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Wednesday 25 October 2023

CONTENTS

	Col.
PORTFOLIO QUESTION TIME	1
CONSTITUTION, EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND CULTURE	1
Constitutional Futures Division (Scottish Independence)	1
Scottish Independence	2
Scottish Independence (Spending)	2
Cultural Investment (Rural Communities)	3
Cultural Organisations in Rural Areas (Financial Support)	4
Public Interest Journalism	7
Creative Scotland (Funding for 2023-24 and 2024-25)	9
Gaza (Humanitarian Assistance)	10
JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS	13
Police Buildings (Closures)	13
Fund to Leave Pilot (Domestic Abuse)	16
Bonfire Night (Preparations)	17
Domestic Violence (Support for Migrants)	19
Retail Crime	20
Recruitment of Police Officers (Dumfries and Galloway and Scottish Borders)	21
HMP Stirling	23
STORM BABEL	26
<i>Statement—[Angela Constance].</i>	
The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance)	26
SKILLS	38
<i>Motion moved—[Daniel Johnson].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Graeme Dey].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Murdo Fraser].</i>	
Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)	38
The Minister for Higher and Further Education; and Minister for Veterans (Graeme Dey)	40
Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)	43
Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD)	45
Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab)	47
Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)	48
Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con)	49
Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab)	51
John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)	52
Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con)	54
Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green)	55
Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)	57
Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con)	58
The Minister for Small Business, Innovation, Tourism and Trade (Richard Lochhead)	60
Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab)	62
CULTURE SECTOR	65
<i>Motion moved—[Neil Bibby].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Angus Robertson].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Alexander Stewart].</i>	
Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab)	65
The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson)	68
Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)	70
Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD)	72
Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab)	74
Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP)	75
Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con)	77
Foysoil Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab)	79
Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)	80
Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con)	81

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)	83
Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)	85
Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con).....	86
The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development (Christina McKelvie).....	87
Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab).....	90
BUSINESS MOTION	93
<i>Motion moved—[George Adam]—and agreed to.</i>	
PARLIAMENTARY BUREAU MOTIONS	95
<i>Motions moved—[George Adam].</i>	
<i>Motion moved—[Shirley—Anne Somerville].</i>	
DECISION TIME	96
CLIMATE JUSTICE	109
<i>Motion debated—[Maggie Chapman].</i>	
Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green)	109
Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow Southside) (SNP).....	112
Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con).....	114
Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab).....	115
Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD).....	117
The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Net Zero and Just Transition (Màiri McAllan)	119

Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 25 October 2023

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

Portfolio Question Time

Constitution, External Affairs and Culture

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): Good afternoon. The first item of business is portfolio questions, and the first portfolio is constitution, external affairs and culture. I remind members that questions 1, 3 and 6, as well as questions 2 and 8, are grouped. I will therefore take any supplementaries on those questions after the questions themselves have been answered. Any member who is looking to get a supplementary question in should press their request-to-speak button during the relevant question. I make the usual appeal for brevity in questions and answers.

Constitutional Futures Division (Scottish Independence)

1. Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on any work that its constitutional futures division is doing to further the case for Scottish independence. (S6O-02616)

The Minister for Independence (Jamie Hepburn): In common with the wider civil service, the constitutional futures division continues to support the Scottish Government's programme of activity, including the articulation of the case for Scottish independence.

Murdo Fraser: Perhaps the minister might give us some clarity on where we are. In the past few weeks, we have had three different positions from the Scottish National Party on the question of a de facto referendum. First, the SNP said that it needed a majority of votes cast in an election. It then said that it simply needed the most seats in an election. It has now said—I think—that it just needs to get a majority of seats in a general election. The SNP is effectively saying that even if it lost 20 seats in a general election—seats lost to the Conservatives or to Labour, or even to the Liberal Democrats—it would take that as a mandate for independence. Does it really expect people to take this nonsense seriously?

Jamie Hepburn: I thank Mr Fraser for taking such a great interest in the SNP's manifesto for the forthcoming election. Our prospectus is clear:

we have had a full debate at our conference—something that I know is anathema to the Conservative party in terms of its internal democracy—and we have laid out our position. We will take that to the electorate and seek their support. I suggest to Mr Fraser that he would do better to be rather more concerned about his own party's prospects than the SNP's prospects at the election.

Scottish Independence

3. Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its work to further the case for Scottish independence. (S6O-02618)

The Minister for Independence (Jamie Hepburn): The Scottish Government will continue to provide information about the opportunities of independence through its "Building a New Scotland" series of papers and various other engagements. We will build on the plans that we have already set out on the economy, the currency, a written constitution and citizenship in an independent Scotland with further proposals, including on migration, pensions, social security, defence, the European Union and the transition to net zero. The next paper is planned for publication shortly.

Rona Mackay: Last week, Scottish Labour made a humiliating choice to abstain from voting on devolving more powers to the Scottish Parliament, despite promising a "fresh start" in its recent campaign. Does the minister agree that Scotland's only opportunity for a fresh start is to become an independent country with full control over all the policies that can improve the lives of everyone in Scotland?

Jamie Hepburn: Of course, I fundamentally agree with the premise of the question, but I would welcome the opportunity to see further powers devolved to this place. We have had that debate in the past, and I understood it to be the case—certainly it was articulated to me—that the Scottish Labour Party's position was to support the devolution of employment law, something from which it is now desperately retreating. We do not know where the Labour Party stands on these matters, but let us be clear about where this Government stands: it is independence that can secure a better future for the people of Scotland.

Scottish Independence (Spending)

6. Sharon Dowe (South Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government how much public money it plans to spend in this financial year and in 2024-25 on any work designed to further the case for Scottish independence, including the costs of publication of any independence-related documents. (S6O-02621)

The Minister for Independence (Jamie Hepburn): The civil service will continue to work on Government commitments on the constitution, including independence. Following the publication of each “Building a New Scotland” paper, we routinely publish the cost of having done so, and we will continue with that approach.

Sharon Dowey: Emergency workers in our police, fire and healthcare services all say that they need more resources. With ministers trying to fill a £1 billion black hole in the budget for next year, does the minister not believe that that money would be better spent elsewhere?

Jamie Hepburn: To be abundantly clear, the cost of each paper that we have published thus far has been less than £20,000. With the enormous benefits and opportunity that independence brings, I think that that money is well worth expending. Of course, we will continue to invest in public services, but the question could equally be posed to the United Kingdom Government. In the past year, the Scotland Office has spent £1.1 million on communication staff alone. It has four special advisers in one UK Government department, which—let us face it—does not have much work to do. Therefore, let us also have some answers in relation to the UK Government’s approach in these matters.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Could the minister explain to Murdo Fraser and Sharon Dowey that freedom from London rule has been a huge success for Canada, Australia, New Zealand and many other countries, including Ireland, which has a huge budget surplus at the moment?

Jamie Hepburn: Frankly, it is probably beyond my best efforts to explain anything to Murdo Fraser and Sharon Dowey, but I will continue to do my best. Inherent in the question is an idea that I very much agree with—we do not need to look too far beyond these shores to see the benefits of independence. For example, Ireland is about to launch a sovereign wealth fund, which it hopes will be worth €100 billion by the middle of the next decade. Norway, Denmark and Finland—all countries of the same size as Scotland—are healthier, wealthier, fairer and happier than Scotland and the UK. What could be more important than creating a happier society? Independence would allow us to do that.

Cultural Investment (Rural Communities)

2. Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government, in light of the announcement by the First Minister that it will more than double investment in Scotland’s arts and culture over the next five years, how it is ensuring that rural communities benefit from

current and future cultural investment. (S6O-02617)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): I take this opportunity—at the first culture questions since the announcement—to welcome the appointment of Anne Lyden as the next director general of the National Galleries of Scotland. I am sure that, across the chamber, we wish her well.

