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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 20 September 2023

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

Portfolio Question Time

Constitution, External Affairs and Culture

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): Good afternoon. The first item of business is portfolio questions on the constitution, external affairs and culture.

I remind members that questions 1 and 2 are grouped together, and therefore I will take any supplementaries on those questions after both have been answered.

If a member wishes to request a supplementary question, they should press their request-to-speak button or indicate as much in the chat function by entering “RTS” during the relevant question.

International Offices

1. **Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the role of its international offices in promoting Scotland internationally. (S6O-02520)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): I begin by welcoming Ian Liddell-Grainger of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association to our proceedings this afternoon.

In answer to Emma Harper, I say that our international network provides a range of benefits to the people of Scotland. Working alongside Scottish Development International, our offices focus on attracting overseas investment, helping business trade internationally and protecting Scotland’s interests in the European Union and beyond. The hard work and dedication of our civil servants deployed overseas, working collaboratively with their excellent counterparts in SDI, help ensure that Scotland is the most attractive location in the United Kingdom outside London for foreign direct investment, thus securing and creating thousands of real living wage jobs.

Our offices also work with officials in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and other UK bodies to deliver impact on behalf of Scotland. I am pleased that their effective joint working was recognised by the Scottish Affairs Committee at Westminster in its report, “Promoting

Scotland Internationally”, which was published last week and to which I was happy to provide evidence.

Emma Harper: I welcome the fact that the Scottish Government continues to do excellent work to foster relationships with our friends across Europe, the United States and the globe. However, the House of Commons Library reports that the UK Government Foreign Office’s spending, including on consular services, has fallen from a peak of £15.1 billion in 2019 to £14.5 billion in 2020 and £11.5 billion in 2021. Most recently, a third of UK Foreign Office spending was on housing refugees in the UK.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that the degradation of UK Foreign Office spending shows that the UK Government is intent on becoming more insular, and that it is only with independence that Scotland can truly play its part as a progressive, outward-looking—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you. I now turn to the cabinet secretary for a response.

Angus Robertson: I certainly agree that the UK Government is overseeing a significant degradation of its great office of state. The Scottish Affairs Committee, of which Douglas Ross is part, recognises that the Foreign Office and the Scottish Government share a responsibility to promote Scotland’s interests internationally and that the UK Government could and should be doing more.

The UK Government must reflect on that as it considers the resources and priorities that are given to the Foreign Office. However, it demonstrates that to secure Scotland’s interests internationally—with regard to trade and investment, jobs in Scotland and a just transition to net zero—we must take our place as an independent member of the international community.

International Offices

2. **Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the work of its international offices. (S6O-02521)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): As I mentioned in my previous answer, our international offices provide a range of benefits to the people of Scotland. Those offices, which in 2023-24 will account for around 0.02 per cent of our overall spending plans, deliver real impact for our nation—for our economy, for inward investment, for our jobs market, for tourism, for culture and much more.

I welcome the fact that a growing number of Tess White's colleagues on the Conservative benches have taken part in visits that have involved Scottish Government international offices. I do not think that Tess White has yet had that experience, but I commend it to her for the future.

Tess White: The Scottish Government has announced that the annual report on the contribution of Scotland's international offices will be published in December 2023. Given the enormous pressures on the public purse, and given that ministerial portfolios are crying out for more funding, can the cabinet secretary explain what metrics will be used to justify the activities and output of those offices?

Angus Robertson: That sounded a bit critical in tone, so it would be interesting to hear from the Conservative front bench whether that is indeed the position of the Scottish Conservative Party. The Scottish Government's international offices measure their activities, output and successes using a range of qualitative data, such as feedback provided by our stakeholders, media articles and case studies and quantitative data such as social media performance and event statistics.

Each Scottish Government international office submits a monitoring and evaluation report for each financial year in order to monitor its effectiveness, which helps ensure that each office is achieving its objectives and is providing value for money. Tess White is absolutely right to say that a report will be produced later this year.

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): The location of the Scottish Government's international offices has been the subject of much debate. In particular, there is a noted absence in certain parts of the world, such as the global south, which is an issue that has come up in the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee. There have also been calls for a Scottish presence in South America, which is a rapidly growing market for Scotch whisky, exports of which to that area increased by 66 per cent in 2022. Does the cabinet secretary agree that the international office network would benefit from a wholesale review of locations, staffing and funding, and will he implement such a review?

Angus Robertson: First, we remain committed to opening a new office in Warsaw during this parliamentary term. After all, there is a rich history of education, trade and cultural links between Scotland and Poland, and we are keen to build on that. There are no plans to open any further Scottish Government international offices during this parliamentary term, but I very much welcome the tone and approach from the Conservative front bench spokesperson, which I contrast with the earlier contribution from his colleague behind him.

There are very strong reasons to actively consider expanding the network, and the member is right to point to different parts of the world where, as yet, there is no Scottish Government office. I would be delighted for him to make his case further, and I would very much welcome contributions from his party or indeed any other political party in the chamber that wishes us to expand the international network. I think that I am right in saying that there is all-party consensus that the offices provide excellent value for money and do a tremendous service for Scotland internationally.

Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2023

3. Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the 2023 Edinburgh festival fringe. (S6O-02522)

The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development (Christina McKelvie): The Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society and the fringe festival that the society operates are independent organisations. Therefore, it is not the role of the Scottish Government to assess their activity. However, following the support of the Scottish Government, especially during the pandemic, I was pleased to see the fringe return in force this year, with just under 2.5 million tickets issued across the festival to approximately 250,000 visitors for more than 3,500 shows.

The member might also wish to note that the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society produces an annual report of its activities, which is in the public domain. An initial closing statement on the 2023 fringe festival was published on 28 August, and the 2023 annual report will be published once the relevant data has been collated.

Alexander Stewart: Research carried out by *The Stage* showed that the average cost for an adult to stay at the festival for its duration this year was more than £2,000 in Airbnb while, in other cases, about £5,000 had to be spent on accommodation. That situation is only set to get worse next year, once the Scottish National Party-Green short-term let licensing scheme comes into effect. Given that the scheme will put accommodation for next year's festival at risk and out of the reach of many people, what does the Scottish Government intend to do to support the sector?

Christina McKelvie: Our proposals give licensing authorities powers to strike a balance—a balance that needs to be struck—between the needs and concerns of local communities and the wider economic and tourism benefits of short-term lets. Licensing authorities may consider applications for temporary exemptions for a single continuous period of up to six weeks in each 12-

month period, which would allow them to be used for events such as the Edinburgh festival that last a number of weeks. Licensing authorities can also make the temporary exemptions process a light-touch one by offering a reduced fee and a shorter application form and by not applying some of the normally mandatory licence conditions. A balance must be struck, and we must take that into account with regard to festivals and ensuring that those who want to access and perform at those festivals have the opportunity to do so.

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): Will the minister be meeting the fringe society soon to discuss the successes and challenges of the most recent festival, including accommodation issues and the short-term let regulations? Will she be working with City of Edinburgh Council to make the temporary six-week exemption as practical and as effective as possible, particularly for those home letting and home sharing? I know that the Minister for Housing has committed to meeting the festival about that.

Will the minister also advise what work is being done from the Scottish Government's perspective to support working and touring artists with regard to working and touring visas post-Brexit in order to maintain Scotland's thriving cultural sector?

Christina McKelvie: The First Minister met the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society on 11 August 2023, and both I and the Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture are scheduled to meet Festivals Edinburgh, the umbrella organisation for all 11 festivals—including the Edinburgh festival fringe—in early November.

On Ben Macpherson's question about visas, we will continue to push the United Kingdom Government to improve visa arrangements for creative professionals. Touring and other such international activities are essential to the business models of many parts of the sector and enrich the diversity of our own cultural scene. Access to and from the European Union simply was not an issue before, but it has been brought about by the disaster that is Brexit, and the long-term solution lies in Scotland being an independent member of the European Union.

Foyso Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): The arts and culture sector suffered immensely during the pandemic and is now suffering once more due to economic pressure, which has seen the sad closure of institutions such as the Edinburgh Filmhouse. Although it is now hoped that the Filmhouse will reopen, the same might not be the case for other venues. Will the Scottish Government outline the support that it plans to give the arts and culture sector ahead of next

year's fringe festival and how it will protect Edinburgh's other iconic venues?

Christina McKelvie: We will work closely with all the festivals. As I have said, I and the cabinet secretary will meet with the festivals organisations in November to pick up on all the points that Foyso Choudhury has raised.

We support all the festivals. For example, one of the events that I visited during the fringe was the made in Scotland programme, which we have been funding through our expo fund since 2008 at an annual average of £513,000, with an additional £550,000 this year.

We are supporting the sector and are meeting it. We will be happy to give an update when we have collated all that information.

Creative Writing (Support)

4. **Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to support creative writers. (S6O-02523)

The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development (Christina McKelvie): Scotland's literary culture is a notable part of our identity and must be nurtured. Our support for creative writers flows through our sponsorship of Creative Scotland. Its regularly funded network and open project funding route support a number of literature and publishing organisations, such as Moniack Mhor, the Scottish Book Trust and the Scottish Poetry Library. We are working closely with stakeholders to explore what can be done to overcome the challenges faced by creatives and ensure that they earn a fair living from cultural professional work.

Marie McNair: Local writers Thomas Cox and Linda-Jane Paterson, in the Clydebank writers group, do so much for creative writing in my constituency. Will the minister join me in praising their commitment? Will she also advise what funding is specifically available to support that kind of locally based talent?

Christina McKelvie: I am delighted to join Marie McNair in praising the commitment of Thomas Cox and Linda-Jane Paterson, and the Clydebank writers group, for their dedication to the art of creative writing.

Funding for writers is available through the Creative Scotland open fund for individuals, which can support a period of research or development and/or delivery of a creative activity for up to 24 months. Writers can ask for financial support towards writing time or research costs relating to their work. Numerous writers are supported in that way across all literary forms. Project funding also supports organisations that platform and develop writers. A key example is the literary festivals that

support writers to build readerships and connect them and their work in a live setting.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): Will the minister join me in congratulating the winners of the young Shetland writer competition, which attracted 316 entries from across all areas of Shetland? How can the Scottish Government support those young writers to continue to develop their creative writing?

Christina McKelvie: It is hugely encouraging to hear about the work that the young writers in Shetland are doing. I am keen to hear more about it, and Beatrice Wishart knows how to find me if she wants to tell me about it.

One of the big pieces of work that we are doing to widen access and create such opportunities for people is our Culture Collective programme, which has been supported with more than £10 million of Scottish Government funding to date. It includes a range of projects delivering creative writing workshops for underrepresented groups. In the north-east, Culture Collective's stories to tell project worked in partnership with Alcohol & Drugs Action to deliver creative writing workshops for people with lived experience of addiction in Aberdeen.

There are many areas in which we are supporting people to access such funds and develop their creativity, but the Shetland young writers group sounds exciting indeed.

Glasgow's Museums and Galleries (Support)

5. Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it will take to support Glasgow's museums and galleries. (S6O-02524)

The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development (Christina McKelvie): Ministers recognise the unprecedented challenges faced by Glasgow City Council's cultural sector—I know that we all do. We continue to provide extensive support to the culture sector in Glasgow through the Scottish Government's funding of the national performing companies and with substantial capital investment towards the city's cultural infrastructure, such as the Burrell Collection.

We will continue to work with the sector and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to identify barriers to immediate and long-term recovery and to ascertain how, within our powers and resources, to continue to help the museums and galleries that are most affected by current economic challenges.

Paul Sweeney: The minister may recall comments made by her colleague David McDonald, who, until recently, was a Scottish

National Party deputy leader of Glasgow City Council and chair of Glasgow Life. He said:

"Unlike Edinburgh, London, Liverpool, Manchester, York, Bradford, Leeds, Cardiff and others Glasgow gets no national funding for its museums from the UK/Scottish Government ... This can't go on. Can it?"

He is right, is he not?

Christina McKelvie: As I explained in my earlier answer, we are all aware and mindful of the challenges that everyone faces right now. Glasgow has a long history of ensuring access to museums and galleries. I grew up in most of them and learned most of the things that I know about Scottish history there, not in school.

We work closely with COSLA and Glasgow City Council. I met them at the Burrell Collection just a few months ago to discuss those issues, and I am happy to keep doing that. I am also happy to work with Paul Sweeney on the issue. It is not one on which we disagree but one on which we know that we have a challenge that we can work together to resolve.

Culture and Major Events (Skills and Careers)

6. Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide further details regarding its programme for government 2023-24 commitment to develop a "long term strategic approach to skills and careers" in the culture and major events sector. (S6O-02525)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): Our culture strategy action plan refresh, which is due to be published later this year, will provide further details on our commitment to develop our strategic approach to skills and careers in the culture sector.

Furthermore, responses to the recent events strategy consultation highlighted the point that maximising skills development opportunities should be a priority when delivering mega-events. An independent analysis of responses and update on next steps on our refreshed national events strategy will be published soon.

I also draw attention to work that is being undertaken in relation to skills and careers in Scotland's burgeoning screen sector. I look forward to updating members on that in due course.

Liz Smith: The cabinet secretary knows that, in a submission to the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee, Creative Scotland described the Scottish Government's support for the sector as

"short-term in nature and precarious in reality"

and warned that one arts organisation in three is at risk of insolvency, with possible job losses of 900. The First Minister recently said:

“The sector should be assured that this Government values the role of culture”.—[*Official Report*, 5 September 2023; c 17.]

So, will those 900 jobs be secure?

Angus Robertson: I recognise the importance of ensuring that we have the right traditional skills to sustain our historic environment and progress our journey to net zero. Often, questions are raised about skills specifically in the heritage sector and Historic Environment Scotland. There is a great deal of focus on that area at present.

I acknowledge the pressures that Liz Smith highlights to the chamber. I am extremely focused on the matter. She will appreciate the budgetary constraints under which the Scottish Government operates, not least because of the policies of the United Kingdom Government, which she supports. However, we will do absolutely everything that we can to fund the sector as well as we can and to support emerging sectors.

That is why I mentioned the screen sector, which has now reached £500 million gross value added to the Scottish economy and is still on a trajectory to reach £1 billion. We need to ensure that we have people with the right skills to take—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, cabinet secretary.

EU Alignment Policy

7. Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of how its European Union alignment policy could be impacted by potential EU expansion, in light of the remarks of the President of the European Commission in her state of the European Union address. (S6O-02526)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): The Scottish Government noted with great interest President von der Leyen’s state of the Union address, which begins the process of the European Union considering its strategic priorities for the year ahead. The Scottish Government will continue to follow the EU’s dialogue on the issues raised and consider what implications that might have for Scotland’s EU priorities and our commitment to align with EU legislation, where it is possible and meaningful for Scotland to do so.

Karen Adam: EU alignment will play an important role in ensuring that Scotland is best placed to rejoin the European Union in the near future. As we know, Scotland voted

overwhelmingly to remain in the EU and was dragged out against its will, so it is disappointing that, this week, Keir Starmer has again disregarded the voices of voters in Scotland and has ruled out the possibility of the United Kingdom rejoining the single market or the customs union, or re-implementing the policy of free movement. Does the cabinet secretary share my concern that that will inhibit economic growth? Does he agree that it is becoming increasingly clear that the only route to our rejoining the EU is as an independent country?

Angus Robertson: We are all, indeed, paying a very high price for a Brexit that Scotland did not vote for, and it is clear that the costs of Brexit outweigh any costs of EU membership. For example, 32 per cent of the UK’s small and medium-sized enterprise employers named EU exit as a major obstacle to growth. The Office for Budget Responsibility expects the UK’s gross domestic product to be 4 per cent lower in the long run due to Brexit. Every year, that equates to around £100 billion in lost output and around £40 billion in lost public revenues.

The Scottish Government agrees that rejoining the EU at the earliest opportunity as an independent country represents the best future for Scotland. Meanwhile, we remain committed to aligning with EU laws and standards where we can.

Nordic Music Days Festival 2024

8. Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what additional support it will provide to the Royal Scottish National Orchestra and other stakeholders to assist with hosting the Nordic Music Days festival, which is being held in Scotland for the first time in 2024. (S6O-02527)

The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development (Christina McKelvie): I welcome the Nordic Music Days festival taking place in Glasgow next year and recognise the important long-term partnerships that that could nurture. Officials have been working with Nordic Music Days and the RSNO on their plans for the festival. Due to budget constraints, the Scottish Government is not able to provide any additional funding for the event, although Creative Scotland has awarded three national lottery targeted grants towards the development of Nordic Music Days.

Michelle Thomson: The support that has been given thus far is noted and appreciated.

The benefit of the year-long Nordic Music Days festival and the involvement of a multitude of stakeholders will bring significant gross value added to Scotland. However, if we are to get that

benefit, funding has to be at scale and must, I concede, come from a variety of sources, including the Scottish Government. Will the minister meet me to explore further avenues, including what might be suitable Scottish Government funds?

Christina McKelvie: Yes. As I said, Creative Scotland has awarded Nordic Music Days three targeted grants through lottery funds, and the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra and the RSNO have agreed to look at contributing towards the festival.

In addition, officials based in the Scottish Government's Nordic office in Copenhagen—this is a great example of our use of overseas offices—are liaising directly with Nordic Music Days festival organisers to explore how to increase the reach of the festival when it comes to Glasgow in 2024. That work includes plans for a Scottish Government-hosted launch event in London with the diplomatic and cultural communities that are based there.

Although the Scottish Government is not in a position to provide any additional funding, I welcome Michelle Thomson's invitation to have a meeting with her to discuss how we can further support the festival, and I look forward to having such a meeting.

Justice and Home Affairs

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to portfolio questions on justice and home affairs. Question 1 comes from James Dornan, who joins us remotely.

Community Safety (Glasgow Cathcart)

1. **James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how the measures set out in its programme for government will help create safer communities, including in Glasgow Cathcart, in 2023-24. (S6O-02528)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): The safety and security of the public are my top priority, so I am pleased that the latest recorded crime statistics indicate that crime remains at one of the lowest levels since 1974. This Government's commitment to creating safer communities, as set out in the programme for government, includes a hate crime strategy and delivery plan, implementation of our violence prevention programme, a commitment to refresh the equally safe fund and the development of Scotland's first multi-agency domestic homicide review model.

I recently visited Cathcart police station to speak with officers about the collective emergency services role, and I was impressed with the

commitment to partnership working there. I learned about the vital work of our cashback for communities partners. Currently, 14 of the 29 cashback for communities partners are delivering services for young people in the Cathcart constituency area.

James Dornan: Alongside creating safer communities, a key focus of the programme for government is to reduce reoffending. Can the cabinet secretary outline some of the key actions that the Government is taking to achieve that aim?

Angela Constance: Reducing reoffending will require continued work with our partners to change how custody is used, in recognition of the clear evidence that community-based interventions can be more effective than short custodial sentences, as is highlighted in our "National Strategy for Community Justice". It will also require supporting people who are given sentences of imprisonment. Our work in that area will include continued investment in community justice services as well as in the prison estate.

In the coming months, we will also be implementing the provisions of the Bail and Release from Custody (Scotland) Act 2023, which will ensure that remand is focused on the people who pose the greatest risk to public safety, and that improved support is available for people leaving prison custody.

Mental Health Services (Prisons)

2. **Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the justice secretary has had with ministerial colleagues regarding improving mental health services in prisons. (S6O-02529)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): In June, I chaired the first cross-portfolio ministerial group on prisoner health and social care, which has been established to provide collective ministerial leadership across health, social care and justice. The group will support the delivery of improved health and care, including mental health care, for our prison population, with an integrated approach to prisoner health. It is a short-life strategic group consisting of senior cross-policy officials and key stakeholders. It has been established to drive forward improvements in prisoner healthcare and it reports to the cross-portfolio ministerial group.

Kevin Stewart: I know that the cabinet secretary has a great interest in this particular area. Can she give us an indication of what is being done to improve processes to move folk from prison to secure hospital accommodation when the prison environment is not able to meet their support and treatment needs?

Angela Constance: I assure Kevin Stewart that the Scottish Government takes seriously its responsibility to ensure that everyone who is going through the criminal justice system with mental health issues is appropriately supported, treated and cared for, while ensuring that their rights are being maintained.

The Forensic Network, together with justice and forensic mental health team stakeholders, is process mapping the pathway from prison to hospital, including what happens when beds are not immediately available. The proposed programme of work in relation to that is due to be concluded soon. Officials are developing protocols in relation to prison-to-hospital transfers, together with guidance for health boards on their responsibilities to persons in prison who need in-patient mental health care and treatment.

Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con): Vehicles belonging to prison officers have been destroyed in at least 10 fire bombings outside Scottish prisons. In the light of those cowardly attacks, what can the Scottish National Party Government do, not only to protect prison officers physically but to protect their mental health?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary, the question in the *Business Bulletin* relates to improving mental health services in prisons, so perhaps you could extract any relevant bits of information that are related that.

Angela Constance: Of course, Presiding Officer. I am more than happy to answer Mr Findlay's question.

The mental health and wellbeing of prison officers is very important. We must look after the care and treatment of prisoners, of course, but prison officers do a particularly demanding and difficult job. I assure Mr Findlay that, via the capital budget, the Scottish Prison Service takes measures to try to reduce any threat or danger to prison staff. However, there is not just one solution; there are many solutions for ensuring the safety and wellbeing of prisoners, which is a matter that I take seriously.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): Since the introduction in 2016 of "Talk to me", which is the Scottish Prison Service's mental health strategy, suicides among prisoners have increased by 42 per cent. Staff testifying at fatal accident inquiries have said that they are reluctant to implement the strategy because it worsens prisoner wellbeing.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am sorry to interrupt, Mr McArthur. I think that your microphone is in the wrong place. Could you start again, please?

