importance of the international day for the elimination of violence against women. Even though I have had my own challenging experiences in the past, I am very sensitive to the fact that many women around the world face much more deadly threats and repression than anyone in our country of Scotland will have experienced.

I therefore dedicate my speech to the courageous women and girls of Iran. They display a quite remarkable heroism by standing against repression and brutality. Their cause is admirably summed up in their cry, "Zan, Zendegi, Azadi", or "Women, Life, Freedom". Throughout history, Iranian women have participated in national protests. Today, they are leading the way by confronting the Iranian regime's abusive and repressive treatment of women and girls. Regrettably, the Iranian Government is responding with lethal force.

The brutal killing of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini by Iran's so-called morality police has sparked nationwide protests. In violent crackdowns, the regime is trying to crush calls for the human rights of women to be recognised. Since 19 September 2022, more than 100 civilians, including at least 23 children, have been killed with impunity. It seems unimaginable that scores of women and children are being brutally murdered by cowardly men to protect the immorality of a brutal regime.

It is not only the evil of the killings that concerns me. Countless numbers are being thrown into prison to face torture. As Sonya Angelica Diehn has recently written,

"In Iran, men and women are 'equal'—only in torture".

Torture is a standard method of the regime. Direct physical torture includes whippings, being hung by the hands for lengthy periods and being forced to sit for many hours with hands tied together behind the back. As part of systematic psychological torture, techniques include total isolation for weeks or even months, enforced sleep deprivation, threats of sexual violence and threats of violence towards family. Those acts are happening as we speak.

The former UN special rapporteur on violence against women, Professor Rashida Manjoo, revealed in her report of October 2013 that torture in Iranian prisons included men raping virgins prior to execution. That women and young girls are therefore brave enough, in such a society, to throw off their headscarves and confront the violence of state police is extraordinary—those are extraordinary acts of bravery. Courage is, indeed, calling to courage in Iran.

We need as many international voices as possible to put pressure on the Iranian regime to end all torture. I add my voice to that of Pam Gosal, and I hope that other members who are participating in the debate feel able to add their voices. For this international day for the elimination of violence against women, let us all join in the Iranian rallying cry for women, for life, for freedom: "Zan, Zendegi, Azadi" indeed.

18:31

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): I thank Pam Gosal for nominating this important topic for a members' business debate. I apologise to her and to other speakers; I did not realise that we had gone on so late tonight, so I cannot remain for the whole debate, but I really wanted to speak in it.

On 25 November, we observe the international day for the elimination of violence against women. On this day, we are reminded of all the women and girls who are victims of male violence, and we are reminded of the urgent need to eradicate all forms of violence against women and girls.

On Friday, Scottish Labour will launch our consultation on changing the future for women and girls, simply because we want to be part of the conversation about how we can change things for all time. Like other members, I applaud the bravery of the Iranian women who are marching in the streets. However, I add that there are many other women in other countries who are also being brave—for example, by speaking out under the regimes in Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan, and in many other countries around the world where girls are not given an education and where they are treated appallingly as an extension of widespread global discrimination against women and girls.

Gender-based violence is one of the most systemic and socially tolerated human rights violations of our time. Global estimates that the World Health Organization published in 2021 indicate that one in three women worldwide will experience physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime. At least one in five women in Scotland will experience domestic abuse, and an average of six rapes are reported every day. Shockingly—I am sure that we have debated this before—only 7 per cent of reported rapes and attempted rapes made it to court in Scotland in 2020-21. Figures that the Scottish Government released yesterday reveal that the number of reported sexual crimes was 6 per cent higher than it was in the year ending September 2021. It is worrying that that trend is, unfortunately, rising.

The question that we must answer is: how are we going to tackle the root cause of that? The root cause will be the same in Scotland as it is in the rest of the world. I know that the Minister for Equalities and Older People, and probably all of us, will share this view, but we need to continue to return to that question. There is an epidemic of misogyny and inequality across our society. Research has shown that socially constructed gender norms that socialise boys and men to value hierarchy, aggression, power, respect and emotional suppression might be a primary root cause of violence against women.

In such debates, I always feel, even when I am literally in my last minute, that I have not really said anything at all, but I must conclude. I could go through more shocking statistics. For me, however, the most important thing is that the Parliament must continue to do the work to identify the root causes. We know that boys of a certain age—we have seen this time and again—mimic the behaviour of other males. In a sense, we have to break that cycle and the cycle of young girls being harassed, arguably, more now than they were in my generation. Figures show that they are harassed while going to school, and the advent of social media has meant that many of them are under pressure to send nude photographs of themselves as a normalised part of growing up. That should not be normal, and it is not acceptable behaviour in schools.

I know that Christina McKelvie and Shona Robison will talk about the work of the equally safe programme. I support that programme, and I would like it to be extended to every school. I make one request, if I may, as I would like to see this in action: we must work together to eradicate violence against women and girls.