In answer to Karen Adam’s question, our investment in culture and the arts is nationwide and our funding reflects the diverse communities across the country. The First Minister’s announcement last week is a vote of confidence in Scotland’s culture sector. The increase in funding for culture and the arts—by £100 million per year by 2029—will drive up opportunities for participation in creative pursuits, support the production of new works and ensure that Scotland’s cultural output has platforms across Scotland and abroad.

Karen Adam: If I may boast a little bit, the north-east has some of Scotland’s most extraordinary cultural talents, and artists across Banffshire and Buchan Coast are putting my constituency on that cultural map. For two decades, organisations such as North East Open Studios have been ensuring that the work of artists in my constituency and the wider north-east is reaching communities locally, across Scotland and beyond.

With that example in mind, what is the Scottish Government doing to ensure that rural and remote artists get the recognition and support that they so thoroughly deserve?

Angus Robertson: As a matter of course, Scottish Government ministers and the Scottish Government will promote and support artists the length and breadth of the country. I am delighted to hear North East Open Studios being so well promoted by its local member of the Scottish Parliament.

Specifically in relation to the funding of cultural organisations, everybody in the chamber recognises that that largely takes place through Creative Scotland, an arm’s-length organisation that makes funding decisions. I am sure that it will listen closely to the points that Karen Adam has made, because it sees it as an important part of its work that there is funding and support for arts organisations the length and breadth of Scotland.

Cultural Organisations in Rural Areas (Financial Support)

8. Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government what financial support is available to cultural

organisations that are operating in rural areas. (S6O-02623)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): Our culture strategy makes it clear that we want everyone in Scotland to have access to cultural opportunities, regardless of where one lives. That is why we fund a range of organisations that provide access to culture in rural communities. For example, via our regular funding to Creative Scotland, we support 12 organisations across the Highlands and Islands, including Atlas Arts on Skye and the Highland Print Studio in Inverness.

Ariane Burgess: Organisation such as the Lyth Arts Centre in Caithness and An Lanntair in Stornoway in my region are central to their communities. They reduce isolation and improve mental health alongside and through their arts work. I welcome the recent announcement by the First Minister to increase the budget for art and culture by £100 million by 2028. How will the newly proposed funding address the long-term funding challenges for cultural organisations in rural areas?

Angus Robertson: Ms Burgess is right to highlight the importance of ensuring that our increased arts and culture budget is distributed in a way that benefits all communities in Scotland and supports the resilience of cultural organisations in rural areas. Although decisions on how the additional budget will be allocated will be subject to the budget process, I assure members that that will be taken fully into account.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There are a lot of supplementary questions, and I will get in most, if not all, as long as they are brief.

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The National Museum of Scotland has said that it is facing its toughest financial crisis ever, with fears over the ability to pay staff to maintain the museum. Without a proper plan in place, the solution might involve having to cease some operations. What further measures can be put in place to maintain, retain and sustain such operations for Scotland?

Angus Robertson: I will begin by saying how sorry I was to learn about the death of Donald Cameron of Lochiel. I extend condolences via Alexander Stewart to his colleague Donald Cameron MSP, who is not in his place today for very obvious reasons, and to Donald Cameron's family at this sad time.

In answer to Alexander Stewart's question, I give him an absolute guarantee that all organisations and agencies that work in the cultural sector that are funded by and work with the Scottish Government are seized of any

particular problems that are being faced in venues or organisations. As we know, there have been extraordinary pressures—I do not need to list the number of organisations in Scotland or elsewhere in the United Kingdom that have been feeling those pressures—and I encourage any member who is aware of any distress, financial or otherwise, that is being felt by organisations to ensure that there can be timely intervention so that we maintain and support cultural infrastructure the length and breadth of Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before I invite the next supplementary question, I remind members that the question is focused on arts and culture funding in rural areas.

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): As has been mentioned, the First Minister has announced his intention to double the arts and culture budget over the next five years and increase it by £100 million. However, £175 million is currently allocated in the Scottish Government's budget for Creative Scotland, other arts, cultural collections and the national performing companies. Will the cabinet secretary explain how he can possibly double a budget of £175 million with only £100 million?

Angus Robertson: I listened very closely to what Neil Bibby had to say. The one word that I did not hear him say was "welcome". I do not know what it is about the Scottish Labour Party in relation to culture and the arts that makes it difficult for it to welcome the fact that the Scottish Government has committed to doubling the culture spend. That has been welcomed right across the culture sector, and I hope that the Scottish Labour Party will join the Scottish Government in supporting the increase in the budget.

The budget-related matters will be subject to the standard budget procedure, which will include the scrutiny that will be exerted through the Scottish Parliament's committees. I look forward to giving evidence to explain the decisions that are made in relation to the fantastic increase that the Scottish Government has committed to in the culture and arts sector. Perhaps Neil Bibby can find it in himself, either during these questions or the debate later this afternoon, to use the word "welcome".

John Swinney (Perthshire North) (SNP): I wonder whether I might encourage the cabinet secretary to visit one of the jewels in the cultural crown of rural Scotland, Pitlochry Festival Theatre, which has a magnificent record of artistic production in rural Scotland. There might be a suitable opportunity with its upcoming production of "Sunshine on Leith", which is not quite in Edinburgh Central, to be controversial, but is certainly close to the cabinet secretary's heart.

Angus Robertson: I thank John Swinney for extending that invitation. I would be delighted to return to Pitlochry. It gives the opportunity to highlight the fantastic cultural and arts venues and organisations in Perthshire, Tayside and right across rural Scotland. If members across the chamber feel that there is anything more that can be done to help to promote cultural and arts organisations across rural Scotland, I, ministerial colleagues and others will be keen to support them as much as we can.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): In collaboration with the Tate artist rooms, Shetland Amenity Trust is hosting a photographic collection from renowned American photographer Diane Arbus. How will the welcome extra funding that has been announced be disbursed across Scotland's arts and culture sector to make sure that events such as that one that is currently taking place in Shetland, as well as those in other island and rural areas, which often come with much higher hosting and delivery costs, can continue, and be disbursed in a way that ensures that the breadth and depth of what the sector has to offer reaches all parts of Scotland?

Angus Robertson: I can confirm one thing for certain: since last week, there has been no shortage of cultural and arts organisations welcoming the proposed uplift in cultural and arts spending and making proposals for support for local organisations, as the member has just highlighted.

Of course, we already have a cultural and arts organisation—Creative Scotland—that is responsible for disbursing funding in large part, but we also have national performing companies and a range of funding streams, so I would encourage any member or party in the chamber that has particularly strong feelings about the best way in which funding can be disbursed to make their case. I am open to their suggestions about how we can ensure that we disburse the £100 million of additional funding—a doubling of the culture budget, which I hope the Scottish Liberal Democrats welcome—to ensure that it reaches all parts of the country and has a profound and positive impact on the future of the culture and arts sector.

Public Interest Journalism

4. Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on public interest journalism. (S6O-02619)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): I declare an interest as a past career journalist and as a past long-standing member of the National Union of Journalists.

The Scottish Government is committed to ensuring the sustainability of the public interest journalism sector. A free independent press is the bedrock of every well-functioning democracy, and local news publications play a crucial role by empowering and informing communities and by holding institutions to account.

In January 2021, the Scottish Government set up the public interest journalism working group, which published recommendations later that year. We responded in June 2022, and, following that, we convened a round table at which a steering group, independent of Government, was formed to progress work towards a strong and sustainable future for the sector.

Richard Leonard: In June, the Welsh Government announced a £200,000 package of funding for public interest journalism in Wales. That has meant new investment in research, training and in 10 local news outlets. Is the Scottish Government prepared to provide any pump-priming funds for a Scottish public interest journalism institute, which its own working group proposed nearly two years ago? Does the cabinet secretary agree that the urgent need for that is highlighted by the current industrial dispute at National World—including at *The Scotsman*—where recent cuts mean that just eight journalists are left to produce 19 local weekly titles, and where local and national journalists have had a real-terms pay cut imposed on them by an owner who is making a whacking great profit?