Liam McArthur: Since the introduction in 2016 of the prison service's mental health strategy, suicides among prisoners have increased by 42 per cent. Staff testifying at FAls have said that they are reluctant to implement it because it worsens prisoner wellbeing. Will the cabinet secretary confirm that those concerns will be taken into account in the revised strategy, and say when that strategy will be published?

Angela Constance: I struggled to hear Mr McArthur, but I am confident that we will consider those matters very carefully. It is imperative that the right interventions are in place at the right time, whether it is the "Talk to me" scheme or something else. A wheen of work—a great breadth and depth of work—is focused on addressing issues around deaths in custody. I am happy to write to Mr McArthur on the detail of that work.

Prisoners' Families (Visits)

3. Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with the Scottish Prison Service regarding supporting and enabling families of prisoners to have better access to visiting their loved ones while they are in prison. (S6O-02530)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): Strong family and social relationships are known to help to reduce reoffending. That is why we support people in custody to maintain and enhance links with their families. That includes support for face-to-face visits through funding of prison visitor centres, the roll-out of in-cell technology and the availability of virtual visits.

Although decisions on the timing of visits are an operational matter for the Scottish Prison Service, I have regular engagement with SPS and partners on a range of issues, as do my officials.

Gillian Mackay: As the cabinet secretary says, the times that some prisons have for visits, especially children's visits, make it very expensive or impossible for some families to visit their loved ones. For example, getting to HMP Shotts from any distance, particularly on public transport, for 9.30 am on a weekend is just not possible, and Perth prison has no weekend family visits at all. That means that visiting is expensive. Overnight accommodation might be needed or children might need to be taken out of school, and if they cannot do that, they barely see their relative. None of that is good for rehabilitation, maintaining family ties or the wellbeing of the children involved. What more can the Scottish Government do to ensure that families of prisoners are not punished in those ways?

Angela Constance: I very much recognise that a prison can be a daunting place for children, and I

know that the Scottish Prison Service works hard to provide child-friendly visiting spaces. All prisons offer visits specifically for families and children, but there are challenges around timing, costs and accessibility, as Gillian Mackay has outlined.

Earlier this year, I had the pleasure of attending a parliamentary reception for the “Paying the Price: A Project on the Financial Impact on Families of Imprisonment and Release” research report, which is about the burden of care that disproportionately falls on women. The cost of living crisis has increased those challenges.

The Scottish Government has invested £800,000 in prison visitor centres. There is also the assisted prison visit scheme, which provides assistance for travel costs, and there is the Sacro service. However, I know that the Scottish Prison Service is working hard to make other assistance and schemes available.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): Transport is a significant barrier for families from the islands who are trying to visit their loved ones in prison. They have to travel hundreds of miles over multiple days, and pay high costs for visits of only 30 minutes.

We know that family contact is important in the rehabilitation process and for mental health. What support can the Scottish Government provide to families in rural and island areas who are trying to maintain in-person contact with their loved ones who are in prison?

Angela Constance: Beatrice Wishart has made a good point. Although virtual contact is important, whether it is in-cell telephony or access to face-to-face online contact, which grew during the pandemic, it should not replace face-to-face contact. I recognise that there are additional costs for travel from the islands to the mainland. Does Beatrice Wishart have any case studies or details of constituents who have such issues? If she wants to give me examples of when those costs have not been met, I would be happy to look into the matter.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): Gillian Mackay was right to mention how crucial visits are to rehabilitation and wellbeing, but it is also crucial that that support network continues when prisoners approach release.

The Dick Stewart Service, in Glasgow, has provided support and accommodation to male ex-offenders and their families for more than 20 years, but it is set to close in December due to council cuts. I know that the cabinet secretary believes in the importance of community-based support and rehabilitation, so will she personally commit to exploring all available options to prevent the closure of the Dick Stewart Service in Glasgow?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before I ask the cabinet secretary to respond, I point to the fact that the question in the *Business Bulletin* relates to enabling families of prisoners to have better access to visiting their loved ones while they are in prison. Based on that, please respond to the part of the question that you feel is appropriate, cabinet secretary.

Angela Constance: I am—as a former prison social worker—very familiar with the Dick Stewart hostel. The purpose of the Bail and Release from Custody (Scotland) Act 2023 was to start release planning early, which is important when preparing families to be reunited, to reduce the risk of reoffending and to make vital accommodation arrangements for release.

Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and Fire Brigades Union (Meetings)

4. **Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government when it last met with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and the Fire Brigades Union to discuss the impact of any reduction in budget and services on communities, including in the South Scotland region. (S6O-02531)

The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Siobhian Brown): The Scottish Government is in regular contact with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and the Fire Brigades Union and those discussions will include how the service is provided to ensure that it is delivering value for the public purse while maintaining community and firefighter safety.

I last met with the SFRS board last week, and with the FBU in June, and officials met with them at the end of August.

Carol Mochan: The reality is that our communities are being seriously let down by the major cuts to fire service budgets, which are putting lives at risk. Reports in local Ayrshire papers last week suggest that there is

“evidence that on at least two days last week, appliances from larger and smaller stations alike across the area were noted on the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service’s own system as being unavailable for service because there are insufficient staff to operate them safely.”

The cuts are reducing the ability of firefighters to provide high-quality services. Our firefighters are standing against the cuts, as are the FBU and our communities. When will the Scottish Government listen and reverse these dangerous and damaging cuts?

Siobhian Brown: As the minister for victims and community safety, I want to reiterate my commitment to ensure that the SFRS continues to deliver the high standard of service that is required

to keep our communities safe. I also thank all the firefighters, who play a vital role in that.

I am sure that every member in the chamber can appreciate the financial pressure that the Scottish fixed annual budget finds itself in, and not one of us could have envisaged 18 months ago the current financial challenges that we face due to record inflation and public sector pay rises.

Despite that, the Scottish Government increased the budget by £14.4 million this year—it now totals £368 million during this financial year. Decisions on how SFRS allocates its budget are an operational matter. The Scottish Government and I am in regular contact with SFRS on plans to deliver the service and ensure value for the public purse while maintaining community and firefighter safety.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): As the minister so rightly said, all budgets are under severe pressure. Can the minister advise the chamber whether the Labour Party said how much additional funding should be allocated to the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service or what should be the source of that funding, given its recent reluctance—no doubt under pressure from its Westminster bosses—to support the raising of increased tax revenue?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The minister should respond with her perspective as a Scottish Government minister.

Siobhian Brown: I look forward to all members taking part in the forthcoming budget process, and I recognise the constraints on its budget that the Scottish Government has due to continuing United Kingdom Government austerity and the sustained impact of high inflation due to the disastrous Tory budget of Liz Truss, which was announced this time last year.

We have limited levers available to us to increase our spending power in the face of the UK Government's failure to ensure that public spending responds to the real challenges that people face in their lives; that is a reality.

I hope that the UK Government's autumn statement realises the situation that the UK cost of living crisis is causing for people and increases the Scottish Government's budget, but I am not going to hold my breath.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): Slashing £11 million from the fire service's budget led to a terrifying situation last week. When Aberdeen's height appliance was "off the run" and Dundee's was faulty, crews had to travel to Falkirk—a 230-mile round trip—to get cover. How often will the Government gamble that brave underresourced fire crews will make things right,

operating with slashed budgets, before they cannot?

Siobhian Brown: That is why it is imperative that the United Kingdom Government's autumn statement sets out more substantive action to increase the Scottish Government's budget, so that we can better align spending and deliver for people and organisations across Scotland.

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): Everyone supports our firefighters, who play a vital role in keeping our communities safe. How many firefighters would we have per head of population in Scotland if we were to match the current situation in England?

Siobhian Brown: We are maintaining front-line services by having a higher number of firefighters than there is in other parts of the UK. The latest statistics show that, as of 31 March 2022, there were 6.1 firefighters per 10,000 of the population in England. If that ratio was replicated in Scotland, we would have just over 3,342 firefighters, but we had 6,225 firefighters in place at the end of March 2023, which is 11.3 firefighters per 10,000 of the population.

I am also pleased to say that, in February, firefighters accepted a two-year pay offer that runs from July 2022 to the end of June 2024.

Body-worn Cameras

5. Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government when it anticipates that body-worn cameras will be delivered to over 14,000 police officers, in light of its 2023-24 programme for government commitment to support Police Scotland to achieve this. (S6O-02532)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): We are fully supportive of Police Scotland's plans to introduce body-worn video cameras. Such cameras have a significant potential to reduce crime, and they will offer greater safety and security to officers and members of the public.

Police Scotland is undertaking a full procurement exercise for body-worn cameras. Following an initial pilot phase, it will commence the roll-out of the technology from summer 2024. The precise pace of the roll-out is a matter for Police Scotland and will be determined by the need to provide full training for officers and staff.

Sharon Dowey: At last week's meeting of the Criminal Justice Committee, David Page of Police Scotland was unable to confirm whether body-worn cameras will be rolled out from next year. Can the cabinet secretary guarantee that the roll-out of body-worn cameras will go ahead as planned next year?

Angela Constance: We are at risk of violently agreeing with each other. The Scottish Government, the Scottish Police Authority and Police Scotland have been clear about their priorities, particularly the priority relating to body-worn cameras. As is reflected in the programme for government, the Scottish Government will support Police Scotland in its plans to roll out body-worn video cameras to more than 14,000 officers and staff from 2024.

There are plans ahead. The initial business case has been completed, and a full procurement exercise is being undertaken. I was very pleased that, at the committee meeting, members of Police Scotland and the SPA spoke in detail about the plans ahead.

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): Will the cabinet secretary confirm how much the Scottish Government has invested in policing this year and how much has been allocated to the body-worn camera programme?

Angela Constance: As I indicated to Sharon Dowey, operational decisions on specific budget priorities are for Police Scotland. The full cost of the implementation of this very important, in effect spend-to-save programme will be available when the full procurement exercise is complete.

On Audrey Nicoll's direct question, the Government will invest £1.45 billion in policing this year. That is £80 million in addition to what was provided the year before, and it represents a 6.3 per cent increase. Crucially, in relation to body-worn cameras, we have more than doubled the policing capital budget since 2017-18.

Fire Brigades Union (DECON Campaign)

6. Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its engagement with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and the Fire Brigades Union regarding the FBU's DECON campaign to mitigate the carcinogenic nature of firefighting. (S6O-02533)

The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Siobhian Brown): In August, we provided the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service with £56,000 in additional funding to enable firefighters to participate in a United Kingdom-wide health screening programme, which is being facilitated by the Fire Brigades Union and the University of Central Lancashire. I am pleased to say that last week, 175 SFRS firefighters took part in that trial, in which more than 1,000 firefighters from across the UK will be screened for early signs of cancers and other health problems that could be related to contaminants. The trial will help to inform the next steps on the health monitoring of firefighters. In

addition, the SFRS is taking action across all aspects of operations and working practices to reduce exposure to contaminants, including investment in new fire appliances and facilities.

Maggie Chapman: I thank the minister for her response and the funding that made last week's screening possible. That is a good first step to improving how we support firefighters to keep safe. However, it must be followed by concerted investment, planning and action relating to healthcare, facilities and infrastructure and basic necessities such as showers and soap, as well as justice at work. How will the minister engage with the SFRS on the programme for government commitment to progress decontamination requirements? Does she recognise that only by protecting our firefighters' wellbeing with proper facilities and investment will we have a sustainable service that is fit for the 21st century?

Siobhian Brown: I agree with the member's last point. The SFRS is taking action across all aspects of operations and working practices in order to reduce exposure to contaminants, including investment in new fire appliances and facilities, through the additional funding that we have provided to support that work. The programme for government commitment on the wellbeing of firefighters shows that we are committed to making progress in the area. I will continue to work closely with the SFRS and the FBU and will carefully consider any proposals that come forward that would increase the safety and wellbeing of firefighters.

Hate Crime Strategy

7. Foysoil Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government whether it can provide an update on how it plans to regularly monitor and evaluate the implementation of its hate crime strategy for Scotland, in the lead-up to the review that is planned for 2028. (S6O-02534)

The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Siobhian Brown): The hate crime strategy makes a number of commitments, including improved support for victims, improving data and evidence and developing effective approaches to prevention. We will shortly publish a delivery plan to set out our activity over the next two years. One of the key priorities will be to improve hate crime data. We are also committed to on-going lived experience engagement, to help us to understand if our interventions are working. The hate crime strategic partnership group will oversee the progress of the delivery plan.

Foysoil Choudhury: Last week, I asked the First Minister how the Scottish Government ensures that demand for police officers is being suitably met after the number of police officers in Scotland was reduced due to the funding cuts.

However, calls to Police Scotland are only increasing. Can the Scottish Government advise what talks it is having with Police Scotland in order to ensure that its officers will be able to fully investigate all reported hate crimes, given the reduction in the number of police officers?

Siobhian Brown: I assure the member that we are in constant talks with Police Scotland regarding the delivery plan for the hate crime strategy. The strategy will set out the strategic priorities for tackling and preventing hate crime and has been informed by individuals who have lived experience of hate crime. Police Scotland is on board and we engage with it at every meeting.

Transport of Prisoners to Court

8. Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to reports of significant issues in transporting prisoners from custody to court. (S6O-02535)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): It is clear that the current performance of the GEOAme contract is not working as it should be and is causing disruption for courts, the Scottish Prison Service and others. We are working with justice partners and GEOAme to agree a range of measures to minimise disruption and reduce the pressures on justice services, including cutting the number of people travelling between prison, court and police custody.

The Scottish Prison Service leads the management of the contract and is supporting GEOAme to improve its staff recruitment and retention to meet the current and future demand for the service.

Sandesh Gulhane: To say that it is not working is an understatement. Court delays caused by late prison transfers exacerbate misery for victims who have already got a long wait to see their case brought to trial. The cabinet secretary will be aware that the Scottish Prison Service receives penalty payments from GEOAme every time that court proceedings are delayed due to its failures, so will she agree with my call today for victims to be compensated through receipt of those payments, as they are the ones most affected by that shocking incompetence?

Angela Constance: The member will appreciate that, when I am in this place, I have to choose my words somewhat carefully and he is of course correct to point to issues and the impact on the courts, but there is another aspect of the contract that is vitally important—that is as important as supporting our court service—and that is, for example, ensuring that prisoners can access their hospital appointments, because,

believe you me, prisoners have the same rights as the member and I to access healthcare.

There are many aspects of how the contract has been implemented that I am far from content with but, in terms of action that we are taking, we are in and around the details and the guts of the contract, because it is clear that the Scottish Prison Service and GEOAme will have to work together to amend the situation and sort this out for the benefit of our courts system, which is, after all, doing very well in its recovery programme and is getting through the backlog of cases that arose as a result of the pandemic.

Scotland's Nature

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-10498, in the name of Rhoda Grant, on protecting Scotland's nature. I invite those members who wish to participate in the debate to press their request-to-speak button.

14:52

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): That urgent action is needed on the climate emergency and its impact is something that unites us all. Rural Scotland is in a strong position to contribute, with our potential for tree planting and our large peatlands acting as carbon sinks. There is also agreement on providing public funds to incentivise action. However, private green finance is not just mooted by the Scottish Government; it is being actively encouraged to finance change. Many Scots will share a deep unease at inviting private financiers to make money exploiting Scotland's natural heritage. We know that, where there is no private profit, there is no private finance. Therefore, is the policy rationale for using private finance for nature sound, especially if it offsets pollution elsewhere?

The most quoted reason for using private finance has been the £20 billion gap in the funding that is required for nature. However, it turns out not to be a £20 billion gap at all. Jon Hollingdale, the retired chief executive of the Community Woodlands Association, has cast significant doubt on the figure. It is now clear that the £20 billion figure that was produced by the Green Finance Institute—an organisation claiming that it is led by bankers—is grossly overestimated. NatureScot now says that it agrees in large part with Jon Hollingdale's analysis and the Scottish Government, in parliamentary answers, has also revealed that other aspects of the Green Finance Institute's report do not stand up to scrutiny. Even the Green Finance Institute seeks to distance itself from that figure, making it clear it always said that its data was heavily qualified.

With the £20 billion figure crumbling under scrutiny, we now see NatureScot throwing out alternative funding gap figures. For peatland restoration alone, it says that a figure of £3 billion to £4 billion is needed, against the £250 million that it has available up to 2030. However, the problem is not the lack of available investment; the real gap is in the underspend of the budgets that the Parliament has voted for.

Both tree planting and peatland targets are not being met by a substantial margin. In peatlands, less than half the annual budget is being spent. The recent programme for government set out the

expectation for peatland restoration for next year as 10,700 hectares, which is less than half the annual target. At this rate, getting up to target will take the rest of the decade. To suggest that we can spend up to £4 billion of private finance on peatland restoration any time soon, when we cannot spend £10 million today, is simply not credible.

The case for needing private finance investment looks flimsy at best. We understand the reasons for the inability to spend the available budgets, which are set out in a recent Scottish Government social research paper, "Mobilising private investment in natural capital". Key among them is landowner reluctance to commit to land use changes. Landowners will lose autonomy over their land use for up to 100 years, when they cannot see the future circumstances, the costs and how those might change. Even landowners suggest that offering more money—public or private—is probably not the answer.

There are other ways to increase tree planting and peatland restoration. Degraded peatland is emitting, not sequestering, carbon. The Scottish Environment Protection Agency and environmental health professionals are constantly acting to monitor and act on air, noise, water and wider environmental pollution. If we consider carbon emission as another form of environmental pollution, what are we doing to regulate it? Regulation could create the right incentives to fix our emitting peatlands. With continuing restoration grants, there could be no excuse not to act. However, where is the policy discussion on that and other forms of regulation that can be considered alongside whether private finance has any legitimate role?

Instead of addressing the practical challenges to ensure that our current budgets for climate investment can be spent, and instead of examining all policy options, the Government has allowed itself to be dazzled by the pitches of private financiers. I know that the United Nations climate change conference of the parties and the national strategy for economic transformation encourage consideration of private green finance, but COP does not tell us what specific actions we must take. We must consider the policy approach that is best suited to our circumstances.

We would tackle the issue very differently. Scottish Labour would not adopt the neoliberal economic preference of Green and Scottish National Party ministers for selling off our natural capital. We would set out and consult widely on a range of policy options that exist and build consensus on the best way for Scotland to move forward. That is what I urge the Scottish Government to do now.

I move,

That the Parliament reaffirms its recognition of the climate emergency and the need to achieve a net zero future; recognises that Scotland has the potential for more carbon sequestration capacity by restoring peatlands and extending tree cover; regrets that the available budgets for woodland planting and peatland restoration are underspent by significant margins, and that targets are not being met; notes that the Scottish Government has promoted the use of private green finance to fill a purported £20 billion gap in funding for nature in Scotland, but that this figure, published by the Green Finance Institute, has been called into question and is now recognised by NatureScot as an overestimate; regrets that there was a lack of due diligence carried out by the Scottish Government; agrees that investment in the climate transition is crucial, but believes that Scotland's natural environment should not be allowed to be used for greenwashing by private corporations, and calls on the Scottish Government to carry out a full and transparent consultation on the policy options and finance mechanisms available to advance Scotland's capacity to sequester carbon.

14:58

The Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity (Lorna Slater): I welcome today's debate. The twin nature and climate emergencies are ever more urgent, and they represent an existential threat that simply cannot be ignored. Last year, nations around the world agreed the global biodiversity framework—an ambitious global agreement to halt biodiversity loss by the end of the decade and to reverse the catastrophic declines that we have seen in our natural world. It is a global agreement to tackle the nature emergency. It is the same determination and commitment to collaboration that led to the Paris agreement on the climate emergency.

The United Kingdom Government might abandon its responsibilities, but this Government stands by its promises to the international community and to future generations.

Restoring Scotland's peatlands and forests is critical to meeting both our climate and nature commitments. We are making good progress. Last year, we restored 7,500 hectares of peatland, up from 5,400 the previous year—

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): You say that you are making good progress, but you have not even reached 50 per cent of your target that was set out in 2018. Is that good progress?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Members should remember to speak through the chair.

Lorna Slater: It is indeed good progress. We can see the year-on-year progress and the enormous effort that the sector is making. The growth in the restoration rate reflects an increasing delivery capacity, and we are confident of positive results this year.

The woodland targets that we have set for ourselves also reflect our ambition to increase planting, not only to sequester carbon but, through the planting of native woodland, to protect and preserve our rich biodiversity. Although weather and other factors can impact progress, we know that we need to do more there, too.

Doing more means continuing to build capacity and understanding across the land management sector. *[Interruption.]*

Lorna Slater: No—I am going to make progress.

It also means investing more money. To prevent climate disaster, we are all in agreement that the infrastructure investment that we need will come not just from the public sector but from the private sector.

All parts of society have a role to play, and that is true for nature restoration. Yes, we need public investment—and this Government is delivering that—but we also need the private sector to take responsibility.

The finance gap, as the global biodiversity framework calls it, is an estimate of how much more investment is needed to protect and restore our natural environment. Globally, the United Nations Environment Programme has estimated that, by 2050, the gap could be as high as US\$4 trillion. In Scotland, the only substantive estimate to date has come from the Green Finance Institute in 2021. Is either of those figures exact? No—they are estimates that are based on a wide range of assumptions.

Rhoda Grant: Did the minister actually look at the document? It contains figures for implementing the right to roam in Scotland, which we have enjoyed for decades, as well as other aspects where private finance is not allowed. Did she read the document before she pinned her hopes to it?