18:36

Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con): I, too, thank my colleague Pam Gosal for bringing to the chamber this important debate. I absolutely associate myself and my party with the comments from Michelle Thomson about the heroism and tragedy that we see taking place in Iran, and with what Pauline McNeill said about the bravery of women who are fighting similar battles in so many countries around the world.

Pam's campaigning work on domestic abuse and violence is a shining example of the good that this Parliament can do. Her proposed bill to create a domestic abuse register should be commended and supported by MSPs on all sides of the chamber. The proposal, which is strong, well intentioned and well considered, would introduce a system along the same lines as the sex offenders register. People who commit violence in the home would be added to the database by a sheriff; police officers would then have access to that information about those who pose such a risk.

Police Scotland already operates such a scheme: it is called the disclosure scheme for domestic abuse Scotland, and it gives people the right to ask about the background of their partner. However, Pam's proposed register, which is still being shaped, might go even further, and I hope that it does. I strongly believe that transparency should be central to our justice system. Secrecy and closed doors are a feature of so many of the scandals in which victims have been let down. There should be no hiding place for people who

commit domestic violence and abuse. Pam has already highlighted the scandal that one in three women—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Findlay, I know that it is a members' business debate and therefore slightly more informal, but I encourage you to use full names rather than just first names—thank you.

Russell Findlay: Apologies, Presiding Officer—I did not realise that that was the form.

Pam Gosal has already highlighted the scandal that one in three women suffer violence—it is a global problem. As my colleague said, we should not lose sight of the fact that Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom are at the forefront of women's rights. That is as true today as it has been historically. However, it is a problem that we can do more to tackle.

Women in Scotland still face discrimination, misogyny, abuse and violence every day. It seems that every week I speak with women who have been through the horrors of sexual assault or rape; women who have been stalked or preyed on or who have had their drinks spiked; and women who have had their lives trashed by abusers with revenge porn, emotional abuse or everyday, low-level harassment. Just this afternoon, I met the chief constable of the British Transport Police, who told me that an estimated 75 per cent of sexual offences on our railways pass unreported.

Many women share a belief that Scotland's justice system does not always live up to the values that it likes to espouse, and I agree. Right now, our justice system remains stacked against victims. The Parliament could act more decisively to tackle violence against women. We could increase sentences for violent and sexual crimes. We could ensure that people who commit unspeakable acts serve their full sentences. We could end automatic early release. We could increase pitifully low rates of conviction for sexual assaults and rapes. We could make the justice system more understanding and compassionate. We could prevent sex offenders changing their names and, indeed, their gender. We could ensure that courts deliver justice much more quickly. We could prevent men exploiting the courts to prolong their abuse, and we could pass Pam Gosal's proposed domestic abuse register bill. If any member, and any party, in the Parliament wants to progress any of those policies to end violence against women, her bill is a good place to start.

I hope that we will step up and use our powers to end violence against women.

18:40

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): I am pleased to speak today to recognise the international day for the elimination of violence against women. I thank Pam Gosal for bringing this important debate to the chamber.

Gender-based violence refers to harmful acts that are directed at an individual or individuals on the basis of their gender. It is rooted in gender inequality, abuse of power and harmful norms. Violence against women is any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women and girls. Those definitions demonstrate that violence against women occurs both privately, within families and communities, and publicly, perpetrated or condoned by the state.

Since the pandemic began, 45 per cent of women report that they or a woman who they know have experienced a form of violence. Lockdowns, increased isolation and economic uncertainty exposed women and girls to increased rates of domestic violence and child marriage. Violence against women remains one of the most pervasive human rights violations around the globe. Impunity, stigma and shame result in underreporting and failures to address problems.

In Scotland, the death of Adrienne McCartney, as reported in the *Sunday Post* last week, shows the horrific consequences of structural failings to address violence against women. It is heartbreaking to read the litany of failures of the public authorities that were supposed to protect her. I am sure that members in the chamber will join me in extending our deepest sympathy to Adrienne's family and friends.

Action is needed. We need recognition that women suffer directly and indirectly from male violence and biased, patriarchal systems. I turn to the situation that women and girls in Afghanistan face. It is now more than a year since the Taliban returned to power, and women and girls in Afghanistan are being systematically excluded from public life. Human rights violations against women and girls are increasing. Girls are no longer allowed in school past sixth grade; women are barred from most jobs and are effectively eliminated from political participation; and women face increased restrictions on their movements and bodies.

Removing education from girls violates their right to education and creates lifelong adverse consequences. Manizha, a teacher, said to UN Women,

"I ask the international community to listen to Afghan women".

I say that we hear you, Manizha.