Angus Robertson: There is quite a lot in Richard Leonard's question, and I am sure that you would wish me to concentrate my reply on public interest journalism, Presiding Officer.

There are a number of ways in which the Scottish Government can support an emerging institute. I am open to all suggestions to bring that about, because I would wish it success. Richard Leonard is right to highlight that there are different models in different places and that there are different circumstances. I am sure that he would agree with me—I hope that he agrees with me—that it is really important that public interest journalism is separate from Government and separate from any sense that there is Government interest or influence on its independence. Notwithstanding that, I am interested to learn how we can best support the emerging institute. If the member or colleagues who are involved in the steering group have suggestions, I am very open to considering them.

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): The cabinet secretary mentioned the public interest journalism working group. That was a vital platform at which to discuss the challenges that the sector faces. One of the challenges that is of particular concern is

disinformation and misinformation. What work is the Scottish Government conducting to combat disinformation and misinformation, and to support public interest journalism in doing so?

Angus Robertson: That is one area in which an institute could play a really important role. I think that all parties are aware that the issue of misinformation is a live one, and that public information about it is extremely important.

A number of countries take the issue extremely seriously—not least, our Nordic and Scandinavian neighbours. We have much to learn from them. I would be very supportive of the institute playing a significant role in helping to explain—to the new generation of young voters, in particular—why misinformation is a fundamentally challenging and dangerous development. I would wish to see the institute playing a leading role in that.

Creative Scotland (Funding for 2023-24 and 2024-25)

5. Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with Creative Scotland about funding for financial years 2023-24 and 2024-25. (S6O-02620)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): I attended the Creative Scotland board meeting on 27 September, where I discussed current and future funding. Scottish Government officials have regular formal discussions with officials in Creative Scotland, including with regard to budgets, as part of their normal sponsorship role, since Creative Scotland is a public body. Those discussions cover budgets for this and the next financial year. My officials will discuss funding for the next financial year with Creative Scotland as part of the budget process.

Martin Whitfield: I know, because he kindly wrote to me about it, that the cabinet secretary is aware that as a consequence of those discussions, Lammermuir Festival in East Lothian has lost its funding from Creative Scotland. Its award-winning festival, which has been around for a number of years, is facing the real possibility of closure. How can the enhanced funding that has been promised for the future do any good if the quality, expertise and institutional memory of an award-winning festival such as Lammermuir Festival's are lost in this financial year?

Angus Robertson: I pay tribute to Martin Whitfield, who has been a doughty campaigner for Lammermuir Festival. He is right to acknowledge that we have been in correspondence about the matter. It will be no surprise to him that I repeat the point—which I have made a number of times during this question session—that financial

decisions by Creative Scotland in relation to specific organisations or events are for Creative Scotland, and it is not for Government ministers to be directly involved in them.

That said, Martin Whitfield is absolutely right to point out—although I am not sure whether he was welcoming it—that the Scottish Government is proposing to double the culture budget. That should be hugely welcome in all corners. I encourage Lammermuir Festival and all others that are in such circumstances to make clear their plans, hopes and aspirations to Creative Scotland for forthcoming funding decisions.

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): How will the Foreign Secretary's recent indication that he will withdraw Foreign and Commonwealth Office support for Scottish Government ministers impact on our ability to promote Scotland's culture at the international level?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That question is not directly related to Creative Scotland's budget, but does the cabinet secretary have anything to add briefly?

Angus Robertson: I am keen that we work as well as we can to promote Scottish culture internationally. We have a forthcoming cultural diplomacy strategy, which will be published in full. I make it extremely clear that we should use each and every opportunity to promote Scottish culture internationally. I certainly hope and expect that the United Kingdom Government will not pursue any measures that would undermine that strategy, to the detriment of the culture sector in Scotland.

Gaza (Humanitarian Assistance)

7. James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what action it can take to support the provision of humanitarian assistance for the civilian population of Gaza. (S6O-02622)

The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development (Christina McKelvie): We have all looked on in horror at the escalating humanitarian catastrophe that is unfolding in the middle east. Our condolences go to all those who have lost loved ones on both sides of this conflict.

We unequivocally condemn the abhorrent terrorist attacks that have been committed by Hamas. Israel, like every other country in the world, has a right to protect itself from terror. However, that must be done within international law. As the number of civilians displaced in Gaza increases and their supplies are restricted, innocent people are being affected and conditions continue to deteriorate.

Last week, I announced that we will make a £500,000 contribution to the United Nations' flash appeal in response to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Those funds will support the immediate food, health, shelter and protection needs of people who are seeking safety. We continue to call for an immediate ceasefire and for the creation of a safe humanitarian corridor that allows such much-needed supplies in and innocent people to leave.

James Dornan: —[*Inaudible.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am sorry, Mr Dornan, but we are unable to hear you. I do not know whether it is to do with your microphone or whether it is an IT issue.

James Dornan: It is not mine.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Do you want to start again, Mr Dornan?

James Dornan: Certainly.

I am sure that the minister will agree that the First Minister has led politicians across the UK in the thoughtful way that he shows care and compassion for the victims of the horrendous attacks by Hamas, while reminding Israel and others of the need to show the innocent civilians in Gaza the same compassion as they demand elsewhere. Given the desperate need to protect those who are affected during and after the on-going onslaught of Gaza, will the Scottish Government reiterate its call for a worldwide refugee programme and refugee resettlement programme?

Christina McKelvie: A ceasefire by all sides is needed in order to allow the creation of a secure and sustained humanitarian corridor to ensure protection of innocent civilians and delivery of essential supplies including food, fuel, water and medical provisions. Currently, 1.4 million people are displaced within the Gaza strip.

We know that many Palestinians will wish to stay in their homeland; they must be supported to do so with urgent humanitarian aid. However, for people who choose to leave, the Scottish Government is also calling on the international community to commit to a worldwide refugee programme for the people of Gaza. The First Minister has called on the UK Government to take urgent steps to use the existing UK resettlement scheme and to ensure that it is aligned with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees—the United Nations' refugee agency—to provide those who want to leave with all the support that they require. Scotland stands ready to work with the UK Government to create and implement a resettlement route for the people of Gaza.

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): I welcome the Scottish Government's response to the crisis. Given that aid is currently not getting into Gaza, how does the minister expect the money that has already been committed to be used? What work is being done to look at further support that could be given, in light of the siege and the worsening conditions?

Christina McKelvie: Katy Clark echoes concerns that we all feel. To answer her question directly, I note that the flash appeal that we contributed to is a UN appeal. United

Nations Relief and Works Agency staff remain on the ground in Gaza; the money will be channelled through their work. They are currently protecting 600,000 internally displaced people in 150 UNRWA facilities, and they tell us today that they are running out of fuel and might therefore have to leave the area. We do not want that. We want the aid money to get to UN people on the ground, and support to be given to the people who need it most.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions on constitution, external affairs and culture. There will be a brief pause before we move on to the next item of business.

Justice and Home Affairs

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next portfolio is justice and home affairs. I remind members that, if a member wishes to ask a supplementary question, they should press their request-to-speak button during the relevant question or indicate by entering the letters RTS in the chat function during the relevant question.

Police Buildings (Closures)

1. **Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it can provide an update on the timelines for, and locations of, the planned closures of up to 30 police buildings. (S6O-02624)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): Overall responsibility for managing the police estate is for the chief constable, under Scottish Police Authority scrutiny. As approved by the SPA, it is for Police Scotland to consult on and announce the details of any proposed estate changes. The Scottish Government is aware of the Police Scotland estate strategy, which seeks to deliver modern and fit-for-purpose police buildings that are co-located with strategic partners and which meet the needs of 21st century operational policing. To date, more than 60 co-locations have been delivered.