Lorna Slater: I am absolutely familiar with that document and with the assumptions that are in it. Rhoda Grant is quite right that there are assumptions in the document. That is the only figure that we currently have towards understanding what the gap might be in Scotland. We are continuing work to get more exact figures and to understand that.

However, those numbers are merely indicative of the size of the challenge, and that challenge is huge. In our biodiversity investment plan, we will set out how we will rise to that challenge.

Investing in our environment is also about investing in our communities. That is why we have published the interim principles for responsible investment and are now developing a market framework that builds on that and reflects our

vision of a values-led, high-integrity market that ensures that communities benefit.

Our aim is to support diversification of land ownership and empower communities—goals that will also be reflected in our forthcoming proposals for a land reform bill.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): Will the minister take an intervention?

Lorna Slater: I am sorry—I am running out of time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The minister is about to conclude, because she is over time.

Lorna Slater: We will, therefore, ensure that those plans are informed by the on-going debate over how we ensure that investment in nature supports our land reform agenda, including the recent Scottish Land Commission report “Natural Capital and Land Reform”.

I am proud of our public investment in nature.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Minister, you need to conclude and move your amendment.

Lorna Slater: At the 26th UN climate change conference of the parties—COP26—in Glasgow, we announced the new multiyear funding for nature restoration—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Minister, I asked you to conclude and move your amendment. Please do so now.

Lorna Slater: I apologise.

I move amendment S6M-10498, to leave out from first “regrets” to end and insert:

“affirms its commitment to the Global Biodiversity Framework, which commits countries to “closing the biodiversity finance gap” and, in Target 19, calls for countries to “Substantially and progressively increase the level of financial resources from all sources”; commends the increase in public investment in nature through the Nature Restoration Fund and Peatland ACTION; recognises the vital role of the Forestry Grant Scheme in supporting woodland creation and sustainable forest management; agrees that investment in the climate transition is crucial, and that Scotland’s natural environment should not be allowed to be used for greenwashing by private corporations; recognises that tackling the climate and nature crises requires all parts of society to act; welcomes, therefore, the Scottish Government’s Interim Principles for Responsible Investment, which are designed to support a values-led, high-integrity market that ensures that communities benefit, and to support diverse and productive land ownership, as well as the recent publication of a consultation on Scotland’s Biodiversity Strategy and an underpinning delivery plan, which will be followed by an investment plan; further welcomes the Scottish Government’s commitment to progress a Land Reform Bill and an Agriculture Bill; notes the valuable contribution made by the Scottish Land Commission in its report, Natural Capital and Land Reform, and looks forward to the Scottish Government’s response to its recommendations,

and calls on all parties to work constructively to restore Scotland’s natural environment.”

15:04

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I refer members to my entry in the register of members’ interests as a partner in J Halcro-Johnston and Sons, which is an organic farming business; the owner of a croft on Orkney; and a member of NFU Scotland and Scottish Land & Estates. I am also the species champion for the Caledonian pinewoods.

I do not think that anyone in this chamber needs telling that Scotland’s natural environment is one of the most beautiful and ecologically varied in the world, and it is key to our meeting our net zero and biodiversity goals. Indeed, it is not hard to talk up Scotland’s natural environment or to extol its many virtues. I am particularly fortunate, as someone who lives in and represents the Highlands and Islands, that one of our most stunning and diverse areas is where I call home.

However, we need to do more than just talk because, all too often, that is what the Scottish Government has done. The reality is that, by consistently missing restoration targets and by launching numerous strategies that neither protect against biodiversity loss nor expand our natural capital, the SNP has failed to protect nature in Scotland.

It is estimated that 80 per cent of the UK’s peatlands, the majority of which are in Scotland, are damaged and in need of restoration, but the Scottish Government has not met its peatland restoration targets for five years now. Since 2000, almost 16 million trees, the equivalent of more than 1,700 every day, have been felled on public land in Scotland to make way for wind farms.

The Scottish Government’s proposal for a natural environment bill will set out a framework for statutory targets for nature restorations, targets that will be binding on Government in the same way that climate change targets require the Scottish Government to work towards meeting its net zero targets. The consultation on the strategic framework for biodiversity states that

“statutory targets will signal a clear long-term direction of travel, and drive and focus action.”

However, in June, it was announced that the Scottish Government had missed four out of its previous five legally binding emissions targets.

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

Jamie Halcro Johnston: I am sorry, but it is a short debate. I have only four minutes, and I am opening for the Conservatives.

The Scottish National Party-Green Government has no problem with setting targets; where it falls down is hitting them. To hit those targets will require effort from stakeholders across Scotland and across many sectors, and at the heart of those efforts will be Scotland's farmers, crofters and land managers. As custodians of large parts of the land, they are already at the forefront of protecting our natural environment, supporting biodiversity and managing land for the future. However, as we debated only last week, Scotland's agricultural sector has been left in limbo with the Scottish Government's failure to publish its new agriculture bill or to provide details of how this sector, which is vital to Scotland and its natural environment, will be supported.

If the new bill is to focus on food security, the support that is available should surely focus on that, too. The Government is looking for farmers and others to support the protection of nature, the encouragement of biodiversity and the meeting of climate targets, but Scottish ministers should be looking at how that can be supported from the net zero budget in the same way that it does for other sectors.

I very much recognise that my connection with the natural environment stems largely from being brought up on our farm in Orkney, which has always been rich in biodiversity, with wetland, moorland, coastal areas and—believe it or not—trees. Given the importance of engaging with the next generation, our amendment acknowledges NatureScot's report "Teaching, learning and play in the outdoors: a survey of provision in Scotland in 2022", which highlights how outdoor education and play stimulate children's connection with nature. I recognise the importance of all efforts to educate wider society of the work that is being done to protect Scotland's natural environment.

I welcome this short debate on what is an important subject. The Scottish Conservatives want to strengthen environmental protection on land and sea. We would establish a cleaner seas fund to get harmful products such as plastic out of our water, and we want to increase tree planting, create a third national park and protect our green belts.

We are ambitious for Scotland's natural environment, and we will work with others to protect and restore it. We need more than just more words or more targets from Scottish ministers; they need to start delivering. So far, that delivery has been lacking.

I move amendment S6M-10498.1, to insert at end:

“; regrets that, despite the pivotal role played by farmers, crofters and land managers in reducing emissions, capturing carbon, promoting biodiversity and restoring habitats through hard work, innovation and investment,

they continue to be left in the dark over future support and await clarity regarding the proposed Agriculture Bill; agrees that investment is crucial to meet Scotland's net zero goals; recognises the UK Government's £1 billion in Track 2 funding for the carbon capture and storage project, to protect jobs and develop green skills, and acknowledges NatureScot's Teaching, learning and play in the outdoors report, which highlights how outdoor education and play stimulate children's connection to nature.”

15:08

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): As the proud species champion of the Scottish primrose, I very much welcome the fact that the Parliament is debating Scotland's twin crises on climate and nature, and I am grateful to Rhoda Grant and her Labour colleagues for allowing us a further opportunity to do so. The subject is one to which we frequently return in debates, statements and questions in this chamber—and that is a good thing.

However, it would also be a good thing if we were not in a holding pattern. As the perilous state of our climate worsens and the need to address emissions and biodiversity loss becomes ever more urgent, the Scottish Government's response has too often lacked focus, detail and urgency. By way of example, Rhoda Grant's motion is right to note that Scotland is falling short of realising its significant potential in carbon sequestration. It comes on the back of years of targets for woodland generation and peatland restoration being missed—by some margin, on occasion. As concerning as that is, the fact that budgets in those areas appear to have been underspent beggars belief, and the confusion now about the extent of the funding gap, as well as questions over the method of plugging that gap, does not inspire confidence.

As members have said, it all comes against the backdrop of the Government missing its wider targets on emissions reductions. The targets might very well be world leading, but that only matters if there is a credible plan for their delivery. That has been a constant criticism of the Government's approach from the UK Climate Change Committee, with Lord Deben and his colleagues all but begging Scottish ministers to detail how they plan to meet their targets. Meanwhile, just this week, Scotland's council leaders sent out a stark warning that, without adequate funding and direction from Government, Scotland will continue to miss its climate targets.

There is an established pattern here. Announcements are made to grab headlines and shape a narrative, but seldom is the hard work done to figure out and explain how commitments will be delivered in practice. When failure can always be blamed on others, whether that be the UK Government, Opposition parties, local councils

or the constitutional settlement, the incentive to invest in the painstaking work of delivery simply evaporates. On transport, heat and agriculture—the areas in which the need for emissions reductions are most pronounced—the Government must detail how it plans to support a just transition. In the meantime, with one in nine species in Scotland threatened with national extinction, ministers seem happy to launch another consultation on a biodiversity strategy that was supposed to have been implemented six months ago.

As for the carbon credit scheme, Rhoda Grant is right to express concern. Given the apparent lack of regulatory oversight, our former Green colleague, Andy Wightman, is correct to suggest that the proposals to sell off Scotland's woodlands are "highly questionable".

All in all, as I have said in previous debates, our climate ambitions might be world leading, but the Government's delivery is world lagging. The Scottish Liberal Democrats will work with ministers and other partners on detailed proposals targeting the twin emergencies, but time is quite clearly running out.

15:12

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): In opening the debate, Rhoda Grant referred to the revealing social research report, "Mobilising private investment in natural capital", which was recently published by the Scottish Government. It confirms everything that she has said about private finance, with its focus on investment in carbon markets and peatland restoration and potentially links in forestry, too. The theory is that, if we plant more trees and restore our peatlands, they will generate large amounts of carbon credits to sell on the open market, paying for green investment and providing a good profit margin.

However, the report makes it clear that the carbon price is nowhere near enough for private investors and that that position is unlikely to change any time soon. The report suggests that public finance should underwrite the risk of the carbon price continuing to fall short, with a minimum of 30 years of public underwriting probably needed but a 50-year commitment perhaps being better. That is a massive commitment.

The report recommends that the grants currently offered to restore peatland be stopped in order to underwrite the future costs of private investment. However, that would result in an increase in the amount of money that would need to be spent from the Scottish Government's budget. There would have to be, say, a £25 million contingent liability or budget requirement for cash guarantees

of well over £1 billion over the suggested 50-year period. There is no free lunch here.

The social research report helpfully goes on to provide instructions on how we could release private finance with a contracts for difference approach. Let us not go there—as we have seen in the past week, that could fail spectacularly. We get dependent on private finance, and then it simply stops delivering until more taxpayer-funded guarantees are offered. What has happened is a timely warning to the Scottish Government.

Let us look at the alternatives for tackling our nature and biodiversity challenges. Rhoda Grant talked about the regulatory changes that we could make—I will add to those ideas. What about refocusing the work of the devolved Crown Estate Scotland? If it had a much clearer climate change challenge focus, it would benefit our communities now, through land purchases, future land holdings and the use of the proceeds from the sales of sea bed leases. Likewise, what more could Forestry and Land Scotland do? Unlike the SNP and Green Government, we would explore all the options for action, not just private green finance.

I want to finish on what needs to happen now. Liam McArthur made the point that we should not underspend our existing budget and that we should make that money work for our communities now. How will the Scottish Government support our rural communities now—our crofters, our farmers and our landowners—in playing a part in the just transition that we urgently need to create jobs and address our climate and biodiversity crisis? Critically, how will it spend the money that is budgeted to create benefits and tackle our climate emergency? On today of all days, the Scottish Government needs not just to talk a good game, but to deliver in practice for all our communities.

15:15

Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): I welcome the opportunity to take part in the debate, albeit with a more positive view than our Labour colleagues. Much has been done by the Scottish Government, and much remains to be done. I will touch on just a few of its climate change initiatives that are making a difference.

First, I draw attention to forestry. Last year, Scotland created 63 per cent of all new woodland in the UK, and we have by far the most ambitious woodland creation target in the UK. In the past five years, 51,000 hectares of new woodland have been established—the equivalent of 102 million trees. The Scottish Government continues to support and encourage landowners to boost the

scale of their efforts. That is a success story, but there is always scope to achieve more.

The Scottish Government is acting now to tackle the nature crisis. The nature restoration fund is Scotland's largest-ever fund for nature. Since it was launched, at the 26th UN climate change conference of the parties—COP26—in Glasgow, the fund has invested more than £20 million, making a difference across the length and breadth of Scotland by restoring rivers and flood plains, regenerating our forests and helping our wildlife populations to recover.

This year, the Scottish Government has provided Scottish councils with an additional £5 million to develop nature networks across the country to help tackle the nature and climate crises. The fund will allow local authorities to develop new woodlands, hedgerows, wildflower meadows and ponds.

One area that needs attention is deer management, as deer can seriously damage growth prospects for young trees and vegetation. In some areas, deer fencing is in poor condition and does not protect young trees; improvements are needed there. Hand in hand with that is the need to restore our peatlands, which lock up huge amounts of carbon. The Scottish Government has previously announced a £250 million, 10-year funding package to restore 250,000 hectares of degraded peatland by 2030. Although the 64,000 hectares of peatland that has so far been restored falls short of Scottish Government targets, the barriers that have been faced are gradually being addressed, and progress is accelerating.

Investing in natural capital needs money. Nothing can happen without funding, and there is no doubt that the public sector alone can never meet that need. That means calling on the private sector to invest responsibly in our natural capital. For it to do that, there needs to be a clear path, with transparency around investment opportunities. There also needs to be a fair return on the capital invested. Private investment is crucial to achieving net zero, and many tens of billions of pounds of investment will be needed to achieve that. It is essential that natural capital has the ability to generate fair profits in order to service the debts that will be incurred and that that is factored in to every project. A key point to remember is the need to ensure that our people and our communities are not disadvantaged and that benefit will accrue to both the investor and the community.

This summer, we watched in horror as one natural disaster after another filled our TV screens. People in so many countries were losing all their possessions and, in some cases, even their lives. The climate crisis is with us now, it is worsening and I do not see the strong and decisive

leadership at Westminster that is needed to take action against it. I genuinely despair when I see both the Labour and Tory parties at Westminster rolling back on green undertakings that they have made. There is no choice about this: we must adapt to our changing circumstances and respond to the climate change threat, or we will face the consequences.

I am pleased that, while Westminster is watering down its net zero targets, the Scottish Government is taking clear action to address climate change. Others must follow.

15:19

Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab):

What we are holding the SNP-Green Government to account for this afternoon is its relationship with big capital. Under the Green Finance Institute—“backed by Government, trusted by finance, led by bankers”, we are told—it has signed a memorandum of understanding with Hampden & Co, a private bank for high-net-worth clients; Lombard Odier investments, an asset management company that offers

“investment capabilities spanning an innovative spectrum of major and alternative asset classes”,

whatever that means; and Palladium International, the transnational corporate private outsourcing consultancy.

So, what we are witnessing is the fusion of venture capital, private equity groups, sovereign wealth funds and the state, and it is all being overseen by a minister who tells us that she is proud—proud—to hand over Scotland's nature recovery to the grasping hands of these asset managers. This process is not bottom up; it is top down. It represents the entrenchment of privilege rather than its removal.

It is a redistribution of power and wealth, but it is a redistribution of power and wealth that is going in precisely the wrong direction. It is a system of commercialism that ushers in not simply private profit but private advantage. So, I say to the minister: whatever happened to the idea of the earth as a common treasury? What about the common good and the commonwealth? This private extractive capital is not remotely compatible with the Government's stated aims of land reform, just transition and community wealth building; it is the polar opposite.

The Government's slogan is “equality, opportunity and community”, but, in this plan, it has abandoned the goals of equality and community in favour of opportunity for the speculators. The Government has turned its back on an economy

“of the people, by the people, for the people”

and has put in its place this grotesque alternative. Our nature is being colonised for nothing more than wealth asset growth, turning it into a financial commodity to be bought and sold and—worse—to be marketed as a vehicle for the avoidance of tax.

Under its market framework for investment, mentioned in the programme for government, are we even to be told who these investor clients—those who will use our land, our trees and our peatlands to greenwash their cash—are? Will we get full disclosure of all the investors? Will we ever be told how much of the money comes from secretive offshore trusts paying no tax in any jurisdiction? Those are not abstract questions; they are questions about what is happening in Scotland today. If we want the radical change that the nature and climate emergency demands, we must not accept the limits of power and money in their present form. We must change those limits, rebalance that power, widen those horizons and build up the confidence of the people.

A century ago, Tom Johnston declared:

“Our old nobility is not noble.”

Well, there is nothing noble about this new nobility either. The Scottish Government needs to understand why there is anger out there about it, why there is impatience for change and why the people who elect us are crying out for a real, responsible, democratic, ethical, socialistic alternative.

15:23

Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con):

As we have heard today, our natural environment is in a perilous condition. Scotland might be one of the most beautiful countries in the world, but it is also one of the most nature depleted. It is ranked 212th out of 240 countries in the biodiversity intactness index. To put that in context, one in nine species in Scotland faces extinction, according to the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

The good news is that the Scottish Government accepts the need to act. The bad news is that it has not been successful. Earlier this year, NatureScot reported a year-on-year decline of 2.5 per cent in the number of habitats that are in favourable condition. Today’s motion highlights the lack of progress in peatland restoration and woodland planting. Indeed, the Woodland Trust warned about a lack of resources for woodland recovery almost a year ago.

Then we have the Aichi targets, which are aimed at preventing biodiversity loss—more than half of which the Scottish Government missed. A subsequent report from Scottish Environment

LINK pointed to a decline in biodiversity over the previous decades and concluded:

“The current biodiversity duty and the strategies have therefore failed to halt loss or generate any recovery”.

I raise that issue to underscore that good intentions are not enough. The SNP and Greens cannot keep blundering on, underfunding policies, missing targets and offering that tired old *mea culpa*, “Lessons must be learned.”

It is welcome to see statutory nature restoration targets considered as part of the natural environment bill, but any such targets must be fit for purpose. For one thing, what do we mean by “nature restoration”? Is it a pre-determined baseline or a fully resilient ecosystem? Likewise, what is the timeframe? The Scottish biodiversity strategy used 2045, which is perhaps enough of a balance between a close enough date to focus minds but far enough off to allow for delivery.

Ultimately, it is delivery that counts, so we need to be mindful that simply designating a target as statutory is no guarantee of success. We have only to look at emissions targets for proof of that—the Scottish Government has missed them eight times in the past 12 years.

The Minister for Energy and the Environment

(Gillian Martin): I actually agree with Maurice Golden. Does he agree with me that, when things that put into place actions to get us to net zero targets come to Parliament for us to vote on, it is incumbent on all of us to vote for them?

Maurice Golden: Yes.

Alongside targets, we need robust means of holding the Scottish Government to account. A dedicated Scottish environmental court would be one such mechanism, offering better accountability and enforcement as well as an opportunity to address the fragmentation in the current model, develop greater technical expertise in the justice system and improve public access to environmental justice. Sadly, the narrow scope of the review of environmental governance looks like a missed opportunity to progress that.

We must harness the overwhelming public support for our natural environment and the appetite for action in this chamber and start delivering.

15:27

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I will start on a point of agreement with the Labour motion. Despite Sir Keir Starmer’s telling his shadow cabinet, “I hate tree huggers,” in response to a presentation from his climate and net zero spokesperson, Labour’s motion reaffirms its recognition of the global climate emergency.

We have huge potential for more carbon sequestration, carbon capture and peatland restoration. I will unashamedly talk about some of the fantastic examples of promoting and protecting nature activity that are taking place in Dumfries and Galloway, in my South Scotland region.

We are at a tipping point for nature. It is in decline around the globe, with about 1 million species already facing extinction. Restoring nature is crucial and will reduce carbon emissions. Businesses are rising to the challenge of the global climate emergency. Although that is key in helping to meet our climate change targets, it is also bringing economic growth, particularly to our rural areas.

There is a fantastic company in Dumfries and Galloway that I have visited on numerous occasions—most recently with the Minister for Energy and the Environment—and it is leading the way in the field of carbon capture. Carbon Capture Scotland, which is based in Crocketford near Dumfries, has a combined investment of £120 million, including funding from the Scottish Government, to remove 1 million tonnes of CO₂ from the atmosphere every year.

CCS is working with farmers, distillers and firms that generate anaerobic digestion energy from waste to capture CO₂ and put it to good use elsewhere or remove it from the atmosphere permanently. CCS uses captured CO₂ to produce dry ice, which caters for the needs of the pharmaceutical and food transport industries. That makes those industries more sustainable, and CCS proudly stands as the UK's second-largest producer of dry ice.

The company hopes to increase its number of employees to 500 and is a great example of how we can use anaerobic digestion, including through agriculture, to bring economic growth and protect our environment. I would be interested in hearing how the Scottish Government aims to engage and support rural and urban anaerobic digestion in the future.

I welcome the fact that the Scottish Government has scaled up its investment in nature restoration, including peatland restoration. In Dumfries and Galloway, the Crichton Carbon Centre has a project called peatland connections, which highlights the significance of the Galloway peatlands through a range of practical and community engagement initiatives. It is part funded by the Scottish Government.

Sarah Boyack: Will the member take an intervention?

Emma Harper: We do not have time for interventions in these wee, four-minute time slots.

I am interested in promoting the peatland restoration work that is taking place in south-west Scotland. The team at NatureScot has been working with external partners on the restoration of degraded, eroding and modified peatlands. That is one of the most effective ways of locking in carbon and supporting the promotion of nature. It offers a clear, nature-based solution to the climate crisis.

I visited one of the peat bogs at Moss of Cree near Wigtown with Dr Emily Taylor, who is the Crichton Carbon Centre general manager and a specialist in deep peat. The Moss of Cree project, which involves peat measuring 6m deep, shows how the peatland ACTION restoration programme can support landowners and land managers through the process of peatland restoration, from initial ideas and planning through to successful delivery. The farmer Ian McCreath has worked closely with the programme, which helped him to put in a successful funding application to create a 62 hectare forest-to-bog restoration project and bring it to fruition. That project is a fantastic case study. I invite the minister to come and visit the Crichton Carbon Centre to see that vital work.