From a counsellor who helps women to heal from trauma and enrol in literacy and vocational training to a human rights defender who has stayed in Afghanistan to help women, Afghan women continue to unite, forming new civil society groups and reopening businesses—all under constant threat of violence.

I turn to Iran, where a women-led protest movement demanding political freedom is persisting, as Michelle Thomson has highlighted. In addition to laws on women's clothing, the Government of Iran has ratified a law that criminalises abortion and restricts family planning. Catalysed by the death in custody of Mahsa Amini, women-led protesters are pushing back against increasing Government control over women's lives.

When we spoke in the chamber for international women's day in March, our thoughts were with the women of Ukraine. Nine months on, the impacts of war continue to affect women and girls disproportionately. A UN report highlights that school-age girls are at higher risk of being forced out of school and into marriage. Women face food insecurity, increased care responsibilities and a heightened risk of sexual violence.

Around the world, civil society organisations, women's networks and human rights defenders are working tirelessly to combat violence against women. Efforts to end violence against women must be inclusive and intersectional, paying attention to the multiple discriminations that many women face, including women with disabilities and LGBT+ women. Together, let us unite in activism to end violence against women and girls.

18:45

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank Pam Gosal for bringing the debate to the chamber. One of my first speeches last year was in the debate on eliminating violence against women. I remember in my speech reflecting on the fact that, although the work around the globe on the issue is to be commended and is essential, it must make us think. We, the elected members in this Parliament, have a responsibility to work hard, make decisions, make action happen and ensure that we do not have to make the same remarks in years to come. I am here speaking again to ensure that we in the Scottish Parliament do all that we can to raise awareness, change and implement suitable laws, and amplify the voices of women and girls.

The theme this year is "UNITE! Activism to end violence against women and girls". I again thank Pam Gosal for allowing us to do just that here, in the chamber.

As the motion says, violence against women and girls continues to be one of the "most pervasive" human rights violations worldwide. The statistics are damning:

"it affects more than an estimated 1 in 3 women ... it is estimated that on average a woman or girl is killed by someone in her own family every 11 minutes across the globe".

Since the outbreak of Covid-19, emerging data and reports from people on the front line have shown that all types of violence against women and girls—particularly domestic violence, as we have heard—have intensified.

Each woman who is a victim of violence must be treated equally and fairly by an establishment that understands, or at least seeks to begin to understand, why they have gone through it. We need a global collective effort to prevent it, and we need to understand that everyone has a role to play. That begins with accepting that the problem is a serious one around the globe and that we do not have it under control. That means more honesty from Governments, and it means direct engagement with grass-roots organisations, health and recovery charities and global institutions. It means having prevention strategies focused on early education, respectful relationships and working with men and boys, especially through and in the media, the sports industry and the world of work. As my colleague Pauline McNeill has mentioned, the social media aspect is coming much more to the fore. We must tackle the issue in Scotland and right around the globe.

As parliamentarians, we must push to ensure women's representation at all levels in politics, economic development, governance and planning—the list is endless—but, until women and girls have full and equal representation, it is unlikely that we will change what are dreadful statistics.

There is so much to be done, but I thank my colleagues here today, who have raised some really important issues about violence against women and girls from right around the globe. I know that we can unite in the Parliament to end this outrageous blight on global society, ensuring that we tackle violence against women and girls.

18:48

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): I am grateful to Pam Gosal for securing the debate, and I am glad to have the opportunity to speak on this topic, two days before the international day for the elimination of violence against women and the 16 days of activism. I also thank all those organisations and agencies that work day in and day out to support survivors. I

refer colleagues to my entry in the register of members' interests.

The existence of this official day is perhaps a sign of progress—that the reality of violence against women and girls is being recognised by institutions and decision makers—but how much of a picture are we really seeing? What image arises when we think of gender-based violence? Is the woman cis and straight, with all her papers in order, dressed and behaving appropriately? And her attacker: is he a stranger to her, a man without authority and not in uniform, visibly unreliable, criminal or monstrous? We know that not all violence against women follows that pattern; yet, the more it deviates from that image, the less sure we are of how wrong it is.

The UN web page for the day recognises that and identifies women who are particularly likely to be attacked—not the meekly respectable but the outsiders, including

“women who identify as lesbian, bisexual, transgender or intersex, migrants and refugees”.

It is no coincidence that people with such identities suffer societal prejudice and oppression, for the problem of violence against women is not one of isolated incidents that are perpetrated by individual men of intrinsic evil; such incidents are symptoms of a deeper disease, which is a disease not just of misogyny but of homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia and a visceral fear of difference and of sharing privilege and status. Worse than that is that such incidents are in reality a harvest—the expected outcome of seeds that are planted, watered and fed not only by men, not only by the tabloid press, not only by populist demagogues and not only in countries that we think of as regressive or repressive.