Jackie Baillie: Can the cabinet secretary advise when she was made aware of the plans to close the 30 police buildings, three of which are, of course, in Rutherglen and Hamilton West? Are any of the planned closures in L division in my area? Does the cabinet secretary back these plans? Can she also advise whether she is concerned by comments from the Scottish Police Federation, which warned that “People may die” as a result of the cuts in police officer numbers?

Angela Constance: As I have previously advised the chamber, I am, of course, well sighted on the 2019 Police Scotland estate strategy and

the work that flows from that to modernise the police estate, but I reiterate that such decisions are for the chief constable.

We are aware, as everybody in the chamber is, of what has been reported in the press. I cannot give Ms Baillie any direct information about her constituency, but I would be more than happy to follow up on any information on her behalf and to be as helpful as possible.

The Government has a good record in investing in Police Scotland and, although there are challenges ahead, we can continue to have confidence that policing is a priority for the Government and that policing will continue on a safe and secure basis.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I have received a number of requests to ask supplementary questions, and I intend to take all three.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): Eighteen months ago—well before the latest financial crisis that the Government has visited on Police Scotland—13 stations in Aberdeen and the shire were scheduled to be closed. Given the current situation, can the cabinet secretary confirm that there will be no further station closures in the north-east, or can my constituents anticipate that there will be even fewer buildings in the future?

Angela Constance: At the risk of repeating myself, I note that such matters are for the chief constable and are scrutinised by the Scottish Police Authority.

On resources, only this financial year, the Government increased investment in policing by £80 million, which represents a 6.3 per cent increase. It is imperative that members look at the 2019 police estate strategy, in which Police Scotland is up front about modernising and, where appropriate, rationalising its estate. When Police Scotland has sold off premises, the money has been reinvested in its estate, because it wants to ensure that policing and the police footprint are effective, efficient and fit for the future and that the estate provides a good place for police officers and staff to work in. The estate should also be appropriately visible to members of the public and allow for collaboration with other public services.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): Can the cabinet secretary outline some of the benefits of co-location, and will she reaffirm the Scottish Government’s commitment that policing will always be embedded in our communities?

Angela Constance: I recently met the newly appointed chief constable, and I am sure that all members will welcome her to her post. I can, of course, reassure members that police services will

always be visible and at the heart of our communities.

A well-established example of co-location can be found in Livingston—in my constituency, by chance—where Police Scotland is one of seven partners in the West Lothian civic centre. It works alongside the local authority, the Crown Office, the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service, the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and the health and social care partnership.

Co-location with suitable partners makes best use of the public sector estate and, most importantly, offers the opportunity for increased visibility, closer working and increased collaboration between Police Scotland and its partners, which will deliver better outcomes for individuals and our communities. It is to Police Scotland's credit that it has, on 64 occasions, moved to co-location, with plans for a further 22 such facilities.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I am sure that the cabinet secretary will have been following the public inquiry into the M9 crash that resulted in the loss of Lamara Bell and John Yuill. She will also have noted the comment from the Scottish Police Federation's David Kennedy that any further cuts could result in a similar tragedy. I do not get the sense from the cabinet secretary's responses today that she understands the severity of the claims that are being made. Does she get it, and will she stop cuts in the future?

Angela Constance: Let me repeat once again that the Government has not cut police services. Investment has increased year on year since 2016.

People are, of course, well entitled to debate the appropriate level of resource for the future. In the meantime, the Government will continue to work very closely with all our partners, whether that is the Scottish Police Federation, the SPA or Police Scotland, to establish their future needs. We are, of course, just at the start of our annual budget process.

With regard to the M9 tragedy that Mr Rennie referred to, my sympathies remain with the families affected by that tragic incident. Members will be aware that there is an on-going fatal accident inquiry, so it would be inappropriate for me to comment on that. However, since those tragic events in 2015, Police Scotland has made a number of significant improvements to how it assesses and responds to the needs of the public and, in particular, its contact assessment model ensures that.

Fund to Leave Pilot (Domestic Abuse)

2. Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how the recently announced £500,000 fund to leave pilot will support women experiencing domestic abuse. (S6O-02625)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): Leaving an abusive partner can be a dangerous and difficult time. It is vital that women are able to access the support that they need when they need it. We know that women who are experiencing domestic abuse face many challenges and that financial barriers can make it even more difficult to leave abusive partners. The fund to leave pilot will help to reduce the financial burden on women, as they will be able to receive up to £1,000 to pay for the essentials that they and their children need, including rent and clothing.

Clare Haughey: South Lanarkshire Council, which is the local authority for my Rutherglen constituency, has the second highest presentation of homelessness applications by women due to domestic abuse across the country. As such, I am grateful to the Government for including the council as one of the five pilot areas for the fund to leave. Can the cabinet secretary outline how women, particularly those from South Lanarkshire, can apply for assistance through the fund?

Angela Constance: Referrals to the fund will be accepted from a range of points, including, but not limited to, self-referrals, local authorities, trusted agencies and third sector organisations. Women's Aid South Lanarkshire and East Renfrewshire is one of the partners involved in delivering the fund. I urge women who need assistance from the fund in the five local authority pilot areas to contact their local Women's Aid group. I strongly encourage anybody who requires support to contact Scotland's Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline on 0800 027 1234.

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): We welcome the fund, which we hope will help many women. However, organisations such as Rape Crisis and Women's Aid highlight other barriers that women face when looking to escape from abusive partners. Those include the lack of available accommodation and the fact that housing benefit rates are sometimes not high enough to cover the cost of a refuge. Will the Scottish Government seek to explore ways to improve the availability of safe housing for women who are experiencing domestic abuse?

Angela Constance: Ms Clark has raised important points. There are other barriers to women leaving an abusive partner and a dangerous situation. Finance is part of that, but I recognise that it is only one of the barriers. Ms

Clark might be interested to know that the group that was commissioned by the Scottish Government was co-chaired by Scottish Women's Aid and the Chartered Institute of Housing. The point that she has made about the availability of accommodation and other parts of the welfare state pulling their weight in meeting other burdens and costs is important.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): I welcome the initiative and note the positive outcomes of similar pilots. As the cabinet secretary indicated, the point at which a woman tries to leave a perpetrator of domestic abuse can be the most dangerous time of all, as the abuser might feel their grip weaken and try to further ramp up their control. What action can be taken to protect and keep safe those who are seeking financial support from the pilot as they escape the control of the perpetrator?

Angela Constance: There are well-established supports that are funded through the delivering equally safe fund, and there are legislative protections that can be utilised to provide other forms of wraparound support. We hope that the pilot will be able to support between 450 and 950 women, and it will provide invaluable learning with regard to the safety of women across Scotland, including in Beatrice Wishart's constituency.

Bonfire Night (Preparations)

3. Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what preparations are being made for the bonfire night period. (S6O-02626)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The minister joins us remotely.

The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Siobhian Brown): We all want everyone to have a safe bonfire night this year. As part of the preparations, I met our emergency services gold commanders for operation moonbeam on 5 October. Operation moonbeam is the multi-agency response to the potential challenges of the bonfire night period and has been activated to ensure a swift and co-ordinated response to any serious incidents.

Through our partnerships, we are delivering public awareness campaigns that focus on firework safety and preventing bonfire night attacks on the emergency services. A significant amount of multi-agency partnership work by our community safety partners is continuing at local level, including awareness raising in schools, targeted work to prevent antisocial behaviour, trading standards activity with retailers and a range of measures to reduce the risk of bonfires and wilful fire raising.

Ben Macpherson: I thank the minister for her answer and her helpful letter to all MSPs on 17 October. I commend all those who are involved in operation moonbeam and in operation crackle here in Edinburgh, who are preparing and planning for the bonfire night period.