Time is short this afternoon. I look forward to hearing the minister's response and to continuing to progress the promotion and protection of our nature in Scotland.

15:32

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): We are seeing attacks from the Tories and Labour on the action that is necessary to tackle the climate and nature emergencies. Labour attacks action on the nature crisis on the same day as Rishi Sunak cancels action on the climate. Those are two sides of the same political coin; such politicians think only of the next election rather than the next generation.

Nature deserves to be restored for its own sake, but woodlands, peatlands and wetlands can also help us to lock up the climate emissions that are genuinely unavoidable.

The global biodiversity framework that was agreed at the 15th conference of the parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity—COP15—recognised the urgent need to scale up nature restoration and the sheer scale of the investment that is required. To close the global biodiversity finance gap, hundreds of billions of dollars are required every year. No country can deliver that through public funding alone, which is why the global framework commits countries to

“Substantially and progressively”

increase the finance that is available

“from all sources”

to restore nature.

Scotland has already begun to ramp up public funding. I am proud that, since the Greens entered government, more than £20 million has already been allocated to projects across the country—from the River Tweed to the Cairngorms—through the nature restoration fund, which is putting species and habitats on the path to recovery.

Sarah Boyack: Will the member take an intervention?

Mark Ruskell: I do not have time in hand.

Those public funds alone will not be enough to deliver the scale of change that is needed. That change certainly cannot be delivered within the constraints of a devolved Government with limited borrowing powers but, even if we had all the powers in this Parliament, the finance gap would remain huge and unbridgeable.

The fact is that the carbon and nature market already exists and is operating in Scotland. Responsible Governments must step in early to ensure that the market develops in a way that is truly ethical and benefits nature, the climate and communities.

I agree with colleagues that communities need to lead that change. I highlight Fife Coast and Countryside Trust's excellent work in setting up nature finance Fife, which will channel public, philanthropic and private finance into nature projects across Fife. That is nature investment from the bottom up. It is driven by communities and not-for-profit organisations working with academics, landowners, councils, regulators and those with finance expertise. Its first investment project, on the Dreel burn in Fife, will involve restoration at a landscape scale.

The trust is also working on a community benefit standard as part of the newly formed nature finance certification alliance. That project aims to create a standard that demonstrates the wider benefits of nature restoration for all communities.

Although important work is being done with our communities, I note the valid concerns that have been raised by Community Land Scotland and others about the effect that the emerging market could have on land prices. Given that Scotland has one of the highest concentrations of land ownership in the developed world, that cannot be overlooked. The problem has already been recognised, including through changes to the woodland carbon code that, according to the Scottish Land Commission, had a cooling effect on demand for land for planting in 2022.

The commission has advised that

“There is nothing inherently contradictory in these ambitions if the tensions are addressed by deliberately shaping the markets and policies that drive delivery.”

The commission has made detailed recommendations to ensure that the right balance is struck across Government, and I look forward to the Parliament receiving the Scottish Government's collective response on that.

The forthcoming agriculture and land reform bills will also help to redirect more public funds and put the public interest at the heart of landowners' responsibilities. However, we need to take action at all levels if we are to tackle the climate and nature emergencies. All Governments will need to act with integrity, particularly on the issue of natural capital investment.

15:36

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries)

(Con): We all recognise the growing importance and urgency of appropriately addressing the climate and biodiversity emergency. A recent report by the James Hutton Institute and NatureScot warned that considerable change is needed to stop nature loss here in Scotland. It points to factors that are indirectly contributing to that nature loss, which include our culture, education, economy, political systems and technology.

It is hugely important that we provide appropriate education. That includes teaching young people about how food arrives on our plates. We must educate primary and secondary pupils on the pivotal role that farmers play in ensuring the availability of good, nutritious produce and—equally important—their invaluable and often overlooked work in protecting Scotland's nature.

Thousands of young people across Scotland are now able to learn about farming and agriculture, thanks to the sterling work of the Royal Highland Education Trust. That charity hosts events such as farm visits and provides free access to unbiased information about food production. Its work supports the country's good food nation ambitions and showcases the work that farmers do in protecting our climate and our unique biodiversity as they strive to deliver healthy, affordable and sustainable food.

During this debate, it is also important—regrettably—that we shine a spotlight on the so-called green credentials that the Scottish Government is so keen to boast about, especially on the world stage. Those green credentials do not exactly stack up.

As Jamie Halcro Johnston said, the SNP has failed repeatedly to reach its tree-planting targets, and let us not forget that, despite all its grandstanding on peat restoration, the Scottish Government has not met its target for five years. In 2018, Roseanna Cunningham boasted of the

Scottish Government's "game-changing" £250 million 10-year investment in peatland restoration. The Government committed to restoring 20,000 hectares of peatland every year as part of its climate change plan, but it is failing and—make no mistake—it is not a marginal failure. The area of peatland that has been restored is less than half the area set out in the target. In its most recent update, the Government admitted that just 7,000 hectares of peatland had been restored in 2022-23.

Gillian Martin: Will the member take an intervention?

Finlay Carson: I am afraid that I do not have enough time.

A number of reasons for the shortfall have been cited, including a lack of capacity among the contractors that are needed to carry out the work and delays in planning processes. The Government also stated that

"limited demand for restoration from landowners and managers"

was a problem. Once again, the Scottish Government had ambitious plans but its failure to deliver has been blamed on someone else.

I agree with Liam McArthur, who, unfortunately, is no longer in the chamber. When will the Scottish Government stop grandstanding and actually develop targets that are deliverable, rather than relying on magic? Farmers, crofters and land managers have been doing their bit to protect nature, reduce emissions and, as Emma Harper mentioned, support carbon capture projects, yet they are still waiting to have sight of the new agriculture bill, years after the rest of the UK has had such legislation. We should have had a new agriculture bill in place years ago, and it should already be delivering improvements for our environment.

Less than a year ago, when the CCC published what Chris Stark called

"the most damning report we have produced on the Scottish Government",

he said that the Scottish National Party's statutory climate targets were

"increasingly moving out of view"

and in danger of becoming

"meaningless".

He called what the CCC published "the most damning report", and that is exactly what it is. He said that the report was a "red flag". Simply put, the SNP-Green Government needs to be shown the red card when it comes to its green credentials.

15:40

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): This has been a very interesting debate. I have been schooled on private finance by the architects of the private finance initiative and on targets by a party whose Government has just abandoned its target to get to net zero. That said, there has been a lot of consensus about where we need to be.

I particularly want to talk about peat bog restoration. That is something that is very close to my heart, as I am the species champion for the small pearl-bordered fritillary, which is a species of butterfly that can be found in various bogs in North Lanarkshire, including Greenhead Moss and the RSPB Baron's Haugh reservation in my constituency. Peat bogs are an important aspect of what we are doing and they are key to the council's North Lanarkshire biodiversity action plan.

Managing and restoring Scotland's nature requires a partnership approach and needs us all to step up, not just the Government. That is why I am so glad that the Government has developed interim principles for responsible investment in natural capital, which mean that, although investment is welcome and needed, it must be responsible, involve work with communities, be additional and verifiable, and have integrity. That is at the heart of what the Government is doing with the interim principles.

North Lanarkshire is not unique in its peat bog restoration. In December 2021, *New Scientist* published an article by Alasdair Lane titled "Peatlands in peril: The race to save the bogs that slow climate change". In that article, Scotland was pointed out as being an exemplar in the area. Finland, which lost 5 per cent of all its peatlands after world war 2, when it abandoned peat bogs for deforestation, has recognised that it has to bring peatland restoration back, and it is looking at the work that is going on in Scotland.

We know that, in the words of Hans Joosten, the secretary general of the International Mire Conservation Group,

"carbon goes in slowly, but comes out fast".

Peat bog restoration is a long-term commitment and project. It takes up to 10 years to restore peat bogs and ensure that there is no carbon emission from them where they have been degraded. That is the challenge that we have.

The *New Scientist* article highlighted the work that is going on in Scotland, particularly by the University of the Highlands and Islands, in conjunction with the University of Nottingham, to monitor peat bogs and their behaviour. We know that peat bogs are environments that change and

develop over time. At times, they can release more carbon dioxide than at others. Those universities are working with satellite technology that uses radio waves that can monitor and accurately measure peat bogs, not just in Scotland but across the globe. With the recent discovery of the biggest tropical peat bog on the planet, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, we know that this is a world issue and a world challenge.

The article also talks about the tensions in Indonesia, which is trying to restore its peat bogs. That means that farmers are being challenged to give up farmland and use their land in a different way.

That is why I am so glad that the Government's work comes in conjunction with a proposed land reform bill that should help us to meet some of our targets. I will leave it there.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): We move to winding-up speeches.

15:44

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): I thank colleagues in the Labour Party for bringing this important debate to the chamber. We are incredibly lucky to live in a country that has such a rich diversity of plants, animal species and fauna, just some of which have been captured in the debate.

I am privileged to represent one of the most beautiful parts of the UK—the north-east of Scotland, which balances our respect for nature with industry and entrepreneurship.

The SNP is great at making promises. Unfortunately, it is even better at breaking them, particularly when it comes to the environment. Four out of five of its legally binding annual emissions targets have been missed: carbon dioxide emissions targets have been missed; domestic travel emissions targets have been missed; business emissions targets have been missed; and energy supply emissions targets have been missed. That point was well made by my colleague Maurice Golden. The SNP-Greens cannot keep blundering on—lessons must be learned.

Peatlands, which are mentioned in the motion and were covered by Rhoda Grant, are at the heart of our natural environment but, again, that target has been missed by the Government. As Finlay Carson said, the Government committed to restoring 20,000 hectares of peatlands each year but, in its most recent update, it admitted to restoring just 7,000 hectares in 2022-23. That is another missed target, but Colin Beattie thinks that that is success. It is somewhat ironic that a Government with the Greens pulling the strings

has failed so dismally at improving Scotland's natural environment.

The Scottish Conservatives have a clear policy to improve our natural environment and protect our economy. We would establish nature networks across Scotland to safeguard protected areas and species. We would bring forward an ambitious nature bill to strengthen environmental protection. We would establish a £25 million cleaner seas fund, increase tree planting and create a new national park.

In the time that I have remaining, I will pick up on two of those points.

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): Will Mr Lumsden give way?

Douglas Lumsden: No—I will not.

We lost millions of trees during storm Arwen but, as Jamie Halcro Johnston mentioned, since 2000 we have lost millions more trees felled on public land to make way for wind turbines. We have a target of planting 18,000 hectares annually and increasing the proportion of native species. Forestry is a key industry in Scotland, and we must work with Forestry and Land Scotland to ensure a good mix of species that benefits the timber industry and complements our tourism and sports industries.

We need spaces that are open for walkers and cyclists to enjoy. National parks are a key issue for many communities. People have been waiting patiently for the Scottish Government to act. The campaign for a new national park was launched in 2013, and the Government eventually agreed to designate one more by 2026. I hope that the minister will update us on the matter.

All colleagues have made important points in the debate, reflecting the importance of the topic to every area of Scotland from the Highlands to the south of Scotland. Lorna Slater mentioned a gap in funding but offered no ideas on how it will be bridged—a point that Liam McArthur made. Jamie Halcro Johnston and Finlay Carson made the point that farmers, crofters and landowners are a key part of the solution. They are looking for guidance, but at present there is a vacuum.

Liam McArthur was also right to point out that the Government has made no real plans and has only chased headlines. There is no guidance for local government, no money for local Government for adaptation and no guidance for farmers—just headlines. As Maurice Golden said, good intentions are not enough—it is delivery that counts.

15:48

The Minister for Energy and the Environment (Gillian Martin): We have heard about the different approaches that parties would take and where they would concentrate their efforts, some with detail and some with less than adequate detail. The UK Government today clarified its stance, which is largely based on inaction and rollback. Rishi Sunak thinks that it is all too difficult and expensive to do; perhaps it would not go well with his election strategy.

In Scotland, it is important that we focus on what we can do as a country despite the noise that comes from Westminster—we need to get on with it ourselves. The First Minister spoke during his New York visit this week about the tangible choices that we can make alongside the other countries that are at the forefront of tackling the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss. The contrast with the Prime Minister's approach could not be starker.

Ms Slater outlined in her opening speech some of the actions that the Government has already taken and the further ambitions that we hold. Given that peatland restoration is a responsibility in my portfolio, I will concentrate my initial remarks on that before I talk about other people's contributions.

We had a 40 per cent increase in peatland restoration last year compared with the year before, and we project that there will be a further 40 per cent increase this year, with the highest budget—£30 million—ever allocated.

To date, 174 projects have been registered under the peatland code, which represents 80 per cent of all UK registrations, but people are right to say that that is not enough. We had lofty ambitions on this, and we still do, but are we doing enough? No, we are not. We are working to see where we can take action so that we can do enough.

Restoring our peatlands is a very young industry, and we are working hard to signal to our young workforce, in particular, that it is an area of conservation and tackling climate change that has long-term career prospects. Peatland Action is encouraging new entrants, through training for crofting communities and island communities, in particular, and across the country we are creating a cohort of skilled and accredited restoration schemes that are designed through the SRUC graduate-level courses. We have to build on the number of people who are experts in this field to help our land managers and landowners to restore the degraded peatland that they might have on their land, and we are building a cohort of experts in the field to do that.

I want to mention some contributions. Sarah Boyack suggested using public bodies to tackle

climate change. I will give her an example from Glen Prosen, where Forestry and Land Scotland is already working to reforest native woodland, sequestering carbon and sustaining nature. Of course, that work needs to be done in addition to working with the right private investors.

The interim principles for responsible investment in natural capital have obviously escaped Richard Leonard's attention; he decided that he would make Lorna Slater sound like some sort of disaster capitalist. The principles say that investment should deliver integrated land use, have public, private and community benefit, demonstrate engagement and collaboration, be ethical and values led and be of high environmental integrity.

The Scottish Land Commission is developing new guidelines on securing social and economic community benefits from investment in land and natural capital.

Sarah Boyack: Will the member refer to the regulatory points that were made by Rhoda Grant, and also to my comments about Crown Estate Scotland? There are changes that could be made as well as spending the budget.

Gillian Martin: With the best will in the world, I am not going to let anyone dictate what I say in the rest of my speech; I have another few people to mention.

Colin Beattie pointed to the climate justice element of the debate and railed against any rolling back of previous commitments. I also want to point out—

The Presiding Officer: I am afraid that you are required to conclude, minister.

Gillian Martin: I will conclude; I will just say one thing. Mark Ruskell said that the two Opposition parties have one eye on the next election but do not have one on the next generation, and he was absolutely right. We have our sights firmly on the next generation, and we are taking action that is going to protect and enhance biodiversity, and we will reach our climate change with those things in mind.

15:52

Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab): The Scottish Government has consistently promoted the use of private finance to meet our rightly ambitious climate and nature targets. It has done so based on an uncritical acceptance of the so-called funding gap that was identified by the Green Finance Institute which, as we heard from Richard Leonard, is an organisation that is led by bankers. As we have also heard today, that alleged gap of £20 billion has not been demonstrated by the Scottish Government and is

now not recognised by NatureScot, which has publicly stated that it is an overestimate.

The recent report by independent forestry and land use consultant Jon Hollingdale, raises significant doubts about the credibility of the Green Finance Institute. In the minister's closing remarks, we should have heard an acknowledgement on the record of the irresponsible way in which the Scottish Government accepted those now discredited figures. Instead, the Scottish Government denied, deflected and doubled down.

In March, when I put it to minister Lorna Slater at a meeting of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee that pursuing a private finance model at this scale would have a negative impact on communities in the long term, I was told:

"The need for private finance for nature restoration is unquestioned."

Well, I am questioning it. I was also told:

"The finance gap is £20 billion."—[*Official Report, Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee*, 14 March 2023, c 31, 32]

However, today the minister told us that that figure is only one estimate.

Private financiers are not accountable to the people of Scotland; the Scottish Government is. For a Government minister to assert such figures as fact without question is highly irresponsible, and to blithely outsource the meeting of Scotland's environmental responsibilities based on unverified figures is nothing short of an abdication of responsibility. For a Government to sell its mandate and our precious natural resources to the highest bidder is shamefully telling of the way in which the Scottish Government operates.

If the Government continues with its private finance initiative, we face the prospect of Scotland's land and natural resources being used as a greenwash for big polluters. As we heard from Rhoda Grant, those financiers will require a return on their investment, so, in return for funding nature restoration and carbon sequestration, carbon credits will be created and sold at a profit. Who will buy the credits? We have already seen that the principal beneficiaries of carbon credits are carbon polluters. Big emitters that have profited from environmentally damaging practices are being encouraged to pay to continue to pollute. Instead of Scotland's rich natural resources benefiting the people of Scotland and contributing to the global response to the climate emergency, they will be used to absolve the sins of the biggest polluters.

Rather than selling indulgences to absolve polluters, the Scottish Government must fulfil its role to the people of Scotland—restoring nature and reducing emissions—not simply in order to

meet targets but to secure a brighter future for us all. It is time for the Scottish Government to draw breath and consider all options to restore nature, not to simply hand over the reins to private financiers. I urge all members to support the Labour motion.

Neonatal Services (Lanarkshire)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-10497, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on protecting specialist neonatal services in Lanarkshire.

15:58

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): According to the Scottish Government, 23 babies required the use of the neonatal unit at University hospital Wishaw last year—that is 23 babies who were born extremely prematurely, at less than 27 weeks' gestation, or who had a low birth weight and required intensive care support. At the sick kids hospital—the Royal hospital for children—in Glasgow, there were 27 such babies; in Edinburgh, there were 33; and, in Aberdeen, there were 18. The Scottish Government, in its wisdom, has decided that neonatal services need to be reorganised, with the number of centres being reduced to three and the closure of the units at Ninewells hospital in Dundee, the Victoria hospital in Fife and University hospital Wishaw.

I will focus my remarks on Wishaw. Its unit is an award-winning service in Scotland's third-largest health board, which serves a significant population of our country. It makes no sense to close the unit, and its closure is vehemently opposed by parents and clinicians. Today, I and the Scottish Labour Party add our voices to theirs.

The appraisal report on which ministers have based their decision is seriously flawed. In a devastating briefing to MSPs, the Government's approach is exposed. No consideration was given to population deprivation factors in the areas that are served. No consideration was given to the lack of transport links for families or the inequality that will be caused. No consideration was given to the displacement of families from their community networks, which sustain them. No wonder there is a 12,000-strong petition opposing the move, which was started by Lynne McRitchie. Lynne's son Innes, who is now aged 4, was born in Wishaw, and she is concerned about the level of stress and trauma that having to move extremely premature babies would cause families at a time when they are already extremely vulnerable.

The view from clinicians and senior staff members is equally stark. The data on which decisions were taken is incomplete. No up-to-date evidence base was used. No outcome data will be available, as there is no measurement of baseline. How on earth can we tell whether the model will work if we do not have that information? The Scottish Government is keen to say that it listens to experts and that it is all about evidence-based

policy making—but just not when it applies to neonatal units, including the one in University hospital Wishaw. If the minister has evidence, she should publish it. If she is so sure of her ground, she should meet with the clinicians at all the units that she intends to close, and with the parents, too.

There is more. NHS Lanarkshire was not represented on the working group at all, yet other health boards were. There has been no consultation with stakeholders and no consultation with the staff at the neonatal unit or with families, and there is no sign of a Government consultation after it has made its decision. As I recall, the national health service and the Scottish Government are supposed to consult on major service changes—or do the rules not apply when it comes to the Scottish National Party?

Parents will tell you that the staff at University hospital Wishaw are highly skilled and well trained. The specialist neonatal team, including consultants, nurses, midwives and allied health professionals such as pharmacists, dieticians and occupational therapists, are literally life savers. How could the Scottish Government not speak to them? I am completely baffled by the Scottish Government's tone deaf approach.

Its decision has had a profound impact on staff wellbeing. Nursing students who were seeking a career in Wishaw have withdrawn their applications, and we know that there will be an impact on maternity services, too. I know that the wider question of maternity services is being explored in a debate that will be led by Meghan Gallacher. Colleagues are right to point out the lack of consultant-led maternity services in Elgin, which have been promised by the Scottish Government but with no plan for recruitment or delivery.

Let me turn to another aspect of the neonatal decision, which is staffing levels. Statistics from the national neonatal audit have a very interesting story to tell about the coverage of nursing shifts. A comparison of statistics for quarter 2 of 2023—the latest available statistics—shows that, in Glasgow, coverage for nursing shifts in neonatal units was 65 per cent. In Edinburgh, the same coverage was 56 per cent. In Wishaw, the coverage was 91 per cent—yes, 91 per cent of shifts were covered—making it consistently the best-performing neonatal unit for staff coverage. Why is the Scottish Government closing a unit that has good levels of staffing, which we know matters in securing good outcomes for babies? Neonatal nursing staff at the sick kids hospital tell me that they can barely cope with the number of sick babies that they have to care for now, without adding even more.

Jaki Lambert of the Royal College of Midwives said:

“The best interests of the baby and parents must always be the focus of any service changes ... it is essential that these three units have the capacity for all the babies that will need care, and accommodation for the mothers.”

The Scottish Government would do well to heed those words, as well as the views of expert clinicians and nurses and families.

The survival of some babies will be put at risk by the decision, and the minister must listen and reverse it. SNP MSPs have the chance to pick which side they are on—the side of families and clinicians or the side of their party bosses. I know whose side I am on.