The UN recognises that violence against women is not perpetrated only by strangers. We know that it comes from intimate partners, families and lawfully constituted authorities. The women, including trans women, who are more likely to experience violence generally are also more likely to be survivors—or, tragically, not survivors—of these embedded, disguised and often hidden attacks.

Trans women are as likely as cis women are to be attacked, in any context, because they are women, but they are also highly likely, as are trans men and non-binary people, to be attacked because they are perceived as trans or as gender nonconforming. Domestic abuse in all its forms, including coercive control, is experienced by many trans women, and transphobia is yet another weapon in the abuser's armoury. Trans women are not only more likely to be in precarious financial situations, unemployed or underemployed, and in legal limbo regarding their

gender status; they also face huge barriers in accessing support and shelter, whether that is from medical, law enforcement or third sector agencies.

Those vulnerabilities, those precarities and those barriers are—make no mistake—the direct result of false and misleading narratives that are still being constructed and disseminated by mainstream media and by elected politicians. Those narratives do not have to be openly transphobic to be deeply damaging to all trans and non-binary people and to many cis women who do not conform to gatekeepers' ideas of what a woman should look and sound like. While lip service is paid to the idea of a “genuine trans person”, the underlying message is that trans women are intrinsically unsafe and untrustworthy. There is, indeed, a danger, but it is one existing for, not created by, our trans sisters.

The theme of this year's UN day and the 16 days of action that follow it is “UNITE!” During these weeks of our parliamentary business, my most heartfelt hope is that we can, indeed, unite in distinguishing reality from rhetoric and in recognising and combating both particular and structural forms of violence.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: As I said earlier, there is a lot of interest in the debate. Given the number of members who still want to participate, I am minded to accept a motion without notice, under rule 8.14.3 of standing orders, to extend the debate by up to 30 minutes.

Motion moved,

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

Motion agreed to.

18:53

Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow Maggie Chapman's speech. I am pleased to speak in this debate to recognise the international day for the elimination of violence against women on 25 November and the 16 days of activism that follow it. The United Nations declares—rightly—that

“Violence against women and girls ... is one of the most widespread, persistent and devastating human rights violations in our world today”

and that it

“remains largely unreported due to the impunity, silence, stigma and shame surrounding it.”

The theme for 2022 is “UNITE! Activism to end violence against women and girls”. The theme makes it clear that supporting and investing in strong and autonomous women's rights

organisations and feminist movements is key to ending violence against women and girls.

In preparation for my speech and in recognition of the main theme, I took time to speak to one of the women's aid groups in my constituency. Clydebank Women's Aid has been providing emotional and practical support and refuge for women, children and young people subjected to domestic abuse for 41 years. I asked what it wanted the Parliament to know. The group is clear that dedicated days of action extend beyond 16 days of the year. Women, children and young people who experience abuse need more than 16 days of action. They live with male violence 365 days of the year. Some of them will live with lifelong implications and several others will be murdered.

The reality for women, children and young people remains unchanged, with barriers limiting women's options. Clydebank Women's Aid points out strongly that we need to ensure that enough refuge spaces are available for women. Refuge is vital when women flee domestic abuse and a lack of spaces might mean that they have no option but to stay. The group is keen that we recognise that the current cost of living crisis will impact on a woman's ability to flee. The more economically deprived that women are, the fewer the financial choices that they have available to them.

Women deserve specialist women's aid services that are underpinned by feminist analyses of domestic abuse, and the cost of living crisis might impact upon that. To support that, Clydebank Women's Aid calls on the Scottish Government to guarantee ring-fenced funding for the women's aid network in Scotland.

During my 19 years as a councillor, I formed a good relationship with Clydebank Women's Aid. It is a strong part of a strong partnership and policy platform that aims to support women and change societal attitudes. As part of that approach, West Dunbartonshire Council became the first social landlord in Scotland to introduce a zero-tolerance policy on domestic abuse in its properties. The council introduced measures that ensure that victims have immediate access to practical help and specialist legal assistance and support following any incident of domestic abuse.

Domestic abuse can have a devastating and long-term impact on a woman's life. It can result in homelessness, isolation, loss of earnings, physical and mental health problems, injuries and even death. Living with domestic abuse can seriously affect a child's emotional and psychological wellbeing, undermine their relationship with their mother and have other negative consequences.

Research by UN Women showed that 45 per cent of women reported that they or a woman they

know experienced a form of violence against women and girls. Seven women in 10 say that they think that verbal or physical abuse by a partner has become more common. Those statistics are unacceptable.

There are a number of welcome initiatives in place that are making a difference, and important legislative changes were made by the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018. Those are all important to the aim of eliminating violence against women and girls but, as the "UNITE!" campaign points out, uniting with groups such as Clydebank Women's Aid will be key to the success of that aim. The silencing of women through violence must end.