The minister is aware of the Fire Brigades Union's concerns about the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service's recent operational changes, which came into effect in September. I appreciate the financial considerations that they involve, but has the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service provided assurance that the fire service will have the capacity to respond to any increased demand during the bonfire night period, including here in Edinburgh?

Siobhian Brown: The firework control zone guidance was co-designed with a number of key stakeholders, including representatives from the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, which fully supports the new powers. The legislation empowers local authorities to introduce control zones. I have written to encourage all council chief executives to consider how those powers might be applied in their areas and to set out the support, including financial support, that is available to them—a point that I made in my letter to MSPs, which Ben Macpherson referred to.

The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service will continue to respond to every incident with the appropriate level of resources. In partnership with Police Scotland, it is well prepared for any additional demand during bonfire night.

Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con): The Scottish National Party Government says that bonfire night safety will be improved by its new fireworks law, a key part of which gives councils the power to impose firework control zones. However, via freedom of information requests, I have established that at least 28 of Scotland's 32 councils—including those in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Dundee—have no plans to introduce zones. The legislation has been shunned by SNP councils. Will the minister explain why this rushed legislation has turned into such a damp squib, as my party warned?

Siobhian Brown: It is for local authorities to utilise the discretionary firework control zone powers on the basis of their assessment of their areas' needs and communities. However, it is untrue that local authorities are not interested in using the discretionary powers; my officials continue to engage with local authorities on using them. I can confirm that we have received a number of early expressions of interest from local authorities that are exploring designating a zone in their area.

It is important to highlight that firework control zones have been developed to support a long-term cultural change in relation to fireworks, not a quick fix. Although such zones will not be in place this year, local authorities across Scotland have a wealth of knowledge about and experience of preventing, planning for and responding to issues that involve fireworks, through a multi-agency response and approach.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): Many parts of Scotland—including Glasgow, the city that I represent—are plagued with antisocial behaviour because of fireworks, and firework control zones became an important aspect of the then Fireworks and Pyrotechnic Articles (Scotland) Bill. Given what other members have asked, and given that we have established as a result of Russell Findlay's question that 28 authorities have not applied control zone legislation, does the minister now think that the amendment that Scottish Labour argued for, to enable community groups to apply for control zones, should have been made to ensure that, if a local authority did not apply, there was another way for the legislation to protect communities? With hindsight, the minister could at least assure me that she will monitor the situation to ensure that the legislation is used.

Siobhian Brown: I assure Pauline McNeill that I will monitor the situation closely, as I want the provision to be implemented in all local authorities, because there is a desire for that in communities. The legislation came into force in June and guidance was produced in time for consultation, although it was up to local authorities to use the discretionary firework powers on the basis of their decisions. Moving forward, I will monitor the situation, and I am happy to keep Ms McNeill updated.

Domestic Violence (Support for Migrants)

4. Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to support any migrants living in Scotland who have experienced domestic violence. (S6O-02627)

The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Siobhian Brown): Domestic abuse is abhorrent. It is a blight on our society and has no place in the Scotland that we all want to live in.

Through the delivering equally safe fund, we will provide approximately £12.5 million in 2023-24 to domestic abuse support services, including women's aid organisations, that provide specialist support and access to temporary accommodation. We have been clear that anyone experiencing domestic abuse who has no recourse to public funds should be offered the same level of support as anyone else in Scotland and should not face

disadvantage or discrimination because of their immigration status.

Marie McNair: I thank the minister for her dedication to supporting all victims of domestic violence. I welcome the recent Scottish Government pilot fund to enable women who are experiencing domestic violence to access essentials. That will go a long way to helping victims to be financially independent. As we know, that is a huge barrier to women being able to flee.

Migrant victims of domestic abuse might face unique problems such as immigration status or a lack of access to social security benefits because of the United Kingdom Government's no recourse to public funds policy. Does the minister agree that the UK Government's hostile environment policies are particularly harmful to migrant women who are affected by abuse?

Siobhian Brown: Yes—I agree. The UK Government's hostile environment policies and no recourse to public funds restrictions limit the support that people, including migrant women experiencing domestic abuse, can access at a time of crisis. The Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities developed the ending destitution together strategy to prevent and mitigate the effect of destitution that arises from the no recourse to public funds policy. The strategy also presses the UK Government to extend the destitution domestic violence concession to make it available to anyone who is in the UK as a dependant as a result of someone else's visa or protection status.

Retail Crime

5. Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to reduce retail crime. (S6O-02628)

The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Siobhian Brown): The Scottish Government recognises the disruption and the harm that retail crime causes to businesses and the individuals who work in them. As the First Minister made clear in the chamber on 5 October, the Scottish Government supports the innovative Scottish partnership against acquisitive crime strategy. The partnership is led by Police Scotland and includes other organisations such as retailers. It outlines a partnership approach to prevention, deterrence and enforcement in relation to a range of crimes, including shoplifting. I urge anyone who is affected by such incidents to report them to the police.

Sarah Boyack: The latest survey of more than 7,500 shop workers by the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers found that incidents of violence, threats and abuse had

doubled since 2016. That shows the challenging reality that retailers and their workers face daily.

The Scottish Grocers Federation has approached the Scottish Government to fund a renewal of its Don't Put Up With It campaign, which encourages retailers to take a zero-tolerance approach by reporting all offences. Will the minister support that request from the federation?

Siobhian Brown: The Scottish Government recognises the vital role of retail workers in our society and wants to ensure that they are protected, just like everyone else. Retail workers should be safe at work and should never have to experience abuse or violence when simply doing their job. The Protection of Workers (Retail and Age-restricted Goods and Services) (Scotland) Act 2021, which came into force in August 2021, created a statutory offence of threatening, abusing or assaulting a retail worker. That specific offence highlights the seriousness of such behaviour.

There is already access to advice, guidance and financial support through a wide range of organisations across the public sector. That is available to private businesses anywhere in Scotland and to social enterprises, the third sector and community-based organisations.

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): What analysis has the Scottish Government undertaken of why retail crime, including incidents of violence against staff, has risen?

Siobhian Brown: It is correct to mention that a significant rise in recorded shoplifting is being seen throughout the whole United Kingdom. Our figures and those that were released recently by the Office for National Statistics confirm the existence of a similar trend across England, Wales and Scotland for the year ending in June.

We know that cost of living pressures can influence shoplifting, although they might not be the driver in all cases. The Scottish Government is finalising two pieces of research that consider the relationship between economic performance and crime and the number of crimes that have been recorded under the 2021 act. Those pieces of research are due for publication in the coming months.

Recruitment of Police Officers (Dumfries and Galloway and Scottish Borders)

6. **Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to support the recruitment of police officers in Dumfries and Galloway and the Scottish Borders. (S6O-02629)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): As the recruitment and deployment of resources is a matter for the chief constable, it is for Police Scotland to determine recruitment approaches both locally and nationally.

Thanks to the additional £80 million of funding that the Scottish Government provided for 2023-24, Police Scotland has invested in its workforce. Since the beginning of 2022, it has recruited around 1,480 new officers. Scotland has more than 350 more police officers than it did in 2007, and more per head of population than England and Wales do—Scotland has 30 officers per 10,000 population, whereas England and Wales have 25 officers per 10,000 population.

Emma Harper: I understand that V division in Dumfries and Galloway is struggling to meet the demands of its large rural region with the current number of officers. As the cabinet secretary will know, Police Scotland relies on officers and staff doing more overtime to keep the service operating and to keep people safe. In addition, V division has raised concern with me about a lack of experienced officers coming into the region. What specific action is being taken to recruit police officers to rural areas such as Dumfries and Galloway as a priority?

Angela Constance: The recruitment and deployment of officers is a matter for the chief constable, but I can inform the member that, according to Police Scotland figures for June 2023, officer numbers in V division were broadly similar to what they were at the same point in 2022—348 compared to 349. Where vacancies are identified in specific geographical areas, Police Scotland holds targeted recruitment events. Two such events were held in Dumfries and Galloway on 20 and 21 March this year, in Stranraer and Dumfries.