I move,

That the Parliament is concerned by the Scottish Government’s decision to downgrade the award-winning neonatal services in University Hospital Wishaw, which will result in newborn babies who require specialist care being transferred to one of three specialist intensive care neonatal units across Scotland; recognises that many families across Lanarkshire have had their newborn babies cared for in this Neonatal Intensive Care unit, and that they are deeply upset by this decision to withdraw critical services and expertise from local communities, and calls on the Scottish Government to reverse its decision.

16:05

The Minister for Public Health and Women’s Health (Jenni Minto): In the 75 years of the national health service, we have never stood still and we have adapted our service to meet the needs of the population. I have had the pleasure of meeting a number of parents, families and maternity staff, who all have the same aspirations: they all want the best for the babies in their care, and we must act accordingly to support that.

The approach set out in “The Best Start—A Five-year Forward Plan for Maternity and Neonatal Care in Scotland” outlined that Scotland should move from the current model of eight neonatal intensive care units to a model of three units supported by the continuation of current NICUs, which would be redesignated as local neonatal units.

The evidence is clear that the chances of survival are better for highest-risk babies when they are cared for in units by clinicians who see more of those babies and have access to specialist support services. Babies born at highest risk are defined as those who are born at less than 27 weeks’ gestation, who weigh less than 800g or who need multiple complex intensive care interventions or surgery.

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): Will the minister take an intervention?

Jenni Minto: I have a lot to get through, if the member does not mind.

The process of determining which units should be providing neonatal intensive care followed an options appraisal process that was undertaken by an expert group that included clinical leads and service user representatives. In NHS Lanarkshire, those representatives included the best start perinatal sub-group.

Graham Simpson: Will the minister take an intervention now?

Jenni Minto: I am not going to take any interventions.

Like Jackie Baillie, I welcome the opportunity to congratulate Wishaw General’s neonatal multidisciplinary team on being named the UK neonatal team of the year in 2023. The work that the unit does is remarkable, and hearing the words of parents who have written to me confirms that the care that it is providing is inspirational.

The “Best Start” document recommended that the new model of neonatal care should be based on the British Association of Perinatal Medicine definitions of levels of care. That moves us away from the previous descriptions of units as level 1, 2 or 3, and it describes units as neonatal intensive care units, local neonatal units and special care baby units.

I would like to reassure everyone that, under the new model, the scope of the practice that the local neonatal unit will be able to undertake is wider than the previous level 2 definition. The units will continue to provide a level of intensive care and will be able to care for babies born at greater than 27 weeks’ gestation.

The intention with the new model of care is that mothers in suspected extreme pre-term labour will be transferred, before they give birth, to maternity units in the hospitals that have neonatal intensive care units, allowing them to be cared for alongside their baby. It is recognised that that will not always be possible, and, in those cases, our specialist neonatal transport and retrieval service—ScotSTAR—will transfer those babies in specialist ambulances that are equipped to care for neonates. That has been established practice for many years. Babies receiving intensive care will then be transferred back to their local neonatal unit for on-going care as soon as possible.

The parents and carers of those babies must be supported to provide care alongside the neonatal staff. The new model of care positions parents firmly as partners in their babies’ care. It includes expansion of transitional care; improved facilities and support for parents; and expanded neonatal community care, allowing babies to get home sooner. In addition, we have already introduced

the young patients family fund—formerly the neonatal expenses fund—which continues to support many parents with the costs of having babies in neonatal care.

We will now work with all health boards affected to plan for and implement the service change over the course of the next year. However, it is also important that we hear the voices of families in the affected areas. Therefore, we will also be consulting with families, so that we can take account of their concerns when the pathways and processes for the new model of care are designed, and we will set up focus groups to support that.

Jackie Baillie: Will the minister give way?

Jenni Minto: I am just coming to the close of my speech.

In closing, I would like to give my personal commitment, and that of this Government, to continuing to listen, learn and act upon evidence to ensure that our NHS delivers safe, effective and person-centred care.

I want to reiterate that this decision has been made on the basis of evidence that this change will improve the chances of survival for these very smallest and sickest babies. I am sure that members will agree that parents would very much expect us to act on such evidence in the best interests of their babies.

I move amendment S6M-10497.2, to leave out from “is concerned” to end and insert:

“believes that it is vital that the smallest and sickest babies born in Scotland receive the best and safest care possible to improve their life chances; notes evidence from expert clinicians that care for babies at highest risk is safest in units that treat a higher number of patients; agrees that parents would expect the Scottish Government to act on such evidence in the very best interests of their babies; welcomes the new model of neonatal intensive care, as recommended by The Best Start report, which was led by expert NHS clinicians and service user representatives, that delivers this change; notes that local neonatal units will continue to offer care to the vast majority of babies who need it, and that no neonatal units will close as part of the new model; further notes that all families who have a baby in neonatal care can access the Young Patients Family Fund, which provides support for costs of travel, food and accommodation; acknowledges the commitment of all neonatal staff across Scotland, and congratulates the Wishaw neonatal team on being named UK neonatal team of the year in 2023.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Unusually for such a brief debate, we have a little bit of time in hand, so members who take an intervention should get the time back. However, the interventions will need to be brief.

16:10

Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): What a cold, managerial speech with no empathy for families that was from the minister.

I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of members' interests—I am a practising NHS general practitioner. We are disillusioned with the Scottish Government's stewardship of our NHS and the indifference shown by successive SNP health secretaries to many well-documented calls by local communities to support critical services.

Here we are yet again: 12,000 people support Lynne McRitchie's petition to reconsider downgrading University hospital Wishaw's award-winning neonatal services. The Scottish Government remains unconcerned. I ask the cabinet secretary to look the families in the gallery in the eye and tell them the truth. He does not care about their opinion.

Currently, Scotland has eight intensive care neonatal units. Under the Scottish Government's centralisation plan to abandon rural communities, that will be reduced to three—Glasgow's Queen Elizabeth university hospital, Edinburgh royal infirmary and Aberdeen maternity hospital.

Of course, the SNP has form when it comes to forcing mothers and babies to travel vast distances for care. In NHS Highland, women in Caithness and Sutherland have faced round trips of more than 200 miles to access obstetrics and gynaecology services in Inverness. Further along the Moray Firth, Dr Gray's hospital in Elgin has not had a consultant-led maternity unit since Shona Robison was health secretary. Over the past five years, the majority of Moray mothers have had to face a 90-minute trip east to Aberdeen or an hour's trip west to Inverness. From Wishaw to the Borders and from Moray to Portree, maternity services across Scotland should be provided with the resources that they need to provide crucial care to newborn babies.

Scotland is so much more than its three biggest cities. More than 4 million people live elsewhere, with around 1 million Scots living in rural and island communities. Services need to be designed, resourced and optimised accordingly. Being wedded to centralisation, apathetic to local needs, will not wash.

The Scottish Government has also ridden roughshod over neonatal patient safety by way of its May 2022 directive to health boards, which limits the use of off-framework agency nurses. I understand the need to restrict the use of agency staff and control costs, but at a time when the Scottish Government has made a mess of workforce planning, and with a soaring 6,000

nursing vacancies, the consequences of coming down hard result in unsafe staffing levels.

The directive came into force on 1 July. What has been the impact? As of 17 September, an off-framework agency—just one—tells me that, due to new controls, it has been unable to place nurses in more than 300 neonatal shifts since 1 July. Managers are openly saying that understaffing will just have to be accepted and that it is on the staff. In total, across general medical and surgical wards over the same period, the agency has been unable to fill more than 7,500 shifts because of the Scottish Government's directive.

We have neonatal intensive care agency nurses being brought up from London to Scotland to cover shifts. We are told that neonatal staffing levels in several regions are dangerously low. We know of a paediatric cardiac consultant whose cases were cancelled due to staff shortages that could not be backfilled under the new directive.

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

Sandesh Gulhane: I am just about to finish. The SNP is clearly heavy handed and disregards the nuanced needs of families, which causes distress and discontent. There is a lack of empathy, and it stamps its authority on patients and staff alike. It is crucial that we pause and listen.

I move amendment S6M-10497.1, to insert at end:

“, and understands that declining maternity services is not being experienced exclusively in Lanarkshire, with Dr Gray's Hospital in Elgin still waiting for its consultant-led maternity services to be restored, five years after they were temporarily downgraded, and with maternity services at Caithness having been permanently downgraded, leading to expectant mothers being forced to travel vast distances just to give birth.”

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

16:15

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): My daughter Rosa was born on 1 April 2017 at University hospital Wishaw. She was born at 27 weeks gestation, weighing 535g or just one pound and three ounces. She came home from hospital almost exactly five months later, having spent the vast majority of those five months in the neonatal intensive care unit that the Scottish Government plans to downgrade.

My daughter's birth was an emergency birth. My wife's labour was induced early because she had developed an acute infection that, left unchecked, would have killed them both. We were told that, because of our daughter's size and gestation, she

would be very likely to be stillborn or to die shortly after birth, but that the neonatal team would be on standby to do what it could. We were left hoping and praying for a miracle, but miracles do not happen—miraculous people happen. After the birth, the miraculous staff at Wishaw worked to keep our daughter alive and get her into the intensive care unit for the start of a five-month rollercoaster journey of recovery. There could not have been a stabilisation and subsequent transfer to Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen or maybe even the north of England, because she was too sick. The Government's proposal means that Lanarkshire parents of the sickest babies, who need the most support, will be left with the choice between making a journey that they know is not in the best interests of their baby or leaving them with a skeleton staff who do not have the award-winning knowledge, experience or capacity that exists in the hospital right now.

Shortly after my daughter was born, my wife's health deteriorated. She was haemorrhaging and had to be rushed to emergency surgery. She spent more than a week in recovery. She felt incredibly guilty that she could not be with our daughter beside her cot, but at least she could be in a nearby ward to provide the breast milk that is crucial to the survival of premature babies. I know that it would have been far too much for my wife to cope with if our baby had been moved to a different hospital before my wife was healthy enough to be discharged. However, there was also the issue that she was not our first but our second child. Sick babies are not born in isolation. It is all very well for the Government to say that travel, accommodation and food costs are covered. Although that is a good thing, parents have to fight for it and it is absolutely galling that that has been used as a partial shield for the decision. However, we are talking about moving mothers away from their communities, families, children and that vital support network. How does a mum get their kids to nursery or school in Lanarkshire and then get to Aberdeen to care for their sick baby?

I have told my family's story, but it is far from unique. Rosas are being born in Wishaw every other week—I have met them. Their families and the staff have not been listened to. This Parliament and Government should listen to the team in Wishaw that is working miracles every day. We should be supporting the staff to do the award-winning work that they want to do and supporting families to give their baby the best start—locally, and surrounded and helped by their wider family and community.

16:18

Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP): First, I pay my respects to Mark Griffin's description of his experience. I also acknowledge that he is the first speaker in the debate who lives in and is a representative for Lanarkshire, which I am not. However, I will relate my experience.

I have three children, the first of whom was born in the Simpson memorial maternity pavilion. When she was born, not that unusually, she was not breathing and was blue, but the very adept and experienced midwife quickly remedied that with a couple of flicks to the toes and a wee bit of oxygen up the nose. The point is that there was no panic, because that person had seen that happen so many times in the past.

I will contrast that with the birth of my two sons, who were born elsewhere, in a much smaller hospital. The birth of my first son was pretty straightforward. When my second was born, his mother haemorrhaged. I think that there was real panic on the part of the midwives who were there. They were not sure what to do. I overheard a conversation about whether they should get a doctor. I do not question their commitment, compassion or expertise; it was simply a case of their not having seen what was happening nearly as frequently as others might have.

My son was then released from hospital, despite the fact that he had two holes in his heart, which were undiagnosed at that point. We had to take him back, but he could not be seen at that hospital and we had to go through to Glasgow for care. That episode left me with the impression that the greater the throughput of unusual experiences the better, and the more specialist the care becomes.

The second hospital that my two sons were born in was very convenient for me, but I would pass that up for making sure that they had the best possible care and attention. I might be wrong, but that is what I consider is underlying the changes.

It is crucial to recognise that the neonatal unit at University hospital Wishaw will remain open and that no neonatal units are closing as part of the plans. University hospital Wishaw, Ninewells hospital and medical school in Dundee, the Princess Royal maternity hospital in Glasgow, Victoria hospital in Kirkcaldy and University hospital Crosshouse near Kilmarnock will all continue to operate their neonatal units.

Of course, we are in a period of transition. In order to maximise the effectiveness of care to our newborns, the Scottish Government has opted to reconfigure the neonatal services that are on offer. It is doing so on the basis of expert advice, with a focus on providing the highest level of care in three specialist intensive care neonatal units.

Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con): Will the member give way?

Keith Brown: My apologies, but I have only four minutes. I do not know why these debates are so short, but I do not have much time to speak.

The units for babies born with the highest risk will be based in Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Glasgow, and they will be dedicated to the smallest babies facing the most significant health challenges, ensuring that they are born where they can readily access the specialist care and services that they need. Babies born before 27 weeks, weighing less than 800g or requiring complex life support will be supported at those locations.

The rationale for the change, which the best start report recommends, is the belief that focusing care for those high-risk infants in units with the capacity to treat a high volume of patients will ultimately yield safer outcomes. That is what is at debate here.

We have heard that people do not care, but I think that everybody in the debate cares about such things. The ultimate aim is to ensure that as many children as possible—especially the most vulnerable ones—are born safely. As parents, that is what we all want.

We have heard from the minister that the changes are in line with advice from expert clinicians. Dr Lesley Jackson, who is the clinical lead for the Scottish neonatal network, and Caroline Lee-Davey, who is the chief executive of Bliss, which is a charity that is designed to improve the care and treatment of babies born prematurely or who are sick, have both voiced their support for the change. They believe that reconfiguring our services can improve the quality of neonatal services in Scotland. I think that the Scottish Government has an obligation to do exactly that. The objective is to offer increased care to those babies who need it most, while ensuring that they can return to one of the excellent local neonatal units across the country, such as University hospital Wishaw, which I stress again will remain open.

The decision to reconfigure neonatal services is based on sound evidence and expert advice. However, we must ensure, as far as we can, as has been said, that we bring the local community along with us. We have to work collaboratively to deliver the new model of neonatal care effectively for newborns and their families.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you very much, Mr Brown. It is, of course, up to the members whether they take an intervention. These debates usually seem to allow very little time to do that. However, on this occasion, there is a little bit of time in hand. Therefore, if there are brief interventions, you should get the time back.

16:23

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): The Scottish Government's amendment rightly congratulates the team at Wishaw university hospital on being named UK neonatal team of the year 2023. It is a wonderful achievement and one that we should all celebrate, but we are in a ridiculous situation in which the Government is praising Wishaw's neonatal unit in one breath and downgrading it in another. We need the Government to make sense. For the parents, families and healthcare professionals who know the unit inside out, the decision is absurd, out of touch and dangerous.

The Scottish Government will be making a terrible mistake if it allows the neonatal unit at Wishaw to be downgraded. The petition against the plans that has been spearheaded by Lanarkshire mum Lynne McRitchie has already been signed by more than 12,000 people. The widespread community outrage and worry is unsurprising, as Wishaw's neonatal team are like a second family for so many in our communities.

I thank everyone who has signed the petition and I pay tribute to Lynne McRitchie, who is in the public gallery. We are also joined by Angela Tierney from Blantyre, who told me that the care that the neonatal team provides to babies, including her son Olly, is provided as if the babies were their own children—care is provided with love, compassion and enormous skill. When Angela gave birth to Olly, she was extremely ill and, like Stephanie Griffin, she could not be moved. Olly received excellent care at Wishaw hospital but, sadly, he died. He was only five days old. The memories that Angela, her husband Barry and their family were able to make in their community with Olly will stay with them for ever.

Under the Government plans, Olly would have been transferred from Wishaw and separated from his extremely ill mother, and the Tierney family would have been robbed of precious time with their Olly. The minister and every MSP should think about Olly when we vote tonight. Olly is not a statistic; he was and is a precious member of a loving family and community that continues to fundraise for team Ollybear Blantyre, raising vital funds for Wishaw's neonatal unit in his memory.

I am so disappointed by the letter that I received from the minister last week in response to our request for a pause and a rethink. Jenni Minto attempts to justify the downgrade by saying,

"This will affect a very small number of families in Lanarkshire."

She should tell that to the Tierneys, the McRitchies and the Griffins. As we heard from Rosa's dad—my brilliant colleague Mark Griffin—it is a life-saving unit, and the minister would do well

to listen properly to families. I and my colleagues have listened. Members should listen to Lynne McRitchie, who believes that her son Innes would not be alive today if he had been transferred to Glasgow, Edinburgh or Aberdeen. Innes is thriving today, thanks in large part to Wishaw's neonatal team.

We have heard from Jackie Baillie that the Government's downgrading plans are having an impact now. Several nurse recruits who had accepted job offers have withdrawn following the publication of the appraisal report in July. NHS Lanarkshire needs support with recruitment and retention, especially in the aftermath of the board's code black status, but the plans will undermine that.

Do ministers really intend to separate families at a critical and traumatic time? How can the Government claim to be tackling inequality when it is downgrading a vital neonatal unit in one of Scotland's largest and most deprived health boards? The strength and scale of the community reaction to the proposal should give the Government pause for consideration on whether it really represents the best start. The Government has not properly included families or staff in Lanarkshire. However, it is not too late. It should start listening, fix this flawed process and stop the downgrade of Wishaw's neonatal unit.

16:28

Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con): I welcome the opportunity to debate maternity services not once but twice today. That shows how important the issue is right across Scotland. I hope that the members who have spoken or will speak in this debate will stay for the members' business debate after decision time so that we can continue this important conversation.

Recent developments have rightly caused outrage across Lanarkshire and the surrounding areas. Local people have set up campaign groups to object to this ill-thought-out decision. Their message is simple: they do not want the neonatal department at University hospital Wishaw to be downgraded. Why would they? It is the same department that won the United Kingdom neonatal department of the year award in 2023. It makes no sense to me that the Government has decided to reward such an outstanding department by removing the vital support that it provides to expectant mums and their newborn babies. The kick in the teeth, which members have mentioned, is that the Government's amendment has the cheek to congratulate the department on its recent achievements. Talk about being tone deaf.

Over the past few weeks, I have been in touch with wonderful women who have shared their

stories about how much they value the neonatal department at University hospital Wishaw. It is great to see some of them in the public gallery to watch this debate and the one that will follow.

I recognise and commend the efforts of Lynne McRitchie, who has been the driving force behind the campaign to stop the downgrade of the Wishaw neonatal unit. She said recently during an interview that, while the decision represents

“a real loss to parents ... ultimately it’s a real loss to babies who are born so prematurely or poorly.”

Lynne’s petition has gained a whopping 12,337 signatures. If that does not send a strong message to the Government, I do not know what will.

Among those who have contacted me are midwives, past and present, who cannot make any sense of the proposals that are outlined in the document for NHS redesign of maternity and neonatal services. They have told me that removing a vital service from the heart of the central belt of Scotland is not the answer, and they are deeply concerned about the lack of evidence to back up the loss of a vital neonatal service. Not only will Wishaw general be impacted, but Ninewells hospital in Dundee and Victoria hospital in Fife have also been selected as part of the downgrade proposals. All those hospitals are in areas with high levels of deprivation, where wrap-around care needs to be as close to communities as possible.

Let us face it: this Government does not have the best track record when it comes to maternity services. We only need to speak to mums in the Highlands to know the consequences of removing maternity services—and, by the way, maternity services at Caithness general hospital and Dr Gray’s hospital are still not fully operational. There has been no urgency from the Government to reopen them, and that has undoubtedly put expectant mums and their unborn babies at risk.

I have only four minutes for my speech, which is not a lot of time, so I am pleased that we are having two debates on the issue today. To conclude, I make a direct appeal to the minister to back the petition, listen to communities and midwives, and stop the downgrade of the Wishaw neonatal unit.

16:31

Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Presiding Officer, you might reasonably ask why a member from the islands is talking about neonatal care in Lanarkshire. However, as members from other parts of the country regularly mention my constituency, as is their right, I make no apology for occasionally straying across the Minch. Before I say anything else, however, I recognise the authoritative and heartfelt contributions that were

made by Mark Griffin and Keith Brown, in very fine speeches.

The fact is that the provision of neonatal care is an issue across Scotland, and I am acutely conscious not only of the excellent work that hospitals in my constituency do, but of the many mothers who, for various reasons, already make very long journeys away from their families to have their babies in larger hospitals on the mainland, and have done so for many years.

I am happy to take this opportunity to acknowledge that University hospital Wishaw has provided an extremely high standard of neonatal care. Countless parents are grateful to staff there for supporting them through some of the most challenging, joyful or heartbreaking moments of their lives. The neonatal unit at Wishaw will continue to provide that support and care for parents and babies in the future. The key change, as others have mentioned, is that the most premature or unwell babies will now be cared for at specialised intensive care neonatal units. As others have set out, that model of neonatal intensive care was recommended by the best start report and it was based on clinical evidence that care for babies at the highest risk is safest in units that can treat a higher number of patients. Meanwhile, neonatal units in Dundee, Glasgow, Kirkcaldy and Kilmarnock, as well as Wishaw, will continue to provide neonatal care for their populations.

As a rural MSP, I am in favour of localised healthcare provision wherever it is possible. However, where the expert advice calls for specialist units, it is crucial that patients and their families are fully supported to receive care where it is felt to be clinically most appropriate. Keith Brown alluded to the fact that ensuring the best possible outcomes for patients must be the priority.