18:58

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): Like others, I extend my thanks to Pam Gosal for bringing the motion before the chamber. It is a powerful motion that talks about some of the most horrendous activities that happen around the world.

I was immediately caught by the statistic that one woman in three has experienced violence. As the UN has pointed out, it is probably the most pervasive of human rights violations that occur around the world. That figure of one in three struck me because of debates that I have had the privilege to listen to in the past.

Of course, 25 November is the anniversary of the death of Patria, Minerva and Maria Teresa, the Mirabal sisters, in the Dominican Republic. Those three sisters stood up against a dictatorship and the violence that was being directed specifically at women. They paid the ultimate price in their murder, but then there was the horror of the dictator and his henchmen trying to cover it up to make it look like an accident. I recall the powerful words of Minerva, who said:

"If they kill me, I'll reach my arms out from the tomb and I'll be stronger."

She was stronger, and women are stronger for this day and because of the experiences that they have lived through.

Pam Gosal spoke about the role of education. I am extremely concerned that we are failing the women who are victims of sexual and gender-based violence within our higher education institutions, as was so accurately described by Beatrice Wishart. We must do more to prevent sexual assault in all forms and we must support victims. In January, the Scottish Government said that universities should be places where students can study free from sexual harassment and gender-based violence. We must see more action on that.

The motion, which refers to the coming 16 days of activism, talks about work that can be done. Heriot-Watt University is participating in the White Ribbon campaign. At Edinburgh Napier University, staff have pocket-sized cards giving information about how to respond to a disclosure of gender-based violence, equipping staff and empowering students with the knowledge that they need. At the University of Edinburgh, the Consent Collective is working to get that community talking about consent, sex, gender, sexual harassment and relationships, using supportive language in a supportive environment. At the University of St Andrews, there is a compulsory orientation module that requires students to learn about consent and sexual assault before matriculating. That is an important step, given the childhood experiences that we have heard about and the mental health challenges that those cause for young people who have seen sexual violence.

I pay particular tribute to the work of Emily Test. That project, born out of tragedy, is doing incredible work to tackle gender-based violence in education. There is now a gender-based violence charter for colleges and universities. Educational establishments must be safe for everyone. We must make them safe for our women and girls, because, at the moment, they are not. We have heard sufficient evidence in this debate alone to say that more must be done.

I end—harking back to the quote about reaching from the grave to become stronger—with a recent quote from East Lothian Councillor Colin McGinn, who recently said something that speaks to where every man should be and is an idea that I hope that we can take forward in the next 16 days:

“It is appalling that in our modern and enlightened times, violence against women and girls remains a reality for so many. It’s not a remote issue, it’s not something that happens elsewhere, to other people that you don’t know. It’s happening right here, in our East Lothian communities, right now.”

19:02

Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con): I thank my colleague Pam Gosal for securing this important debate.

I am currently dealing with the case of a man who assaulted multiple partners and traumatised his own children so much so that he was given a permanent no contact order. He was also given community service, probation and counselling but no jail time. None of that had any impact on his behaviour. He breached his probation by entering into a relationship with my constituent and becoming a step parent to her children. It was not long before his campaign of abuse escalated: he began throwing the children along hallways, grabbing them by the throat or hair and dragging

them upstairs by their ears. He received a non-harassment order and was told not to contact the mother or children. He ignored that, getting accomplices to stalk her and break windows in the family home. They had to flee to a safe house.

Although little to nothing happened to that abuser, the trauma for the family continues. The experiences that they suffered have changed them. The family spoke about how that person’s actions have affected the children, and it is clear that the domestic violence that the children endured has severely traumatised them. The situation has not improved. The woman says that her son has changed beyond recognition, going from being a youngster who gave everyone hugs, had a great sense of humour and looked out for his younger sister to being one who recently attacked and seriously hurt his younger brother.

The family talked about burying their heads in their hands and crying over what has been taken from them by a serial abuser who has no remorse and who mocks Scotland’s justice system while going about his daily business.

Regrettably, that family is just one of many in Scotland who are affected by domestic abuse daily. I am therefore pleased to see Pam Gosal’s proposal for a domestic abuse register bill.

Violence against women and girls has no place in our society. Ultimately, we want to create a society that eliminates violence against women and girls. It is also our responsibility to establish a system that effectively deters and punishes potential abusers and unconditionally supports victims.

To finish, I will touch on the need to support victims of domestic violence. Reem Alsalem, the United Nations special rapporteur on violence against women and girls, has written a letter on the Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill, about which she has raised a number of concerns. She said:

“For persons identifying as women, the certificate would create a legal presumption that they have the right to access women-only services, across Scotland ... such proposals would potentially open the door for violent males who identify as men to abuse the process”.

She continued:

“a failure to provide single sex spaces to female survivors of male violence”

leads to

“self-exclusion from support and refuge services.”