In addition, individual divisions can access specialist expertise at regional and national level to meet demand. That would not have been possible before the creation of Police Scotland in 2012.

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): Despite being the third-biggest region in Scotland, Dumfries and Galloway has the smallest number of local officers of all the local policing divisions—at the moment, it has just 320 officers, not the 349 that the cabinet reported it as having in June. It has much fewer officers than the 411 that it had in June 2020. That has led to community policing being dismantled in many parts of the region.

Given the recent warnings by Police Scotland's deputy chief officer of more cuts to come, can the cabinet secretary give a categorical assurance to my constituents in Dumfries and Galloway that

there will be no further reductions in the already low level of officer numbers?

Angela Constance: Once again, I repeat that this Government has not implemented cuts to investment in police services—quite the reverse is true. We have increased resource year on year. Policing locally and nationally remains secure and stable. No one disputes the pressures on the public purse but, despite United Kingdom Government austerity, record levels of inflation and the fact that the Scottish Government's budget has not kept up with inflation, we continue to focus on policing as a priority.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 7 has been withdrawn.

HMP Stirling

8. **Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the progress of the action plan put in place by the Scottish Prison Service to address reported concerns raised by local residents about HMP Stirling. (S6O-02631)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): I thank the member for raising this important issue on behalf of his constituents, and I assure him that the matter is being taken seriously by the Scottish Government and the Scottish Prison Service.

Although addressing the issue is primarily an operational matter for the SPS, the SPS and the Scottish Government are very sympathetic to the impact on residents, and a range of infrastructure and operational measures are being explored to address the concerns. To date, six of the 10 recommendations in the SPS action plan have been implemented and progress continues to be monitored.

Keith Brown: I thank the cabinet secretary for that answer and for the progress and, indeed, the discussions that she has held with me on this issue. As she will be aware from my most recent correspondence on the matter, I continue to receive contact from constituents who are being adversely affected by noise and incidents at the prison. Unfortunately, the SPS would not attend a meeting with my constituents to discuss the situation on Monday night, which was subsequently cancelled. I understand that the SPS has agreed to attend a future meeting, but does the cabinet secretary agree that the SPS, which says that it wants to be “a good neighbour”—I believe it when it says that—should meet local people and engage with them on these issues as a matter of urgency, to address their continuing concerns?

Angela Constance: Mr Brown has written to me regularly and spoken to me on a number of occasions about his concerns. I am sorry to hear that residents are continuing to be affected by the situation and, of course, I agree with him that the SPS should continue to meet local people to hear their concerns. SPS officials have met the local councillor and residents on two occasions, including at a community meeting on 8 August to discuss their concerns regarding noise levels. I am aware that the SPS has offered to hold smaller engagements and discussions with concerned residents, and it will attend the public meeting that is being proposed.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I have received requests from two members to ask supplementary questions, and I wish to take both. Could I have brief questions and answers, please?

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The facility cost more than £80 million. It was designed with a trauma-informed approach, but it would appear that the design is significantly flawed and not fit for purpose, given that residents' lives are being disrupted on a daily basis. I ask the cabinet secretary to confirm what support is being provided to protect the inmates and support the local residents from this “living hell”, as they call it.

Angela Constance: I am sure that the member is well aware that the prison is a first-class facility. It is a new facility that is newly populated and there are, of course, issues in and around the bedding down of the support for the women. I have met Mr Stewart to discuss that, and I know that he understands very much the vulnerability of the women concerned and the fact that they have a high level of needs. He is also aware of the six operational recommendations, which are very much about supporting the women to modify their behaviour in a way that is trauma informed, which is in the interests of the women and the residents.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): The disturbances are deeply distressing for residents in Vale Grove. What kind of assessment of noise was conducted by SPS during the design phase, especially given the proximity of the residential wings to housing in the local area?

Angela Constance: I have looked at the matter in close detail. Although all statutory obligations were met during the planning and construction processes for the new prison, an assessment of noise disturbance was not undertaken.

As the member may be aware, prisons, by their very nature, are predominantly located within or close to residential areas, and negative reporting from neighbouring communities continues to be the exception rather than a rule. A prison has been located at Cornton Vale site for nearly 50 years

now, and the new prison remains committed to maintaining its positive relationship with its neighbours.

The level of noise that is being experienced is due, as I indicated to Mr Stewart, to some of the newness, particularly with regard to new women arriving. Prison staff are continuing to work very hard to ensure that staff and prisoners are becoming acclimatised to the new buildings and the very important operating procedures.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions on justice and home affairs. There will be a very brief pause before we move on to the next item of business, to allow front-bench teams to change positions, should they so wish.

Storm Babet

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a statement by Angela Constance on the response to storm Babet. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of her statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

15:00

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): I am grateful for the opportunity to update the Parliament on the exceptional weather that Scotland experienced last week as a consequence of storm Babet. I begin by expressing condolences to the families and friends of the people who lost their lives due to the extreme conditions that were caused by the storm. I also express my sympathy for those whose homes and businesses have been damaged by the extensive flooding. I thank and pay tribute to local and national authorities, volunteers, the emergency services and members of the public for all their hard work and efforts in the extremely challenging conditions.

I highlight the impressive community response to offer support to all the people affected by the floods. Angus Council received hundreds of offers of alternative accommodation for those who were forced to evacuate their homes. That is testament to the strong community networks in Scotland that are there to support people.

On Thursday 19 October, the Met Office took the serious step of issuing a red weather warning of threat to life. The Met Office issues such warnings when dangerous weather is expected with substantial disruption and the possibility of widespread damage to property and infrastructure. Red weather warnings are extremely rare and extremely serious.

The Met Office's national climate information centre has calculated that, provisionally, 19 October 2023 was the wettest day for the county of Angus in a series from 1891, and 7 October 2023 was the sixth wettest day in that series, so there have been exceptional rainfall amounts across the Angus area.

Serious impacts were felt across Scotland but were felt most keenly along the North Esk and the South Esk, including in Brechin, where, unfortunately, the flood protection scheme overtopped and was subsequently breached. Nonetheless, the flood protection scheme delayed the impact and provided valuable time to prepare for evacuation. Nearly 350 properties in Brechin were evacuated on Thursday afternoon. Angus Council and the Scottish Environment Protection

Agency are assessing the extent of the damage to the Brechin flood protection scheme.

The flooding has also had an impact on communities in parts of Aberdeenshire, Tayside and Dundee. The process of assessing the full amount of damage that has been caused by storm Babet will take time. The road to recovery will be long, but the Scottish Government will support our partners to ensure that communities can recover as quickly as possible.

The Minister for Community Wealth and Public Finance agreed the activation of the Bellwin scheme on Tuesday 24 October. The Bellwin scheme exists to give special financial assistance to councils that face an undue financial burden as a result of large-scale emergencies. To date, three local authorities have notified the Scottish Government of a potential claim relating to storm Babet. The Scottish Government stands ready to support local authorities to carry out the immediate work that is required.

We recognise that communities and home owners will seek to make vital repairs to secure their homes. Crisis grants are available through the Scottish welfare fund to families and people in Scotland who are on low incomes and have been hit by a crisis such as a flood, and people can apply for a grant through their local authority.

The Scottish Government has funded the Scottish Flood Forum since 2009 to work with communities to build flood resilience and support people who have been affected by flooding. The forum, which offers free advice and information on issues such as recovering from flooding, is working with communities that have been affected by storm Babet.

We face a climate crisis and, although no single storm event can be solely attributed to climate change, events such as storm Babet are becoming more frequent, intense and destructive due to the changing climate. Storm Babet reinforces the need to think strategically about Scotland's future and what we need to do to adapt to our changing climate.

The Scottish Government supports local authorities to deliver actions that protect our communities and businesses. We have committed an additional £150 million during the course of this parliamentary session on top of the £42 million that is provided annually to councils to increase flood resilience through the general capital grant.