The best start report, which was published in 2017, listed 76 recommendations as part of a five-year programme to improve maternal and neonatal services in Scotland. The Scottish Government accepted all those recommendations, including the establishment of a new model of neonatal intensive care. Within the model, the most preterm and the sickest babies will receive specialist complex care in three main centres. That approach is based on evidence showing that babies who are cared for within that kind of framework have improved outcomes.

Monica Lennon: Will the member give way?

Alasdair Allan: I must make progress given the little time that I have.

The Scottish Government has taken many significant steps to support expectant and new parents. Those steps have been alluded to today.

Quite rightly, the vast majority of the 5,000 babies who are admitted to neonatal care each year will continue to be treated in their local neonatal units and postnatal wards. I therefore say respectfully that I am not sure that questioning the expert clinical advice of those who were involved in producing the best start report—which is, in effect, what some are doing today—is a helpful way forward. Nor do I believe that making undeniably difficult decisions, which the NHS has to make, in the context of highly charged political debate would be entirely helpful when compared with the other option of listening to clinical advice.

16:35

Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): I begin by expressing my sincere thanks to all those who work in neonatal units across the country and who care for some of the sickest babies born in Scotland. I also thank everyone who has shared their story so bravely today.

Understandably, neonatal care is an extremely emotive subject, and it is vital that the concerns of parents and staff about the changes that are under discussion are heard and responded to. That is why it is so important that we clearly set out what those changes mean, how people in the NHS Lanarkshire health board area will be affected and, crucially, what services will look like.

University hospital Wishaw is in my region, and I have heard from people who are worried about what any changes to neonatal care will mean for staff, patients and their families. I am sure that many of us in the chamber have received correspondence from staff members who are concerned about those changes and why they are taking place. Alongside today's debate, it is vital that the Scottish Government engages with staff from University hospital Wishaw and that a forum is provided for them in which to raise questions and have those answered.

It is important to recognise that this proposal is a result of recommendations from expert clinicians.

Meghan Gallacher: Does the member agree that the forum should have happened before the decision was taken and that the fact that that did not happen and that they have not been involved in the process whatsoever has led to many families being exceptionally concerned about what is happening?

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

Gillian Mackay: I agree that it is vital to share all information that can be shared ahead of decisions being made to ensure that we bring communities along with us with these decisions.

That includes staff and all clinicians who are working in the units.

“The Best Start” report recommended a new model of neonatal service provision based on the suggestion that the care for the smallest and sickest babies be consolidated to deliver the best possible outcomes, and that change is part of the new model. The report was produced in conjunction with clinicians.

Jackie Baillie: Will the member take an intervention?

Gillian Mackay: I need to make some progress. I am genuinely sorry.

The report was produced in conjunction with clinicians, and it is worth stating that the recommendations on the new neonatal model of care are underpinned by strong evidence that population outcomes for the most premature and sickest babies are improved, with regard to delivery and care, in units that look after a high number of these babies, as we have heard from other members.

Outcomes for very low birth weight babies are better when they are delivered and treated in neonatal intensive care units with full support services and experienced staff. Therefore, babies who are born at under 27 weeks, who are lighter than 800g or who need complex life support will receive specialist complex care in these units.

It is important to stress that, although that will result in care for the smallest and sickest babies being delivered in a smaller number of specialist centres, no units will close as a result, and University hospital Wishaw will continue to provide excellent care of babies that require treatment in a neonatal unit. Local neonatal units will continue to provide care, and babies will be returned to their local area as soon as they are well enough.

However, that is certainly not to dismiss how distressing it can be for parents whose babies are treated outwith their local area at what will already be a very emotional time. I absolutely recognise the points that were raised by Mark Griffin, among others, about the issues when a baby is in one health board area and the family is in another. We need to ensure that families receive all possible support and that as many of those issues as possible are taken care of.

It is vital that babies receive the best care available, but it is equally vital that we support parents and carers, and I would be grateful if the minister could advise what emotional support is available to families whose babies are being treated outwith their local health board area.

These changes are the result of expert advice and are being made so that the smallest and sickest babies can receive the best neonatal care

possible. They are a sign of Scotland's improving neonatal healthcare, but it is so important that we take people with us and that we continue the dialogue with worried staff, parents and carers who also just want to see the best for their babies.

16:39

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate. I thank the Labour Party for using some of its debating time for such an important topic. I declare at the outset that I have a daughter who is a midwife in the Scottish NHS and that my youngest was born at Wishaw, as was my eldest grandson.

It is a timely debate for me, because I—along with my colleague Carol Monaghan—was recently invited by Ayrshire and Arran NHS maternity unit into the hospital to discuss issues affecting the care that the staff there give. I would suggest that that was a very unusual step, because it is usually we politicians who request their time. Perhaps that speaks to the real concern being felt across midwifery in Scotland. During that meeting, I committed to bringing their points to this chamber, which is why I am grateful to have this opportunity. This is what they said—politics aside.

There is a shortage of staff and a workforce planning problem, and there is a problem around retention and recruitment. I hark back to when my daughter applied to be a midwife: there were 43 places available and more than 400 applications. We now have a situation in which they are going through clearance to fill those places. Retention and recruitment are, I think, among the major problems that are leading to what is happening at Wishaw.

One of the issues raised by the group was the need to accept that, for the medical and midwifery workforce, there are increasingly medical complexities for the women using the service. Midwifery is a specialist role that has expanded over the past 10 years, but without recognition of that increase in its responsibilities.

The medical requirements for midwives go way beyond what we traditionally recognise as midwifery. The change is rapid and the level of medical intervention that we expect from them continues to grow. Professional staff, including midwives, now have degrees and complete a flying start support practice year. That requires staff not only to deliver a mentoring programme for those who are about to qualify but also to oversee new starts. A reduction in staff impacts the ability to train new staff.

They want support for early career midwives and to see opportunities for consolidation and development in maternity services so that they do not have to leave the service to better their

incomes or development potential. That development stops after just a few years, which, again, speaks to the retention of staff.

They want to be able to spend time supporting women and families in an individual and holistic way, such as in relation to smoking cessation, diabetes prevention and management, how to help women keep well in pregnancy physically and mentally, and preventative health, which we talk about a lot in here—but we do not deliver the tools for our healthcare workers. Retention is a huge issue, with the pressures of the job and increasing responsibility without the support and environment to match that responsibility.

They want routes to training and development, such as Open University opportunities, to allow them to grow their own staff. That couples with an issue that I have raised many times—digital platform investment that collaborates with interfaces. That has to be the starting point for delivering a more efficient NHS.

I will not go through half of their list, but I will mention the practicalities that they raised. The delivery of maternity and community sessions in our rural areas, which was mentioned earlier in the debate, is impacted by the move to electric vehicles without the infrastructure to support those electric vehicles. That is a definite cart-before-the-horse scenario.

They are also asking the Scottish Government to stop delivering changes in process or guidance to health boards at 5 o'clock on a Friday evening, when there is little or no time to evaluate or implement those changes. Surely it is not too much to ask for the vision timeline that staff need, with dialogue including evaluation of matters that impact healthcare. It seems that the Scottish Government does not recognise that healthcare staff work shifts and will not necessarily be in the building when directives arrive at short notice.

That is just a snapshot of the issues that were raised by those on the front line. Real practical changes could be made to allow our front-line staff to do the job that they love in a manner commensurate with their commitment. It is time that the Scottish Government considered the practical impact of the interventions that they impose on our midwives. The Scottish Government needs to take the time to speak with those on the front line and to deliver a working environment that encourages and supports our midwives to stay in the service.

16:44

Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP): I thank Jackie Baillie for bringing the subject to Parliament. Given the clearly personal and important contributions made by members, I am

sorely disappointed that more time was not given to this emotive debate.

My constituency is covered by services provided by University hospital Wishaw, and I have had a few—not many—constituents get in touch who are keen to better understand why the decision has been taken. “The Best Start” report recommended a new model of neonatal intensive care and is based on evidence that care for the babies at highest risk is safest in units that can treat a high volume of patients. It needs to be said again that no neonatal units will close. The model of neonatal services will be redesigned to accommodate the current levels of demand, with a smaller number of intensive care neonatal units supported by local neonatal and special care units.

Monica Lennon: Will Collette Stevenson give way?

Collette Stevenson: I am sorry, but I do not have any time in hand.

“The Best Start” report begins:

“Wherever women and babies live in Scotland and whatever their circumstances, all women should have a positive experience of maternity and neonatal care which is focused on them, and takes account of their individual needs and preferences.”

Surely we can all agree on that.

The new, refreshed model of maternity and neonatal care is based on the current available evidence. It uses best practice and feedback from families and front-line staff to design and further improve existing services. Clearly, the decision is major, but I do not believe for a second that it has been taken lightly. Evidence tells us that long-term health outcomes will improve for babies if they are cared for in higher-volume units.

There are approximately 50,000 births a year in Scotland. Of those, 5,000 are admitted to neonatal care. The majority of those babies will continue to be delivered in local units and postnatal wards. Around 110 to 130 babies are born under 27 weeks each year and the change will affect around 50 to 60 of them. When they are well enough, they will be moved to their local neonatal units for further care.

When news of the changes broke, my first thought was to ask how they would affect my constituents. Would they have to travel further? What support would be in place for families during a hugely testing and emotional time for them? Therefore, I was pleased to have clarity that special care services will be relocated to Queen Elizabeth university hospital. From my office in the centre of East Kilbride, it is 14 miles and takes around 27 minutes to get to the Queen Elizabeth university hospital. It is 11.6 miles to University hospital Wishaw and takes 29 minutes. For the

people of East Kilbride, the difference in travel times is negligible.

The young patients family fund was launched in summer 2021 and it enables families to claim financial assistance to support them during their baby’s neonatal stay. That allows them to focus on the health and wellbeing of their child and not worry about the financial costs that they might face for travel, accommodation costs or food.

Local neonatal units, including the one at Wishaw, will continue to provide care for the babies who need it, including a level of neonatal intensive care. The decision to move to three national neonatal intensive care units has been made in line with strong evidence and input from expert clinicians, who know that specialist care will deliver improved outcomes for the smallest and sickest babies born in Scotland. Every member in the chamber is united in wanting what is best for the smallest and sickest babies.

Monica Lennon: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I wonder whether you can provide some advice. Collette Stevenson is concerned that Scottish Labour has not given enough time for the subject. The Scottish Government has given zero time. How could we go about getting a debate in Government time to allow Collette Stevenson and others to make fuller contributions?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I thank Monica Lennon for that point of order. She has been in this institution long enough to know that that is a matter for the Parliamentary Bureau. I know that she will speak to her business manager, who will be able to make that point.

We move to the closing speeches.

16:49

Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con): It is clear who understands and who does not understand the decision to downgrade University hospital Wishaw’s neonatal unit. We can clearly see who has their hands over their ears and who is not interested. The people who are watching in the gallery will see that.

The staff at Wishaw’s neonatal unit have supported families across Lanarkshire at times when emotions are at their most raw, and stress runs especially high. Neonatal units care for the most vulnerable babies, but they see parents being at their most vulnerable, too. It is no wonder that 12,337 people have signed Lynne McRitchie’s petition. The community feels blindsided by another top-down decision from this tin-eared SNP Government.

In the north of Scotland, we are all too familiar with centralisation of NHS services under successive SNP health secretaries. As Dr

Gulhane said, Scotland is so much more than three cities. The downgrading of Dr Gray's maternity unit in NHS Grampian as a result of staff shortages has been disastrous for pregnant women. They have been forced to travel miles to Aberdeen or Inverness to deliver their babies, away from their homes and their support systems. There have been harrowing stories of women having to deliver their babies on the side of the A96. It is shocking.

The Scottish Conservatives have campaigned for those services to be reinstated. I am thankful that they will be, but by the time the consultant-led maternity unit at Dr Gray's is restored, services will have been downgraded for at least eight years. Members should think of the impact on women and their families in that time.

Under the new model of neonatal services, newborn babies who need the intervention of a specialist NICU will be transferred miles away from the Wishaw hospital. For parents, the process of caring for a premature or seriously ill baby in hospital takes place around the clock, and it can involve weeks and even months of highly specialised care. Being close to home is not a silver lining; it is a lifeline. It means being able to care for the baby's siblings and still do the school run. It means being close to friends and family who can lend a helping hand.

Dr Sandesh Gulhane highlighted the alarming shortage of neonatal nursing staff, which means that neonatal intensive care agency nurses are being brought up from London to Scotland to cover shifts. Once again, NHS services are suffering because the SNP has botched workforce planning.

Monica Lennon talked about the ridiculous situation that we are in, with the SNP praising a service in one breath but downgrading it in another. She said that the Government's decision was

"absurd, out of touch and dangerous."

She requested

"a pause and a rethink",

and she asked the SNP-Green Government

"to listen properly to families."

Jackie Baillie talked about the fact that there has been no consultation of stakeholders. As she is, we are baffled; we are baffled that the SNP-Green Government has not listened to the community.

Meghan Gallacher said that it was an "outrage" that the community has not been listened to. She said that it was a "kick in the teeth" that Wishaw's neonatal unit, which is the UK neonatal unit of the year, is being downgraded, and an example of the fact that the SNP-Green Government is tone deaf.

She said that midwives cannot make any sense of the Government's decision. The same will be happening elsewhere across Scotland—for example, at Ninewells hospital and medical school, in my region.

The only empathy that has been shown today by members of the SNP-Green Government was shown by Gillian Mackay. Will she, please, on behalf of the Government, listen to the women and families and ask the Government to pause its decision, which is a terrible decision that will have disastrous implications?

This SNP-Green Government is clearly intent on progressing its plans for neonatal care, despite the strength of feeling that has been shown locally. We are all concerned about the impact of the Government's decision on women who need to be at the centre of decision making on the future of maternity and neonatal care. The SNP has got it so wrong before. For the sake of patients and staff, it cannot afford to do so again.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call on the minister to wind up.

16:54

Jenni Minto: I thank all the members who have taken part in the debate. I appreciate that some of the contributions will have been emotional and difficult, but I very much appreciate that honesty.

I need to set out that the Government has acted based on expert clinical advice on where the smallest and sickest babies will get the best treatment and will, therefore, have better chances of survival. As I have outlined, the evidence is clear that the chances of survival are better for the highest-risk babies when they are cared for by clinicians who see more of those babies and when they have closer access to specialist support services.

Maintaining high standards of neonatal care is an on-going challenge.

Jackie Baillie: Does the minister accept, based on the figures that were published by the Scottish Government that I read out, that Wishaw is seeing enough babies? While I have the microphone, I will also ask the minister whether she will publish the evidence, so that everybody can consider it; meet the clinicians at Wishaw, because they have not been listened to; and meet the families.

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

Jenni Minto: I need to stick with the expert clinical advice that we have received.

It is important that we ensure that all babies who are born in Scotland receive the best and most up-to-date care. There is a wide range of different

needs associated with provision of neonatal care, ranging from routine baby care at home, to care in a midwife birthing unit, to the most highly specialist neonatal intensive care.

Evidence shows that the chance of survival for those very small numbers of the smallest and sickest babies is improved when they are born and cared for in a specialist unit. That model is supported by a range of stakeholders and clinicians, including Bliss, which is the leading charity for babies who are born premature or sick. It recognises that the new model of care is based on strong evidence and will improve the safety of services for the smallest and sickest babies. Keeping families together is at the core of the best start plan. As part of that, we have increased access for parents to psychological support in neonatal units. I commend the great work that our leading charities, including Bliss, do in providing support for families with babies in neonatal care.

We are rolling out transitional care across Scotland, with all units being on track to have it in place in the next year.

The framework for practice, "Criteria to Define Levels of Neonatal Care Including Repatriation, within NHS Scotland", was published on the same day as the announcement and describes the new model of care. It provides a level of flexibility that can be agreed based on local skills and experience.

There has been reference to the maternity unit at Dr Gray's hospital, which I visited this summer, and the maternity units in Caithness and Stranraer.

Graham Simpson: Will the member take an intervention?

Jenni Minto: I am sorry, but I want to continue.

I want to be clear that those units are in very different sets of circumstances. As has been said on many previous occasions in the chamber, the Government is committed to providing care as close to home as possible. That includes the return of consultant-led maternity services to Dr Gray's in a safe and sustainable way. That has been moving on, and I have been very clear in my directions to NHS Grampian and NHS Highland.

Meghan Gallacher: Will the minister take an intervention?

Jenni Minto: I will continue.

The Lanarkshire petition has been highlighted today, and I appreciate that local people will have concerns about the announced changes. I would like to clarify again that the changes will affect a small number of families in Lanarkshire. For families who have the very smallest and sickest babies, I would like to reassure them that the

change is based on evidence and will improve those babies' chances of survival and give them better life chances. I know that parents would want to act on that evidence.

There has been a lot of discussion about the young patients family fund and the important support that that gives to families to ensure that they can spend the right time with their parents. It provides assistance with travel, subsistence and overnight accommodation.

The perinatal sub-group of the best start implementation programme's options appraisal report was also raised in the debate. Skills maintenance is a key concern for the units that are no longer categorised as NICUs. Small and sick babies will continue to be delivered unexpectedly outwith NICUs, and some babies in local neonatal units and special care units will deteriorate in smaller units and will need stabilisation and transfer, so those skills need to be maintained.

All local neonatal units will continue to deliver intensive care and care for babies who are born from 27 weeks and who need stabilisation and treatment, so nursing and medical staff will continue to have experience in delivering those aspects of intensive care. The Scottish Government will work with the Scottish Perinatal Network and NHS Education for Scotland to take forward a number of actions to ensure that appropriate learning and development opportunities are available for staff who are impacted by the changes. Modelling work is currently being commissioned by the Scottish Government to inform capacity requirements. That work is expected to conclude by the end of this year.

In the meantime, discussions are under way in the regional forum to prepare and plan for the changes, which will be further informed by the modelling. As I said in my opening speech, there will be focus groups in NHS Lanarkshire. In addition, we will continue to provide funding to health boards to help them to transition to the new model.

I thank everyone who has taken the time to speak with us to inform our picture of what more needs to be done to reassure parents and staff in our neonatal community. I thank all those who have worked with us to look at how we can best deliver the changes that are recommended by the best start report. Their experience has been invaluable in informing our approach to date. It will continue to be invaluable as we take forward our work, through ensuring that the Government does as much as we possibly can to increase the chances of survival of these very special babies.

17:01

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): We brought the debate to the chamber to ensure that the voices of our communities are heard loud and clear. This is reckless decision making by the Government. Has the minister asked a single question on the research process? Has the minister asked why NHS Lanarkshire was not involved throughout the process?

I often question the Government's political decision making. Its political priorities and decision making are often misplaced, which leads to significant errors in policies over which it has full control. The downgrading of neonatal services in University hospital Wishaw is one of its more significant errors to date. It is an award-winning neonatal unit situated in an area of high deprivation, and it serves a population to which it means a great deal. We heard from Jackie Baillie that, at a time when staffing levels are presented as a danger by our trade unions, the unit retains its staff. It works in an important area that it wants to continue to contribute to.

Graham Simpson: I thank Carol Mochan for taking my intervention, because the minister was not prepared to do so. Does she agree that the minister does not seem to acknowledge that Wishaw has the best neonatal team in the United Kingdom? Does she also agree that, because of that fact and the fact that there was no Lanarkshire involvement in the decision, the new model should be paused?

Carol Mochan: I absolutely agree with the member on that point. I will go back to what my colleague Monica Lennon said—make this decision make sense, because it makes no sense at all.

The service is being downgraded, which will result in newborns who require specialist care being transferred to one of three specialist neonatal units across Scotland, when they should be going to our best and award-winning neonatal unit. My colleague Mark Griffin gave us an insight into what it is like for families, and he mentioned the key point that the unit is needed every other week.

On behalf of my party, I say that we support those in the gallery and campaigners on this issue.

I hope that I can call on some of the back benchers from the Government parties—both the Green and the SNP members, and those who represent the area, in particular—to call on the Government to pause this, look at the evidence and give some transparency about what has happened. It is disappointing that members who represent constituencies in the area do not seek to ensure that the evidence is open and available for staff and families to look at.

We are told time and again that health services are best delivered when they are delivered locally in communities, and even more so in communities where there is already a lack of services or amenities or in communities with high levels of deprivation. That therefore begs the question: what is the Government thinking, and why is it not reversing the decision? The people of Lanarkshire and the area that is served by the unit deserve so much better. I can say categorically that we will continue to fight this. We need to ensure that the communities are heard.

It is disappointing, as usual, to read the SNP's amendment to today's motion. Yet again, it is about the SNP; it fails to recognise the importance of this issue and the importance to the community, and it fails to mention any of the concerns that these families and communities have.

The minister needs to meet staff, consultants and families from the area. Indeed, the minister needs to take some interventions from MSPs, particularly those who represent the area.

Despite what Collette Stevenson's contribution indicated, one family with a newborn being forced to travel miles for care is one too many when they could get expert support in their own area. We have heard about the complications with stress, about the cost and about the way in which families will feel after the event. We must take those things into consideration and not dismiss them.

Members have outlined fully why they support the unit and the risk that is posed to premature babies if the change is made. We do not need to change things and have one thing instead of another; we can have both. That is clear from the debate.

Publish the evidence. Make it transparent. Make sure that we know what is actually happening.

The expertise on these wards is second to none. The community links are strong and the trust that is placed in the service that is provided is at the highest level. It would be a mistake to put any of that at risk.

In closing, I ask the minister to fully consult all of the population of the area and the MSPs in the area and to make all of the evidence transparent to us.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The concludes the debate on protecting specialist neonatal services in Lanarkshire.