She also said:

“While I commend the Government for listening to the voices of transwomen, including organizations that represent them, I am concerned that the consultations for this proposal do not appear to have been sufficiently inclusive of other groups of women, most notably female

victims of violence. It has been reported that five survivors of male violence approached”

the Scottish Parliament Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee

“to speak in a private session about their concerns in relation to the Bill and their own experiences of self-exclusion. The convenor reportedly informed the group that the Committee did not have time to see them and to put their objections in writing.”

If the Government truly wants to help victims, it needs to listen to all parties; when introducing new bills, it needs to listen to all points of view; and when members of its party raise concerns with it, it needs to listen. Otherwise, we will bring in bad law, with untold unintended consequences.

19:07

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): I congratulate Pam Gosal on securing the debate and all who have contributed to it. The purpose of the debate is to recognise and bring focus to the international day for the elimination of violence against women and girls, which takes place on Friday, and to the following 16 days of activism, which run until 10 December, which is human rights day.

As has been said a number of times, the World Health Organization estimates that, globally, almost one in three women are subjected to partner violence. It is perhaps more shocking that the statistic is similar for Scotland: one in three women and girls in Scotland experience the threat and the reality of physical violence. Those are statistics, but they are about real people and real women.

However, many of those victims are hidden. I will speak about one of those women, who has already been referred to by Beatrice Wishart: Adrienne McCartney, whose experience was recounted in an article on 3 October 2021 in the Sunday Post by Marion Scott. On that occasion, Adrienne McCartney spoke in her own words about a series of failures by the police and the prosecution service that she said had shattered her trust in Scotland’s justice system. She described an on-going campaign of abuse and harassment from her estranged husband, and she claimed that officers had dismissed her fears for her family’s safety. Eventually, her husband was charged and received a £450 fine and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service apologised for errors.

More shockingly, however, Adrienne is no longer with us. She was found dead as a result of taking drugs that she had initially been prescribed—powerful painkillers that she was taking as a result of injuries to her arm, which her husband had caused in a violent outburst—and

alcohol. Her family are of the clear view that her death was a direct result of her treatment by the police and prosecution services. Unfortunately, Adrienne was only one of many women who can recount similar experiences. Members of this Parliament have to reflect on the fact that, despite all our debates, we continue to fail women and girls in Scotland.

Last week, an inquest in England found that the police had made errors that contributed to the deaths of Raneen Oudeh, aged 22, and her mother, Khaola Saleem, aged 49, in Solihull in 2018. Many of us will have heard Raneen Oudeh’s call to the police asking for help, as it was widely circulated in the media.

I congratulate everybody who contributed to the debate today, but we all have to reflect that, despite these debates, the threat that we face is probably getting greater. Both Martin Whitfield and Pauline McNeill have spoken about the experiences of girls and young women. Over the coming period, and particularly during these 16 days of action, we need to reflect on what we can do to ensure that we truly take the action that is required to eliminate violence against women and girls in this country and, indeed, worldwide.

19:11

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I congratulate my colleague Pam Gosal on securing this members’ business debate.

Every year, we mark the start of 16 days of activism against violence against women and girls. This year, the campaign theme is “UNITE! Activism to end violence against women and girls”, to ensure that girls and women are supported. It will also promote the leadership of women and girls, to increase their participation in democracy around the world. Initiatives along the lines of the ask her to stand campaign have a role to play in that promotion. However, it is clear that much more needs to be done to increase the number of women in positions of power.

There are many risk factors associated with violence against women, including poverty and isolation, which have been exacerbated during the Covid-19 pandemic. Sadly, women are already reporting significant increases in violence against them in countries around the world.

The sad truth is that Scotland has not been immune from the effects of the pandemic in that regard. We know that domestic abuse charges are at a five-year high. Alarmingly, organisations such as Scottish Women’s Aid and Rape Crisis Scotland have reported huge increases in demand for their front-line services. Funding is crucial, and given the need at present, as we go through the

cost of living crisis, more and more people will be requiring support.

Projects in my region such as Fife Women's Aid and the Kingdom Abuse Survivors Project have received funding in the past but will require more to maintain and sustain their services. I look forward to hearing assurances from the minister that that funding will be made available in the coming months and years. Many such organisations will say that the effects of the pandemic are being felt across the sector.

We also know that there is a court backlog of thousands of domestic violence cases, of which a high percentage involve allegations of sexual violence. Currently, some victims are waiting up to three years between reporting their abuse and seeing their case come to court. Scottish Women's Aid has warned that that risks undermining women's confidence in our justice system. We cannot allow that to happen. Women should not be fearful of the length of time that cases will take. I hope that I am wrong in thinking that that situation will continue, but I fear that I will be right about that unless urgent action is taken to tackle the backlog.