Flood protection schemes are one important tool to help our communities to become more flood resilient. This year, three new flood protection schemes have been completed in Caol and Lochyside, Arbroath and Stonehaven. That infrastructure is a crucial part of our flood resilience approach, but it is not the only tool that

is available to us. We are taking action across agriculture, transport, forestry and the water industry and planning sectors, and we are integrating flood resilience measures into policies to deliver multiple benefits.

The agri-environment climate scheme promotes land management practices that protect and enhance Scotland's natural heritage, manage flood risk and adapt to climate change. To date, £285 million has been committed to more than 3,000 businesses.

Transport Scotland is spending more than £2 million a year on drainage improvement schemes and on a watercourse realignment scheme to enhance the flood resilience of Scotland's road network.

Forestry Scotland estimates that the capacity of woodlands to store water and slow down run-off to downstream communities is worth almost £100 million a year to the Scottish economy. Its new woodland for riparian benefits forestry grant scheme opened in July 2023, offering grant support for woodland creation near rivers. Around 175,000 hectares of land has been identified for woodland planting, all with the potential to slow the flow of flooding, among numerous other benefits.

To future proof our developments against climate change, the fourth national planning framework—NPF4—aims to strengthen flood resilience by making it much harder to build in areas that are at risk of flooding, by supporting the protection and management of our important natural assets in a sustainable and regenerative way and by promoting the use of natural flood management and blue-green infrastructure.

However, despite all the good work to date by the Scottish Government and responsible authorities, our changing climate means that flooding impacts are still on the increase, and we recognise that our current approach to delivering flood management actions is not keeping pace with that. Indeed, events at the weekend are a reminder that climate change is not a far-off distant threat; it is a crisis that is here and now. We know that our climate will continue to change for many years to come, so the decisions that we make today have to stand the test of time. In January, we will start consulting on a new national adaptation plan. We have a lot to gain by ensuring that Scotland is well positioned to continue thriving in the face of a changing global climate. The plan will set out the tools that are available to ensure that lives and livelihoods are adapting well to the impacts of climate change.

Fundamental to our approach to climate adaptation is responding to the increasing impacts of flooding, which is Scotland's biggest climate adaptation challenge and one that is set to

become more difficult in the years to come. Meeting that challenge will require a team Scotland approach involving a broad range of delivery partners to ensure that our places and communities can continue to thrive in the face of the climate emergency.

Our new national flood resilience strategy will form an integral part of shaping a climate-resilient Scotland. The strategy will look ahead to 2045 and beyond and capture the big issues that must be addressed if we are to transition towards a sustainable level of flood resilience in our changing climate.

The impacts in Brechin—despite it having flood protection built to a high standard—illustrate that we cannot always protect our communities from all flood impacts 100 per cent of the time and that we should be considering all actions that can be implemented to increase flood resilience.

It has been an exceptionally challenging few days. We should not underestimate the impact that severe weather events have on our families and communities. It is critical that we take action to mitigate the impact of future events, and the Scottish Government will continue to do so.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary will now take questions on the issues that have been raised in her statement. I intend to allow around 20 minutes for questions, after which we will move to the next item of business. It would be helpful if members who wish to ask a question would now press their request-to-speak button.

Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con): I associate myself with the tributes to the people who tragically lost their lives in storm Babet, and I pay tribute to the front-line responders, emergency services, individuals, businesses and community organisations who have worked tirelessly to support the affected communities. From River Street in Brechin to the North Esk caravan park in St Cyrus, scores of people are homeless, with little prospect of return in the coming months.

As happened to so many others across the north-east, my home in the Mearns has been badly damaged by the severity of the storm. Families are living in Airbnbs and depending on the goodwill of others. The flood defence scheme in Angus, which cost £16 million in 2016, was all but swept away in a matter of hours. Infrastructure needs to be repaired, and significant changes need to be made in the vicinity of River South Esk. There are massive issues with coastal erosion and with flood damage to farms in Montrose that need to be addressed. The bill could run to millions of pounds.

My three questions to the cabinet secretary are as follows. Does the cabinet secretary believe that the funds that will be made available through the

Bellwin scheme will touch the sides of the crisis? How will the Scottish Government work with insurance firms to help residents who have been hit by flooding, as Humza Yousaf has committed to doing? What support is available to Angus Council to rehome those who will not be able to return to River Street for months?

Angela Constance: I am well aware that, through personal experience, Ms White will be aware of the damage and the trauma, and of how frightening it is to be a victim of flooding and the dangers of rapidly rising water. As she has done, we should always pay tribute to those who have lost their lives. Three lives were lost in Scotland, and there are reports of four lives having been lost elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

People will have protections under homelessness legislation, and the Scottish Government and our housing colleagues will continue to support Angus Council in that regard.

It is important to recognise that the flood defence scheme was built to a very high standard and has, in the past, done the job that it was designed to do. On this occasion, it did not, but it is worth remembering that it delayed the deluge and allowed valuable time for evacuation. There will need to be an assessment of repair costs.

As I said in my statement, the Bellwin scheme is now operational. There will need to be assessment of the damage that has been done at local level, and there will be sympathetic discussions between the Scottish Government and the local areas.

I confirm that the Scottish Government has been in touch with the Association of British Insurers, because we need a timeous and sympathetic response for the people who are in need. We will also continue to engage closely with our colleagues in Angus.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): I thank the minister for advance notice of her statement. We in Scottish Labour also send our condolences to the families who have lost a loved one. The floods have had a devastating impact on people's homes, on businesses and on farming communities.

I also thank the emergency services and communities for coming together to support people in their time of need. I welcome the fact that the Bellwin scheme has been activated to support local authorities, given the scale of the damage that has been caused, but lessons must be learned urgently.

The Brechin scheme was built only seven years ago and was designed to deal with a one-in-200-years incident. We urgently need to understand why it failed to protect the communities that it was

designed to serve. That will be critical to planning for new infrastructure. Can the cabinet secretary say what the timescale is for publishing an analysis of why the damage was so severe? What work is being done to review existing and planned flood prevention infrastructure? What will be done to accelerate flood resilience to support communities, businesses and farmers?

Finally, I agree that the climate crisis will lead to more extreme and unpredictable weather. How will we make sure that all our transport infrastructure—road and rail—is resilient and equipped to deal with the more extreme weather that we will face?

Angela Constance: There was a lot in Ms Boyack's question, so if I do not respond to all of her points, I will be happy to correspond with her with further detail or to ask my colleagues to do that.

The damage was so severe because the weather was so severe. We had two storms within two weeks, and, there was two months' worth of rainfall in two days.

I absolutely concur with the point that Sarah Boyack raised about learning lessons, as the Scottish Government contributed 80 per cent of the cost of the Brechin scheme. Although such engineering projects are vital, they are only one part of an overall plan. We need to learn the lessons so that, as we move forward, we can assess where engineering projects will be most beneficial and can be targeted at areas that are most at risk. In short, however, the engineering projects are only one part of the solution, and I hope that I have managed to speak to that in my statement today.

The member's point about farmers is very important. Our farmers and food producers are on the front line of climate change and the climate emergency. I appeal to retailers and supermarkets to be responsive, respectful and, where possible, sympathetic to the needs of farmers and food producers. There is a range of support available—for example, through RSABI, which is the agricultural benevolent fund, and the agri-environment climate scheme.

The member also touched on the importance of a national flood resilience strategy, which needs to capture all the actions that we must pursue.

John Swinney (Perthshire North) (SNP): During the recent extreme weather events, which had significant effects in my constituency, including the tragic death of my constituent Wendy Taylor, a number of flooding problems were, thankfully, avoided through the outstanding efforts and intervention of local volunteer resilience groups. Those groups have tried-and-tested experience of managing such situations—

including in Aberfeldy and Alyth, to name but two areas—and they work in collaboration with public sector responders.