Business Motion

17:08

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-10522, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 26 September 2023

2.00 pm Time for Reflection
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Topical Questions (if selected)
followed by Scottish Government Debate: Climate Emergency – Ambition and Action
followed by Committee Announcements
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 27 September 2023

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy; Finance and Parliamentary Business
followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Patient Safety Commissioner for Scotland Bill
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)
 6.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Thursday 28 September 2023

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: Transport, Net Zero and Just Transition
followed by Ministerial Statement: Vision for Scotland's Future Energy System
followed by Stage 1 Debate: Trusts and Succession (Scotland) Bill
followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 3 October 2023

2.00 pm Time for Reflection
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Topical Questions (if selected)
followed by Scottish Government Business
followed by Committee Announcements
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 4 October 2023

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands; NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care
followed by Scottish Government Business
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Thursday 5 October 2023

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
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 25 September 2023, 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.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motion S6M-10523, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument. I ask George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move the motion.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Cost of Living (Tenant Protection) (Scotland) Act 2022 (Amendment of Expiry Date) Regulations 2023 [draft] be approved.—
[George Adam]

17:09

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): I rise to speak against the approval of the SSI. The decision to implement rent controls was taken by Parliament under emergency Covid-19 legislative measures. Since the policy was implemented, we have seen record-high rents for new tenancies in Scotland; they have increased at the highest rate anywhere in the United Kingdom—there was an average 12.7 per cent increase in the year to July.

Asking rents in Edinburgh and Glasgow have risen at a rate of 15.5 per cent and 13.7 per cent in only one year—the highest rate of increase of any UK city. We have warned Scottish National Party and Green ministers that new renters across Scotland will see rents increase at that alarming rate. The managing director of Citylets, Thomas Ashdown, has said:

“We are living through unique times for the Scottish Private Rented Sector. Never before have we recorded such steep and sustained annual price appreciation across a single region, never mind across the country as a whole.

A vicious circle of low supply leading to higher rents for new tenancies and less movement within the sector seems to have been set in motion as the rent gap between open and closed markets grows.”

He went on to say that

“evidence of landlords leaving and pressures on would-be property buyers”

make it

“clear we have a difficult path ahead in achieving balance.”

SNP and Green ministers do not seem to understand how the rent control policy is impacting the housing market in Scotland, especially in our cities. The policy has been deeply damaging for the private rented market, with many buy-to-let developments, for example, now being put on hold or abandoned. In the social rented sector, business plans are being rewritten and the level of social rental completions is at the lowest that it has been for many decades.

The Scottish Government must recognise that the continuation of the policy will lead to counterproductive outcomes for many people and will directly lead to significant future rent increases for everyone in Scotland. We will therefore not support the latest extension at decision time.

17:11

The Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights (Patrick Harvie): I might have misheard Miles Briggs, but I think that he said that the measures were introduced as part of the coronavirus emergency legislation. However, what we are talking about today comes under the auspices of the cost of living emergency legislation. We introduced the Cost of Living (Tenant Protection) (Scotland) Act 2022 to support tenants at a time of unprecedented financial pressure. We acted to stabilise housing costs, to help people to stay in their homes and to reduce the impact of eviction. Since its introduction in October last year, the act has provided important additional protection for tenants.

In June, we published a statement of reasons for the second proposed extension of the emergency act. That statement set out the intention for the measures in the act to be extended for a further, and final, six-month period, which will run to the end of March 2024. Last week, I had the opportunity to provide further information on the matter to the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee.

Although some economic indicators have changed for the better, the statement of reasons provides updated data and economic analysis that show that the challenging economic position has not yet changed fundamentally and that many households on low and modest incomes continue to feel the strain of cost of living pressures. For that reason, I am seeking to extend part 1 of the emergency act, in its current form, until 31 March 2024 at the latest.

I recognise that some landlords are impacted by rising costs, which is why there continues to be a safeguard in place that allows landlords to apply for approval of an increase of up to 6 per cent in specific circumstances. In response to Mr Briggs, it is worth highlighting that that applies to the private rented sector. A voluntary agreement was reached with the social rented sector that provides an alternative way forward.

Miles Briggs: I do not know whether the minister is coming on to this point, but the real concern in the sector relates to the significant increases for new entrants. Does he recognise that, in his community in Glasgow, the policy is leading to one of the highest rent increases for

new entrants—13.7 per cent? That is a direct result of the policy.

Patrick Harvie: I was about to come on to precisely that point. In proposing the extension, we have, of course, taken into account what is happening in the wider housing market. At present, the number of registered landlords has remained stable. Some data sources show that rents for newly advertised properties in some parts of Scotland are rising significantly. Such rates mirror those in comparable cities in the rest of the UK—not just London, which, of course, has a very overheated property market and where there has been a 13.5 per cent increase, but Southampton, where there has been a 10.7 per cent increase, and Manchester, where there has been a 13 per cent increase.

While tenants in the rest of the UK have faced a double hit of, at times, double-digit rent rises within tenancies as well as between tenancies, tenants in Scotland have faced only the latter. It was not possible to address the intertenancy rent increases using the emergency legislation. However, those increases reinforce the need for an effective national system of long-term rent control in Scotland. A thriving, well-regulated private rented sector is good for tenants as well as landlords, and well-regulated markets can, and do, attract investment to support good-quality affordable homes. We see that in other countries where rent control is part of the operation of the private rented sector.

The Presiding Officer: Could you conclude, minister?

Patrick Harvie: In seeking to extend part 1 of the act, I will continue to ensure that the provisions do not remain in force for longer than is necessary in connection with the cost crisis, and I will keep under review the on-going necessity and proportionality of the measures.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, minister.

Patrick Harvie: I will continue to advise the Parliament through regular reporting. The next report is due on 14 October.

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

The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motion S6M-10524, on membership of European bodies. I ask George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move the motion.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees to nominate Kate Forbes as a full member of the Committee of the Regions UK Contact Group, and to nominate Keith Brown as a full member and Alexander Stewart as an alternate member of the Congress

of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe.—[George Adam]

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

Decision Time

17:16

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

There are eight questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S6M-10498.2, in the name of Lorna Slater, which seeks to amend motion S6M-10498, in the name of Rhoda Grant, on protecting Scotland's nature, be agreed to.

Are we agreed?

Members: No.

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

17:16

Meeting suspended.

17:18

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We will now proceed with the vote on amendment S6M-10498.2, in the name of Lorna Slater.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, 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)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (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)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (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)
 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)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (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)
 Dowe, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 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-10498.2, in the name of Lorna Slater, is: For 63; Against 50; Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-10498.1, in the name of Jamie Halcro Johnston, which seeks to amend motion S6M-10498, in the name of Rhoda Grant, on protecting Scotland's nature, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

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, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 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)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, 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)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (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)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (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)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (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)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)

Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-10498.1, in the name of Jamie Halcro Johnston, is: For 47; Against 66; Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-10498, in the name of Rhoda Grant, on protecting Scotland's nature, 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, 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)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (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)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (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)
 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)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (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)
 Dowe, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 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-10498, in the name of

Rhoda Grant, as amended, is: For 63; Against 50; Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament reaffirms its recognition of the climate emergency and the need to achieve a net zero future; recognises that Scotland has the potential for more carbon sequestration capacity by restoring peatlands and extending tree cover; affirms its commitment to the Global Biodiversity Framework, which commits countries to “closing the biodiversity finance gap” and, in Target 19, calls for countries to “Substantially and progressively increase the level of financial resources from all sources”; commends the increase in public investment in nature through the Nature Restoration Fund and Peatland ACTION; recognises the vital role of the Forestry Grant Scheme in supporting woodland creation and sustainable forest management; agrees that investment in the climate transition is crucial, and that Scotland’s natural environment should not be allowed to be used for greenwashing by private corporations; recognises that tackling the climate and nature crises requires all parts of society to act; welcomes, therefore, the Scottish Government’s Interim Principles for Responsible Investment, which are designed to support a values-led, high-integrity market that ensures that communities benefit, and to support diverse and productive land ownership, as well as the recent publication of a consultation on Scotland’s Biodiversity Strategy and an underpinning delivery plan, which will be followed by an investment plan; further welcomes the Scottish Government’s commitment to progress a Land Reform Bill and an Agriculture Bill; notes the valuable contribution made by the Scottish Land Commission in its report, Natural Capital and Land Reform, and looks forward to the Scottish Government’s response to its recommendations, and calls on all parties to work constructively to restore Scotland’s natural environment.

The Presiding Officer: I remind members that if the amendment in the name of Jenni Minto is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Sandesh Gulhane will fall. The next question is, that amendment S6M-10497.2, in the name of Jenni Minto, which seeks to amend motion S6M-10497, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on protecting specialist neonatal services in Lanarkshire, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is now closed.

The Minister for Energy and the Environment (Gillian Martin): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I was not able to vote; the app would not refresh. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Martin. 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, 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)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (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)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (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)
 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)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (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)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)

Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 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-10497.2, in the name of Jenni Minto, is: For 63, Against 50, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The amendment in the name of Sandesh Gulhane falls.

The next question is, that motion S6M-10497, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on protecting specialist neonatal services in Lanarkshire, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is now closed.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. The app has not worked for me. I would have voted no.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Kerr. 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, 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)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (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)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (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)
 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)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (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)
 Dowe, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 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-10497, in the name of Jackie Baillie, as amended, is: For 63, Against 50, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament believes that it is vital that the smallest and sickest babies born in Scotland receive the best and safest care possible to improve their life chances; notes evidence from expert clinicians that care for babies at highest risk is safest in units that treat a higher number of patients; agrees that parents would expect the Scottish Government to act on such evidence in the very best interests of their babies; welcomes the new model of neonatal intensive care, as recommended by The Best Start report, which was led by expert NHS clinicians and service user representatives, that delivers this change; notes that local neonatal units will continue to offer care to the vast majority of babies who need it, and that no neonatal units will close as part of the new model; further notes that all families who have a baby in neonatal care can access the Young Patients Family Fund, which provides support for costs of travel, food and accommodation; acknowledges the commitment of all neonatal staff across Scotland, and congratulates the Wishaw neonatal team on being named UK neonatal team of the year in 2023.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-10523, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, 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, 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, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 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)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 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)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (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)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 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)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

Against

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)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (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)

Abstentions

McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-10523, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, is: For 83, Against 27, Abstentions 3.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Cost of Living (Tenant Protection) (Scotland) Act 2022 (Amendment of Expiry Date) Regulations 2023 [draft] be approved.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S6M-10524, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on membership of European bodies, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees to nominate Kate Forbes as a full member of the Committee of the Regions UK Contact Group, and to nominate Keith Brown as a full member and Alexander Stewart as an alternate member of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time. I ask members who are leaving the chamber to do so quietly.

Maternity Services

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-10307, in the name of Meghan Gallacher, on maternity services in Scotland. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes with regret the recent reported decisions taken by the Scottish Government to downgrade or remove what it considers to be vital maternity services in Scotland, following the publication of the Five-year Forward Plan for Maternity and Neonatal Services options appraisal report; understands that the neonatal ward at University Hospital Wishaw will be downgraded from level 3 to 2, and that newborn babies requiring specialised care will be transferred to the Queen Elizabeth University Hospital in Glasgow, Simpsons Centre for Reproductive Health at the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh, or Aberdeen Maternity Unit; notes reports that NHS Lanarkshire has expressed disappointment that the neonatal unit at Wishaw General, which, alongside other hospitals such as Ninewells in Dundee and Victoria Hospital in Kirkcaldy, would not form part of the specialist intensive care neonatal units; considers that this decision is particularly disappointing given that Wishaw General's Neonatal Multidisciplinary Team was named UK neonatal team of the year in 2023; recognises the upset and worry that these decisions have reportedly had on expectant mothers as, should their newborn baby require additional care, they would need to travel up to 100 miles away from their families and support network; notes the petition raised by a local Lanarkshire woman, which has now received nearly 12,000 supporting signatures; considers that this is just the latest maternity service to be downgraded, with consultant-led maternity clinics at Dr Gray's and Caithness General Hospital being closed, which, it believes, is putting expectant mothers in rural communities at significant risk while making dangerous journeys to Inverness or Aberdeen to give birth, and notes the calls urging the Scottish Government to rethink its reported conclusion to downgrade or close what are considered to be vital maternity clinics, to support the petition, and to reassure expectant mothers and their families that they will not have to make long journeys should their babies require specialist care.

17:32

Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con): I thank those in the public gallery along with those members who have stayed on tonight to take part in a wider discussion about maternity services in Scotland. It is greatly appreciated.

I am shocked, however, not to see Collette Stevenson in the chamber. She said in the debate on neonatal services earlier today that she wanted "more time" to debate the issue, and participating in this debate would have been the ideal opportunity for her to do so. Having not one but two debates on the same issue shows how strongly MSPs feel about maternity services being removed or scaled back.

As I mentioned earlier, the Scottish National Party does not have a good track record on maternity services. Since 2016, this Government has downgraded or closed maternity or neonatal services at Caithness general hospital in Wick; Dr Gray's in Moray; University hospital Wishaw; Ninewells in Dundee; and Victoria hospital in Fife. Expectant mums and newborn babies up and down the country have been impacted by those decisions, and many have started campaign groups to voice their anger and frustration.

Members have heard previously in the chamber about the issues that rural mums face when travelling more than 100 miles to give birth in hospital, especially during the harsh winter months. There have been many debates on the subject, but we have yet to see maternity services fully reinstated at either Caithness or Dr Gray's. I find it staggering that more than 90 per cent of children born in the Caithness area were delivered at Raigmore hospital in Inverness, despite there being a maternity ward in Caithness general.

The process for a mother who goes into labour in those areas is even more questionable. The general instruction is to get in the car—that is no easy task when you are having contractions—with your partner, if they happen to be with you at the time, and travel 105 miles down the one and only road to Inverness: the A9. That is the exact road that this Government has failed to dual, and it seems to think that it is safe for mums to give birth at the side of that road.

Once the expectant mother arrives at the hospital, they should admit themselves to the maternity ward at Raigmore—that is, if it is time to be admitted. As mums will understand, having contractions does not automatically mean admission to hospital, and any false alarm would result in a 210-mile round trip. Does the Government seriously think that that is a comfortable and acceptable journey for women who suspect that they are in labour to make? No expectant mum should ever have to face a journey like that, yet it still happens.

Campaign groups in the Highlands have rightly been angered by that, and it appears that they have been given no support by this Government to provide them with better maternity care. They have been forgotten about by this Government, and the SNP should feel ashamed of the journey that rural mums need to make in order to give birth in a maternity ward.

The reason that I brought this members' business debate to the chamber is because I am a mum. When the news broke about Wishaw general hospital neonatal department being downgraded, I could not sit back and let it happen, because I gave birth to my daughter there just over a year ago. I met the wonderful midwifery

team at the hospital; the care and support that they give to families and newborn babies are second to none.

I could not, and still do not, understand why Wishaw general or any of the other areas were selected for downgrading, but that is part of the problem. The plan to reduce the number of maternity services in Scotland has been shrouded in secrecy, and many questions have been left unanswered.

In the case of Wishaw neonatal department, babies who need specialised care could be transferred to Glasgow, Edinburgh or Aberdeen—the three major cities—instead of being closer to home. For the benefit of those who say that Glasgow is close by to Wishaw general, I say that the transfer could be to Aberdeen, which is roughly 150 miles away from Wishaw.

What message does it send to mums, who are already going through an exceptionally stressful time, to say that they will need to make a substantial journey in order to access specialised care, when they could receive care in the hospital that they are due to go to? The decision makes absolutely no sense—to go back to what Monica Lennon said in the earlier debate, the Government must make sense.

The Minister for Public Health and Women's Health spoke earlier about a fund that parents can access to help with costs for travel and food, but I must say that £8.50 will not go far if they have to travel to Aberdeen.

The decision is centralisation for centralisation's sake at the expense of vulnerable mothers and babies. Has the Government thought about how traumatising it could be for a new mum and her baby to be put in an ambulance and told that they need to go to another hospital because the one that they are currently in can no longer help them?

I get that the minister said that journeys would happen before labour started, but babies do not always work that way. As we heard in the case of Mark Griffin and his family, there are cases in which it would not be safe to move a mother or baby. I thank Mark Griffin for sharing his story, and I understand why he is not able to take part in the debate this evening.

We should not forget that we are talking about giving support to babies who need it most. Surely that should be delivered as close to home as possible.

There are also the logistics. Will the midwives be required to work across several different health boards? If a mother and baby need to be transferred, will the midwife have to accompany them? That would result in less resource in

Wishaw general, which is already stretched to breaking point.

Finally, there has been a shocking lack of consultation. The announcement came out of the blue, and that is why a large group of concerned women are in the public gallery this evening: because they will not stand for it, and nor should they.

I have enough time left to thank those who have contacted a wide spread of MSPs about the issue. I especially thank Lynne, who is at the forefront of the campaign to stop the neonatal department at Wishaw general from being downgraded. Lynne has her own story about her son Innes. I have loved seeing photos of him since he appeared on a BBC documentary that highlighted the wonderful support that he received during his stay at Wishaw general while receiving specialised neonatal care.

It is because of Innes and other babies that we will fight this decision every step of the way. Moray mums fought a downgrade and Caithness mums are still fighting the downgrades. What about Lanarkshire mums? We are the feisty type, and we will fight this decision every step of the way.

17:39

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I welcome that Meghan Gallacher has brought the debate to the chamber, and I note the degree of detail that she described with regard to Dr Gray's and Caithness hospitals.

I remind members that I am still a registered nurse. As a former clinical educator who provided specific clinical education support for midwives in NHS Dumfries and Galloway, I agree with the member that it is important that expectant mothers are able to deliver their babies as close to home as possible. However, that must be clinically safe, and the right option in each case.

As the minister will know, I have a number of challenges to make regarding maternity services in Wigtownshire and Dumfries and Galloway, and I will focus on some of those.

When mothers have to be transferred further from home to receive the best care for their baby, it is crucial that support is in place to enable parents to be at their baby's cotside as much as possible. I am aware that the Scottish Government is committed to improving maternity and neonatal services in Scotland in order to ensure that they provide the right care for every woman and baby and give all children the best start in life.

We heard in the previous debate, which I sat through, that in 2015, maternity services underwent a national review, through which "The Best Start: A Five-Year Forward Plan for Maternity and Neonatal Care in Scotland" was developed. In

February 2017, the Scottish Government appointed the chief executive of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde to lead the implementation programme board that will implement the five-year plan. Implementation of the best start programme was remobilised in May 2022, following a pause due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The plan for maternity and neonatal care in Scotland updates and builds on “Neonatal Care in Scotland: A Quality Framework”, which was published in March 2013. However, while I welcome that work, my constituents in Wigtownshire are not able to deliver their babies locally, at Galloway hospital in Stranraer. That means that many expectant mothers who are not able or who do not wish to give birth at home are required to travel 72 miles to Dumfries infirmary in order to deliver their babies.

In 2011—sorry, I think that the date is wrong there—the Clenoch birthing centre at the Galloway community hospital was operational as a community midwifery unit, providing low-risk, midwifery-led, intrapartum care as a two-baby facility. In 2018, due to sustained and significant staffing pressures, an operational decision to temporarily suspend the birthing centre at Clenoch was taken by NHS Dumfries and Galloway, and the centre is still closed.

Thanks to campaigning by expectant mothers, the Galloway community hospital action group and others, NHS Dumfries and Galloway commissioned a review of Wigtownshire maternity services, which reported in July this year. The initial findings of the independent review of maternity services in Wigtownshire have been published, and the review has the support of the community maternity hub at Galloway community hospital. The review wants to see the community midwifery maternity hub return to the hospital.

The hub would provide an on-call, intrapartum midwifery unit. A lot of constituents have long campaigned for the return of a local midwifery-led service unit in Wigtownshire. That includes the Galloway community hospital action group, with which I have worked closely. The previous Minister for Public Health, Women’s Health and Sport, along with colleagues, met with members of the action group in Stranraer.

I understand that if the service is to be resumed, changes will be required in the current Clenoch birthing centre, including an upgrade in the facilities and equipment, with projected costs of £103,000. The report says that staff will also require updated education on obstetric emergencies before maternity services can properly resume. Those recommendations are a step forward, and I thank everyone who has been involved in carrying out the review.

I acknowledge, however, that the safety of mothers and babies is of paramount importance. Expert clinicians, doctors, midwives and anaesthetists must be involved, not only for their clinical input; they must be able to be recruited and retained in order for service delivery to be achieved safely and returned to Wigtownshire.

17:43

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

I congratulate my colleague Meghan Gallacher on bringing this important debate to the chamber. I also welcome the campaigners from Wishaw general hospital who are in the public gallery for the two important debates today. They continue to fight for what they and I—and, I think, most members in the chamber—believe is the right outcome for them and for the local area.

However, I will focus my remarks on Dr Gray’s hospital and the maternity services there. During today’s earlier debate, I was astonished to hear the minister basically patting herself on the back by saying how good things are in Moray now because there is a pledge to reinstate consultant-led maternity services by 2026. We should remember that those services were first temporarily downgraded in 2018, and now the Government wants thanked for the fact that they may get back up and running by 2026.

The minister visited Elgin back in August, just a few weeks ago. After that meeting, Kirsty Watson—with whom I have been in contact last night and today, ahead of the debate—and others in the Keep MUM campaign group were frustrated by the lack of progress. We are getting no answers from NHS Grampian or NHS Highland about how this consultant-led unit will be introduced. The responses from the minister on 24 August and in subsequent letters have been to say, “Everything is fine. Don’t worry. This service will be back up and running.” Minister, we are worried. We are desperately worried in Moray that no real progress is being made and that that is having an impact.