Violence against women is not just an issue for Scotland; it is a global one. For me, it is also a personal one. My mother was subjected to violence from my father for many years, which I witnessed as a young child. She accepted the abuse for years and blamed herself, before she had the courage to take her three small children out of the situation and became a statistic herself. However, many women and girls do not have the courage to leave their abusive partner, and much more needs to be done to support them to have the courage to leave an abusive relationship.

Few issues are more deserving of parliamentary time than the topic of this evening's debate. I regret the fact that the debate has to take place at all, but it must, because we need to speak up, and we must ensure that voices are heard and that people sit up and listen.

I pay tribute to Pam Gosal for the work that she is doing on her member's bill, and I hope that that will have the success that it deserves. It is only through society acting as a whole that we can finally eliminate such violence and ensure that women can live without fear, wherever they find themselves.

19:15

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): I thank Pam Gosal for securing the debate. As we approach the international day for the elimination of violence against women 2022, it is a sad reality that gendered violence is still widespread. In Scotland, as we have already heard in the

chamber today, one in three women will experience domestic violence in their lifetime, and an average of six rapes are reported every day.

Women are often subjected to gendered violence from an early age, and a report from the University of Glasgow revealed that sexual harassment is common in Scotland's secondary schools. That is not only deeply upsetting, or even traumatising, for young girls, but it can mean that generations are growing up with the view that gender-based violence is somehow normal or inevitable. We cannot allow that to continue.

Violence against women is an epidemic. Most women have—or know someone who has—experienced misogyny, assault or violence at the hands of men. It is particularly prevalent among women from minority groups: disabled women in the UK are twice as likely to experience gendered violence; 83 per cent of trans women have experienced hate crime; and black and minority ethnic and migrant women face higher levels of domestic homicide and abuse-driven suicide.

Every one of us, not just in this chamber but across our country, has the responsibility to do everything that we can to end it. That means challenging misogyny when we see or hear it, rather than looking away, as well as educating ourselves and reflecting on our internalised views and perspectives.

In particular, men have a responsibility to do and be better. In order to end the violence, the behaviour and attitudes of men must improve. Of course, that is not to say that all men are violent towards women, but we need male allies to fight the battle with us.

It also means tackling relentlessly the inequalities in income, power and wealth that also drive misogyny. Countless incredible organisations across Scotland are working tirelessly to end gendered violence and support its victims, and I give thanks to them today, especially those in the Glasgow region—such as Glasgow Women's Aid, the Daisy Project, Glasgow and Clyde Rape Crisis and Wise Women—for all the invaluable work that they do.

However, that vital work is impacted by short-term funding arrangements, because the funding that many of those organisations receive is due to end by September 2023. That means that they are in a constant cycle of applying for, receiving and reapplying for funding, while operating with standstill or reduced funding from the Government or local authority. That not only means that too much of those organisations' time is consumed with worrying about funding but distracts from service provision and is costly.

The harm that violence against women and girls causes in Glasgow costs more than £1.18 billion a

year to public services and the wider economy, through loss of output. However, the Glasgow standing group on violence against women estimates that properly funding women's services would save £6.5 million for the public purse each year. The Scottish Government has the power and responsibility to ensure that those organisations are funded properly, and I hope that it will do so.

The Scottish Government and Parliament also have responsibility and authority to act, through the creation of legislation, to protect women and girls and enshrine their rights in law. I support the recommendations of the Baroness Kennedy report and I welcome the Government's commitment to hold a public consultation prior to introducing a bill to Parliament, which I hope will include a new statutory aggravation of misogyny.

However, the law alone cannot end violence against women. Much more must be done to challenge the misogyny that has become ingrained in society and institutions. Therefore, I support the calls in Baroness Kennedy's report for the Government to invest sufficient resources in training across the criminal justice system and in front-line agencies, such as schools and colleges, to improve technology and police capacity for recording and reporting, as well as measures to help men and boys to understand misogyny.

Every one of us has a responsibility to do everything in our power to end violence against women and girls. Let us use this international day for the elimination of violence against women and the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence to redouble our efforts and work to eliminate gender-based violence and inequality once and for all.

19:19

The Minister for Equalities and Older People (Christina McKelvie): I thank Pam Gosal for securing the motion, which recognises the international day for the elimination of violence against women, and for recognising the vital role that men must play in challenging and eradicating violence against women and girls.

I start by picking up on a point that Beatrice Wishart and Katy Clark spoke about. I convey the Scottish Government's condolences to the family of Adrienne McCartney. As we give our condolences to that family and to Adrienne, I reflect that that gives us the reason why we are all here today—again—hearing, at the outset of our debate, about another woman who has died at the hands of a man.

I also pay tribute to women and girls in Iran and Afghanistan, as did Pam Gosal, Michelle Thomson and Beatrice Wishart. We look at those women in awe, and we send our solidarity and support to

them. Next week, there will be a further opportunity during the wider Scottish Government debate to reflect on what more we can all do to ensure that gender-based violence is tackled head on.