I want to use my time today to articulate a very difficult birthing story. It is really important that the minister hears this, because this is happening to Moray mums right now, and it has been happening since 2018. I have explained in the past in this chamber my own family’s story, but this is one that should shock the minister and, I hope, the Government into action.

This mum spoke about her first baby being born at Dr Gray’s hospital in 2020. The downgrade made the family worry about having another child, but they did, and things were going well. However, there were last-minute complications. I am going

to read exactly what the mum put in the public domain.

“I was told I had to give birth in Aberdeen. On the morning that my contractions started, I phoned Dr Gray’s and was advised to make my way through to Aberdeen ASAP as it was a second pregnancy and, because of this, they wouldn’t turn me away. We drove through and I was contracting the whole way, which was horrible. When I arrived in Aberdeen and was examined and triaged, I was told I was only 2cms so would need to go home as women labour best at home.”

The mum explained that she was from Elgin, that it was a four-hour round trip and that it was not possible to just nip back home for the labour to continue. She went on:

“They then advised that we would need to book a hotel as we couldn’t stay at the hospital as they didn’t have space, so we frantically tried to find a room to book and managed to get one just down the road from the hospital, but check-in wasn’t until 3pm. By this point, it was only 12pm. We asked if we could stay at the hospital for a few more hours and we were told no.”

She continues:

“I was then contracting heavily in the hotel car park. My waters had gone and were leaking everywhere, and I was crying my eyes out, feeling so scared and uncomfortable. I phoned the hospital back around 2pm and explained that the contractions were a lot stronger and closer together and asked if I could come back in, but they said they didn’t have space for me and I could only come back in at 3pm. So, I waited another hour, and by the time I got into triage and was examined, I was 7 to 8 centimetres and my baby was born 30 minutes later.”

She finishes by saying:

“The whole experience was awful and felt inhumane. I had several panic attacks throughout and afterwards, and I still feel panicked when I think about it now.”

Minister, this is happening right now in Moray, in Scotland, and it is unacceptable. It is inhumane. We must ensure that consultant-led services are reinstated to Dr Gray’s hospital as quickly as possible so that no more mothers and no more families have to suffer in that way.

17:48

Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): I remind members of my membership of the GMB trade union, which organises NHS workers, and I suppose that, in the idiom of Douglas Ross, I ought to record that my wife is a serving trade union organiser for NHS workers.

I thank Meghan Gallacher for bringing this important motion to Parliament. In so doing, she has shone a bright national parliamentary spotlight on a dark plan to centralise and downgrade nationally critical, locally based neonatal services. Like her, I am especially concerned about the threat that is hanging over the neonatal intensive care unit at University hospital Wishaw, which is proposed to be downgraded from level 3 to level 2.

One experienced midwife, Elsie Sneddon—minister, these people are the clinical experts as well—told me that

“this would not just be a disaster for Lanarkshire, but a disaster for Scotland.”

She went on:

“Greater Glasgow and Lothian patients are often transferred into Wishaw so why take it away?”

Four weeks ago, I wrote to the cabinet secretary setting out some of those concerns. At the time, there were 10,000 signatures on a public petition; there are now more than 12,000 signatures on that petition. At that time, there had been no consultation with the public, no consultation with the trade unions, no consultation with anyone based in Lanarkshire and, shockingly, no consultation with families who have direct experience of the neonatal intensive care services at Wishaw.

All these weeks later, I have to report that there has still been no consultation, even though the proposed downgrade could have profound implications for patient safety, and even though every staff member who delivers those services tells me of their anxiety and concerns about infection control and risk, about neurodevelopmental care and outcomes, about family-centred care, about staff retention and staff transfers and about ambulance demand and capacity. There appears to have been no assessment of any of that—no equality impact assessment; no risk assessment; no assessment, let alone an independent validation, of the data sets that are used; no assessment of the co-location of specialist paediatric services on site at Wishaw; no assessment of the skills, training and irreplaceable institutional knowledge that are now at risk; no assessment of the impact that that is now having on staff morale; and no assessment of the human cost. No assessment.

We are told to follow the evidence, but the whole exercise has lacked transparency. There is no breakdown of the weighting of the scores in the options appraisal report. There is widespread concern, too, that the statistics being used are way out of date. It is the Government’s job to consider the best available evidence. I say to the minister tonight: do not rely on the tables in the report. Listen to the human stories of the lives that have been saved, the futures that have been won and the hope that has been given. Do not extinguish that hope.

Finally, there are risks in service redesign, risks in the so-called new model, risks in overcentralisation, risks in cutting the number of beds—that is what this means—and risks in the downgrading of our local NHS services. If we have not learned that over the past few years, we have

learned nothing. It is time that the minister stepped in, stopped the plan and finally listened to the voices, including those of the people who are here tonight, who need to be heard. That is the right thing to do; it is the only thing to do; and it is what we are calling on you to do tonight.

17:52

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): I have listened to the previous debate and this debate with interest. The minister was not prepared to take any of my interventions earlier. I will take any of hers, if she is prepared to make them, because her earlier contribution was, in my view, tin eared. She was not listening. I say to the minister that, even now, she has an opportunity to say that she will reconsider and pause the plan. She won the vote earlier, but it is not binding—she can change her mind. As she closes the debate for the Government, she could say that she will reconsider and go back to the drawing board. That is exactly what she should do.

I congratulate Meghan Gallacher on securing this members' business debate. However, it should not have been necessary. The plan to downgrade the neonatal intensive care unit in Wishaw has managed to provoke the ire of patients and staff. As we heard earlier, it has attracted 12,000 signatures on a petition that the Government is apparently ignoring. It would see babies who require specialist care being taken to Glasgow, Edinburgh or Aberdeen from Scotland's third-largest health board area.

The staff at Wishaw are not just among the best—they are the best in the United Kingdom. Here is what one of them told me:

"Wishaw Neonatal unit are currently a level 3 unit, successfully managing care for the babies of Lanarkshire effectively, confidently and to a high standard. Our multi-disciplinary team won UK neonatal team of the year in 2023 & our care and success was evidenced on the Tiny Lives documentary.

We successfully manage our workload with a highly competent and skilled team of staff. It is a concern that downgrading will mean that we should stabilise babies that we are skilled at caring for, and transfer them to another hospital, to the detriment of staff, babies and families. I query how this is child or family-centred care and propose that it is financially or politically motivated and based on inaccurate data."

Presiding Officer, this has been a deeply flawed process. The Scottish Government consultation fell short of being fair and inclusive, and it was in no way transparent. Decisions were made by the Scottish Government without representation from Lanarkshire on the board. No one from Lanarkshire was there, but other boards were fully represented. Why was that? Perhaps the minister could tell us. She could intervene on me now and explain that, but she does not want to. NHS

Lanarkshire representation on the perinatal subgroup was only there until 2019, before the options appraisal process started. There was no local representation after that.

Data in the document is no longer relevant—it was, in fact, relevant only in 2015. The scoring system used has been called into question. It was weighted heavily on the ability to provide interventional care for rare congenital anomalies, most of which are picked up during pregnancy anyway and plans then put in place for delivery. Wishaw has specialist fetal medicine expertise for just that purpose.

The planned move could—and will—have a detrimental effect on NHS Lanarkshire, which could lose skilled staff to other areas. That is happening already, as we heard in the previous debate. It could also see mums being moved to other hospitals. Having a sick baby is a hugely traumatic situation for any parent. Earlier, we heard Mark Griffin speak movingly about that. It is completely senseless to move mums from their local area, including their support network of friends and family, and ask them to leave their other children, if they have them, when local care would be more appropriate, which it is.

This is not a plea or a campaign that is based on wanting to keep something local just for the sake of it. We say that the decision should be revisited, not because it sounds good but because it is the right thing to do for staff and, crucially, for mums, dads and their babies. The Government must think again and must not palm us off, as the minister tried to do earlier, with focus groups. That does not cut it.

17:57

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): I, too, thank Meghan Gallacher for securing the debate and for bringing everyone together. I join her in paying tribute to all the campaigners and families in Caithness, in Moray and, indeed, in Lanarkshire, on whom I will focus in my remarks.

I know that Meghan Gallacher feels this personally, as a mum who gave birth to her baby girl in Wishaw just last year. My daughter was born in the same hospital—not last year, but 17 years ago. A few years ago, Richard Leonard and I had a lovely special visit to the hospital so that we could go and meet staff and listen to those who work in maternity and neonatal care. To my surprise, I was reunited with my midwife, who gave me the biggest hug. I was humbled that she remembered me, and we had a lovely chat.

In my earlier speech, I mentioned that, to families who have had experience of being in the neonatal department, the staff there feel like

family. They feel that genuine love, compassion and care. Continuity of care is really important.

Earlier today, I made the mistake of sitting behind Mark Griffin while he made his speech. I agree with Graham Simpson that it was very moving. The fact that Mark and his family have been so open about their struggles has helped other families, particularly in relation to the financial support that Mark's campaigning has helped to secure. In the debate, we have heard a lot about mitigation and the support that people might be able to get if the plan goes ahead, but the whole point is that we can prevent such trauma from happening.

I should also say that Mark Griffin has had to leave the chamber because Rosa needs to be picked up from Rainbows tonight, but I am sure that we would all welcome that—we would not begrudge Rosa her Rainbows experience.

As the minister knows, I chair the cross-party group on women's health. I am very passionate about women's health, and I make no apology for that, but I have to say that on the point about the impact on women—the birth trauma that Douglas Ross has addressed—so many issues that affect women also affect dads, partners and family units, and they can have lifelong impacts. It does not need to be like that.

I am quite jealous of Jenni Minto, as she probably has one of the best jobs in Government as Minister for Public Health and Women's Health. She is sitting here as a lonely figure tonight, but we do not want her to be alone in this—we do not want her to be burdened with this terrible dilemma. People want to help: the people in the gallery want to help. Our communities know what they are talking about and they want to help, too.

I would actually quite like Richard Leonard to be the minister who is looking at this, because he went through the issues forensically. He asked the questions that ministers need to be asking civil servants and clinicians. We must be forensic, and we must get to the bottom of this. Carol Mochan was very clear about that earlier, and she hit the nail on the head when she asked: where is the transparency? Where are all the documents? NHS Lanarkshire was not even properly at the table, a point that the Royal College of Midwives has made in its briefings.

There is not a lot of time left. I hope that Collette Stevenson asks her business manager to secure a proper debate in the Parliament, because parents who are sitting in the gallery tonight have messaged me to ask, "What does this actually mean? What did that vote actually do?" The vote endorsed the downgrading of the neonatal unit, and that is not what people want. We are going to live to regret that, minister.

As we have heard from some of the families that have been mentioned this afternoon, significant long-term complications can be linked to premature birth and the need for neonatal care. The ability to go back to our local hospital and see those familiar faces—to have that institutional knowledge that Richard Leonard talked about—is something that money cannot buy.

So, yes, this is a dark plan. This downgrading will be dangerous. However, it is not too late, minister—we can stop it.

The question that I wanted to ask the minister earlier, when she did not take an intervention, was this: when did she last go to University hospital Wishaw? When did she last visit the neonatal unit, speak to the staff and try to walk in their shoes to understand the situation? We cannot sit behind a desk or in this Parliament and just write them off. Please listen—these people are award winning for a reason.

18:02

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): I thank my colleague Meghan Gallacher for bringing this debate to the chamber. As we have heard, the Scottish Government appears to be determined to downgrade, or even to remove altogether, vital maternity services across the whole of Scotland. Its actions are, in some cases, putting expectant mothers at unnecessary risk, especially those who live in rural communities, such as mine of Galloway and West Dumfries, and who often face lengthy journeys because there are no neonatal services close by.

"Born on the A75" might sound like a dodgy rip-off of Bruce Springsteen's classic hit, but sadly it is no laughing matter, because that has become the reality, with women having to give birth in lay-bys along that road. Indeed, I know of one child whose birth certificate lists her place of arrival as "Drumflower road end, Dunragit". That is simply unacceptable.

I do not want to focus on the risk that is associated with the A75, because I know that the paramedics and midwives who accompany the mothers are left with no option but to make the 70-mile journey, and they provide the highest level of care, no matter where they are. However, the situation simply cannot continue: one new mum said that she had had to travel 7,500 miles during her pregnancy to get maternity care. Some mothers have told me that they would not have any more children because they could not face the uncertainty of not knowing whether they might have to make those kinds of journeys, including the sort of journey that Douglas Ross described.

The fact is that, increasingly, mothers-to-be are denied a choice in where they give birth. A normal

and natural physiological birth, in their community and with their support network around them, should not be denied to any woman. Whether they are in Dumfries, Stranraer or at home, women have the right to make that decision and not to have that dictated to them because of a flawed management decision related to workforce decisions or the downgrading of maternity or neonatal services.

The minister will be aware of the campaign to reinstate the midwife-led Clenoch birthing centre in Stranraer. The campaign, which is led by mothers, elected members and the Galloway community hospital action group, resulted in an independent review of maternity services in the west of Dumfries and Galloway. The review was led by NHS Ayrshire and Arran's Crawford McGuffie and Jennifer Wilson, with the support of midwifery expert Angela Cunningham.

Two proposals were drawn up: the existing model of a community maternity hub with home births, and a second option, which also included planned on-call birthing for low-risk births at the Galloway community hospital's birth centre. The recommendation from that independent group was for option 2 but, bizarrely and frustratingly, the integration joint board has not as a matter of urgency put in place the plans to deliver what that independent inquiry recommended. I call on all the IJB members to do the right thing.

The Scottish Government must support local NHS boards to improve workforce planning, retention and recruitment, especially given the huge demands on our much-valued midwives, who now have increased responsibilities and require an increased set of skills, particularly in rural areas.

Everyone wants the best care for mothers and babies, and the move to ensure that the smallest babies are looked after in centres that will have the right level of care is not disputed. However, the Royal College of Midwives has voiced concerns surrounding the testing of the Government's model, following publication of "The Best Start: A Five-Year Forward Plan for Maternity and Neonatal Care in Scotland".

We are in a very different world demographically and financially from that of 2017, when "The Best Start" was published. The ethos of the report is that we should provide care close to home, keep mums and babies together and individualise care around the needs of women, their individual circumstances and their family circumstances. That is certainly not what is being offered in the west of my constituency.

I stress again that fathers and mothers-to-be must be given a choice when it comes to giving birth. After all, it should be one of the most

precious moments, if not the most precious, in our lives.

18:06

The Minister for Public Health and Women's Health (Jenni Minto): I thank all the members who have taken part in the debate.

The new model of neonatal intensive care recommended by "The Best Start" outlined that Scotland should move from the current model of eight neonatal intensive care units to a model of three units supported by the continuation of current NICUs redesignated as local neonatal units. The evidence is clear that the highest-risk babies are more likely to survive when they are cared for in units by clinicians who see more such babies and with access to specialist support services.

"The Best Start" report was underpinned by evidence. Eight evidence reviews are detailed in the report, which was led by Professor Mary Renfrew of the University of Dundee. The evidence is clear and is set out in the report.

Graham Simpson: The minister has heard repeatedly that the staff at Wishaw are performing at the highest level: they are the best in United Kingdom. Her argument does not stack up. Even at this late stage, is she prepared to say that she will pause the decision and have a rethink?

Jenni Minto: I have made it clear that the decision was based on clinical evidence from clinical experts. We need to take account of that evidence.

Babies who are born at highest risk are defined as those who are born at fewer than 27 weeks' gestation, weigh less than 800g or need multiple complex intensive care interventions or surgery. It should be understood that no neonatal units will close, and that local neonatal units will continue to provide a level of neonatal intensive care for sick babies in their areas. However, the most preterm and sickest babies will receive their specialist complex care in one of our specialist NICUs and will—which is important—return to their local area as soon as is clinically appropriate.

The process of determining which units should provide neonatal intensive care followed an options appraisal that was undertaken by an expert group, including clinical leads and service-user representatives. That model is supported by a range of stakeholders and clinicians, including Bliss, which is the leading charity for babies who are born premature or sick. It recognises that the new model of care is based on strong evidence and will improve the safety of services for the smallest and sickest babies.

Monica Lennon: I appreciate that a lot of the work started before the minister was in post. Now that the matter is on her desk, what steps has she taken to go back to check that everything is in line, as it should be? She has talked about the importance of clinicians, but what has she done to make sure that there was no one missing from the discussion? The information in my folder suggests that the process is flawed.

Jenni Minto: When I came into post, I had a number of meetings with officials to talk through the matter, and there was a review in 2022 of the decision that was made in 2019 and the outcomes.

As members will be aware, we currently have 15 incredible neonatal units in Scotland, each of which is providing invaluable care for babies in their area. That will continue under the new model of care. “Best Start” recommended that the new model of neonatal care should be based on the British Association of Perinatal Medicine’s definitions of levels of care. Neonatal units in Ninewells hospital and medical school in Dundee, the Princess royal maternity hospital in Glasgow, University hospital Wishaw, the Victoria hospital in Kirkcaldy and University hospital Crosshouse in Kilmarnock will continue to function as local neonatal units.

As I said in the previous debate, the scope of practice of a local neonatal unit is wider than that of a level 2 neonatal unit. I reassure members that, under the new model, the scope of practice that a local neonatal unit can undertake means that the vast majority of babies who need neonatal care will still receive it locally. Local units will continue to provide a level of intensive care and will be able to care for all local babies who are born at greater than 27 weeks’ gestation. As members have highlighted today, the work that those units provide, and will continue to provide, is incredible. Hearing the words of parents whom I have met and who have written to me detailing their experience has only reassured me that the care that we are providing to the most vulnerable babies is inspirational.

I take this—[*Interruption.*] I will not take an intervention; I would like to make some progress.

I take this second opportunity to congratulate Wishaw hospital’s neonatal multidisciplinary team on being named the UK neonatal team of the year in 2023. I have also heard reference to Dr Gray’s hospital, so I will touch on that. Douglas Ross is correct—I visited Dr Gray’s in Elgin in August. I was disappointed that Mr Ross was unable to join me at the meeting, because it was, from my perspective, very helpful. I heard from Keep MUM, which was very clear about its concerns. As I said in that meeting, I am very clear that five years was too long, which is why I am pleased that the plan

between NHS Highland and NHS Grampian was agreed in March. When I met the boards, we discussed what progress was being made and, as Mr Ross will know, a project manager has been appointed.

I also point out that the Scottish Government has put £5 million into refurbishment at Raigmore hospital and £5 million into Dr Gray’s. I have written to both health boards, requesting that they improve the timelines that they have set and that they continue to give the Scottish Government more information.

Douglas Ross: I, too, was disappointed that I could not meet the minister. I appreciated her officials contacting me and apologising for the late notice of the minister’s visit to Elgin. However, we cannot just keep going round in circles, having more letters go from the Government to the health board. The Government can instruct NHS Highland and NHS Grampian to ramp up their efforts. There is real frustration that we are seeing little or no progress. Simply writing to them and urging them to do a bit more is not cutting the mustard. Indeed, Keep MUM has said that, at the moment, it has

“little faith that our voices ... will be heard”.

Its members’ voices are not being heard by the Government, NHS Grampian or NHS Highland. If they were, we would see far more action on the ground right now to reinstate full consultant-led maternity services at Dr Gray’s.

Jenni Minto: As I understand it, Mr Ross was given enough time to know that the meeting was happening—we had given him that notice.

Douglas Ross: You apologised.

Jenni Minto: I have been listening to Keep MUM, and I have been direct with the health boards as to what I expect them to be doing.

Douglas Ross: We are seeing no progress.

Jenni Minto: I would like to make some progress, thank you.

Stranraer was mentioned by Finlay Carson and Emma Harper. The midwife service there was temporarily withdrawn because of staffing. As has been pointed out, there has been a review by NHS Ayrshire and Arran, and the IJB will be considering the issue, I believe, at the meeting at the end of September.

Finlay Carson: Will the minister take an intervention?

Jenni Minto: I will not take an intervention; I would like to make some progress, thank you.

In reference to the petition that has been highlighted today, I appreciate that local people will have concerns about the announced changes.

I would like to clarify that those changes will affect a small number of families in Lanarkshire. I appreciate that, for any family affected, that is probably difficult to cope with.

I will also highlight a range of other features of the new model of neonatal care that was outlined in “Best Start”. The new model of care positions parents firmly as partners in their baby’s care. It includes expansion of transitional care, which will allow for mothers and babies who need some additional neonatal support to stay together in a postnatal ward, improved facilities and support for parents, and expanded neonatal community care, which will allow babies to get home sooner.

Members will be aware that we have begun to address the financial concerns of parents with babies who are in neonatal care through expansion of the neonatal expenses fund, which is now known as the young patients family fund. The fund continues to support many parents with the cost of travel, meals and accommodation while they are partners in the care of their babies. I say to Meghan Gallacher that £8.50 is for meals—all travel is compensated in full.

We are rolling out transitional care across Scotland, with all units being on track to have that in place next year. In addition, all our units are working towards implementation of the Bliss baby charter, with almost all units at silver or bronze level, two units having achieved gold standard and four more golds expected this year.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Minister, could you please bring your remarks to a close?

Jenni Minto: We will now work with all health boards that are affected to plan for and implement the service change over the course of the next year, informed by the testing that has been under way over the past few years.

I thank everyone who has taken time to speak with us to inform our picture of what more needs to be done to reassure both the parents and the staff in our neonatal community. I thank all those who have worked with us to look at how best we can deliver the changes that were recommended by the “Best Start” report. Their experience is invaluable in informing our approach to date, and it will continue to be invaluable as we take forward our work, thereby ensuring that the Government does as much as we can do to support those who require neonatal care in Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, minister. That concludes the debate.

Meeting closed at 18:17.

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