Beatrice Wishart and Pauline McNeill say that the root of violence against women is misogyny. We have just heard Pam Duncan-Glancy describe eloquently why we all agree with Baroness Kennedy's report and why the work to advance legislation on the relevant aggravations is incredibly important. However, the plain fact is that this is not a women's problem; it is a men's problem. Men have to step up, and they must play their role in eradicating this blight on our society. Violence against women and girls has no place in our vision for a safe, strong and successful Scotland.

White Ribbon Scotland, the campaign to involve men in tackling violence against women, says that, although most men are not violent to women, many ignore the problem by simply remaining silent. They unwittingly create a conducive context for violence to continue, and that must stop—they must take responsibility.

That is why the initiatives by White Ribbon Scotland that Martin Whitfield described are so welcome and needed. As I look round the chamber, I know in my heart that we all acknowledge that men must recognise that violence against women is a violation of women's fundamental human rights. Maggie Chapman eloquently gave us many examples in her speech.

The international day for the elimination of violence against women on 25 November marks the launch of the 16 days of activism, and the theme this year is "UNITE!" Over that period, we will come together and unite many times and at many venues across Scotland, including in the Parliament, to recognise the work that is being undertaken day in, day out to tackle and eradicate violence against women. We will also talk about the challenges and about what more we can and must do, individually and collectively, to tackle this failing in society. I know that these are challenging times and that the pandemic and the cost crisis make the lives of victim survivors harder and place enormous pressure on the life-saving services on which many rely.

Let us take this opportunity to reflect on what we still wish to achieve. Let us do that with openness, respect and recognition that others look to all of us to meet the challenges head on. Most importantly, let us acknowledge differences of opinion. We should not let the matter become an opportunity for political point scoring; we should seek common ground. I know that that is the spirit in which the debate is being undertaken.

Tackling and eradicating violence against women is a key priority for the Government. I have championed the issue since the first day that I stepped into this building, and I will continue to do so. We will continue to deliver the societal changes that are needed to ensure that every woman and girl in Scotland lives free from abuse. I therefore echo the sentiment in the motion and all the contributions from everyone today, as we recognise the opportunity to come together with a call for an end to gender-based violence. I would go further, by saying that that is something that all of us should be doing daily. I agree with the workers at Clydebank Women's Aid who Marie McNair spoke with: this is not just for the 16 days; it is for every day.

We will do all that we can on funding. An independent review of the landscape for women's services across Scotland is on-going right now, with the aim of making them more sustainable and ensuring that they have the strength to carry on. If members have not yet seen the report on the first six months of the delivering equally safe fund, they should go and look at it. They will be inspired and motivated, and I hope that they will see the difference that the organisations are making, especially when they take an intersectional approach to their work.

Only last week, I met the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and other key partners to look again at our equally safe strategy, and at how we can galvanise our approach by working collaboratively. As always, I am happy to speak with members about the development of equally safe. I am also aware of the ideas from many members in the Parliament—we have heard many of them this evening—on what we need to do to make a difference. Those ideas can influence policy and our approach as we move forward.

People with lived experience must form the backbone of our policy development. As Carol Mochan said, we must “amplify” their voices. Equally, we need to look at how young people are embedded in the discussion and are better enabled to play their part in developing solutions to the challenges that we face. Pam Duncan-Glancy and Pauline McNeill spoke about schools; I hope that they will be interested in the work of the gender equality task force in education and learning, which I met just today. I am working with the group on that area, so I ask members to look at that. In addition, I pay tribute—as I do at every opportunity that I get—to the work of Fiona Drouet and her charity EmilyTest.

My door is, and will continue to be, open, and I will listen to any ideas about initiatives that further our collective aspiration, just as I am prepared to respond to constructive criticism on what we could be doing better. I await the details of Pam Gosal's

proposed bill with interest—as she knows, because we have discussed it previously.

The debate has highlighted yet again what the Parliament does so well. Members on all sides of the chamber are able to come together in solidarity, with a renewed commitment to tackle violence against women and girls. I acknowledge the appetite for further action to tackle the root causes, and I renew my offer to listen to any views and ideas—many of which have been articulated tonight—about how that might be achieved. It is important that we all leave the chamber with that goal clear in our minds, and that we, as politicians, work together and lead by example.

As many members have done, I, too, take the time to pay tribute to the front-line organisations, the survivors and the campaigners on violence against women and girls, both in Scotland and globally. As we approach the 16 days of activism, we rightly recognise that this is a daily fight that we must win. In the spirit of the women and girls in Iran, therefore, we unite in our cry: “Woman, Life, Freedom”.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate.

Meeting closed at 19:27.

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