Will the Government commit to building into future resilience plans the vital role that volunteer-based organisations can play in supporting communities to deal with the awful effects of flooding, and take practical steps to offer the necessary support to make that happen?

Angela Constance: The short answer is yes. I echo John Swinney's comments and thanks, and I pay tribute to the resilient volunteers in his constituency and across the north-east who have, as he said, been outstanding.

Voluntary and community sector organisations are, alongside statutory response organisations, valued participants in our resilience structures, and in the processes for planning and responding to, and recovering from, emergencies. In order to assist them, the Scottish Government emergency planning portal Ready Scotland, at www.ready.scot, has been updated to include a new section that is designed to support and help community groups, voluntary sector partners and the public to understand how they can participate in an effective and joined-up response to emergencies.

I can also advise members that my resilience officials have been running a series of online community resilience workshops, which have to date been joined by 240 participants. We will continue to work with the voluntary and community sectors and, in particular, with local authorities, which play a lead role in engaging with local communities, to understand their training needs and to provide additional resources if those are required.

Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con): It is vital that the public follows official guidance, in particular with regard to red weather warnings—the highest level of alert—to help to preserve life and aid the emergency services. Many stakeholders worked hard to communicate those messages to support residents and businesses to take the right actions.

Can the cabinet secretary outline what additional steps the Scottish Government is considering to help local authorities, emergency services and others to reinforce communication channels for future incidents?

Angela Constance: Mr Golden raises an excellent point. It is a fundamental point, because storm Babet had the first red alert that this country has had since 2015, when there was a red alert for storm Desmond. We need communication at each and every level.

I contend that the communication at the national level was effective and, where support was needed and requested, emergency services supplemented communications support and communications-officer support to local authorities. One of the benefits of having a resilient structure that operates at local, regional and national levels is that they can all chip in and support each other and direct support where it is required.

Ms Boyack raised a point about important learning. Bearing in mind that there are instances of people not following advice, I am particularly interested in looking in more detail at the barriers to people following advice and at how we might increase the prospect of people following advice, not just through our many communications channels, but by looking at who communicates—and how they do so—messages that can be destabilising and frightening. That was an excellent point, which I will definitely pursue.

Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I thank the cabinet secretary for her statement and for paying tribute to the people who went above and beyond during the storms.

As a representative of the north-east, I know the harsh impact that extreme weather events such as Babet have on the energy and food security of rural communities. With each extreme weather event, we often see delayed deliveries of goods and empty supermarket shelves. Will the Scottish Government commit to ensuring that the energy and food security of rural communities such as Banffshire and Buchan Coast are built into future resilience plans, so that power cuts are minimised and shelves are restocked in good time?

Angela Constance: Extreme weather events can be extremely disruptive to supermarket operations. Empty shelves sometimes represent sensible behaviours by citizens who have acknowledged weather warnings and are preparing themselves for disruption.

The wellbeing of people in an emergency has to be a key and central part of resilience planning. Access to food is one element of that, so we will continue to seek opportunities to support and improve that. Food features significantly as an issue in the Scottish Government resilience meetings, and we have well-established routes and relationships with key stakeholders, including supermarkets, to monitor supplies and potential issues. However, over the years, we have learned a lot about managing supplies—not least through the Covid pandemic.

With regard to energy resilience, although the energy sector is reserved to the UK Government, as a Government we work closely with the UK Government and the energy network operators.

Although there were power outages and substantial disruptions, the energy companies and the energy sector worked hard to ensure that more than 30,000 households were reconnected as quickly as possible.

Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab): I offer my condolences to everyone who has lost loved ones and been affected by the devastating impact of storm Babet.

Unless we act, extreme weather events such as last week's storm will become more frequent and severe, and we will continue to mourn victims of climate change around the world. However, the Scottish Government has already admitted to breaching its statutory climate duties and has already missed four of its five most recent emissions targets. Can the minister assure my constituents in the North East Scotland region that her Government will meet its next emissions reduction target?

Angela Constance: My understanding is that the Parliament has a duty to work together to ensure that we, as a nation, do everything possible to meet our pivotal climate change targets. The Government will always aim high, and I am sure that the Parliament will always hold us to account.

I agree with the member that storm Babet and other, frequent storms emphasise once again that climate change is not some distant future event—it is with us here and now.

With regard to our future actions, the consultation that will be undertaken on the national adaptation plan will be crucially important, as will the national flood resilience strategy, which will be published next year. Crucially, it is about us all working together, not just across Government but across the Parliament and the nation.

Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP): I offer my condolences to the families and friends of those people who died in storm Babet.

In my constituency, areas such as Aberfoyle and Callander regularly flood. Discussions on large-scale flood defence schemes have been ongoing for some time. What support is available to residents and business owners to help reduce the risk of damage to their properties while they await progress on flood defence schemes?

Angela Constance: The responsibility for the development and delivery of flood protection schemes rests with individual local authorities, which are best placed to respond to those local resilience needs. Nonetheless, the Scottish Government continues to fund the Scottish Flood Forum, which we have done since 2009. That includes £220,000 of support for this financial year. The purpose of that investment is to enable

the forum to work with communities to build resilience and to support those who have been affected by flooding. As I mentioned in my statement, the forum provides invaluable advice on property flood resilience, and it encourages families and businesses to prepare a flood emergency plan and a flood kit, and communities to set up flood resilience groups.

Those who have experienced flooding can also get individual advice and information. Some of that is in and around managing insurance claims as well as dealing with the practical impacts. In my statement, I mentioned that the Scottish welfare fund is available with the crisis grant scheme for those who are on a low income, and that can be accessed via local authorities.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I have five more members who wish to ask a question. In order to get everybody in, which I would like to do, I will need much shorter answers—with respect, cabinet secretary—and short questions.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): Thankfully, we have avoided deaths in North East Fife, but I have witnessed the distress that has been caused by flooding in recent weeks in places such as Freuchie Mill.

I have been working with farmers for some time now on the climate extremes in relation to drought and flooding, and I note the schemes that the minister set out in her statement. I urge her to explore whether those schemes are flexible enough to cover flooding and drought on, for example, reservoirs, which can help for the future.

Angela Constance: I will speak to my colleague Ms Gougeon to ensure that our schemes are as flexible as possible. I know that she has been engaging with the farming community and food providers through a range of round tables, but Willie Rennie's point that the issue is about not only flooding but water scarcity is well made.

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): I also pay tribute to all the responders and communities involved in storm Babet and extend my deepest sympathies to the families of those who lost their lives.

Given the harrowing scenes that emerged of the extensive damage that storm Babet caused to people's homes, what initial discussions have taken place with the Association of British Insurers, which I understand has deployed extra resources into contact centres and on the ground to assist people, including those who are affected now and those who might be affected in the future?

Angela Constance: The Association of British Insurers has been in on-going discussions with

Scottish Government resilience and flooding officials and has set out a range of measures that the insurance industry is taking to support affected communities as quickly and sympathetically as possible. Those measures include deploying staff to flood-hit areas and preparing to make emergency payments to flooded households.

The ABI is also working with the Scottish Flood Forum, which is an independent Scottish Government-funded charity, to produce an advice document for the public called "Responding to Floods: What You Need to Know", which is available on the ABI website. I believe that the ABI has also proactively shared materials with MPs and MSPs in affected areas.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): Potato crops were flooded, livestock washed away and newly sown fields destroyed. Farmers have been left to carry the can or rely on support from RSABI or Forage Aid. Will the Scottish Government commit to supporting farmers wherever it can, in whatever way it can, and include them, food producers and suppliers in a storm Babet resilience review to ensure that their losses are considered and that food supply chains will be protected in the future?

Angela Constance: I would like to reassure Ms Hamilton that Ms Gougeon will be taking forward a range of discussions. As I intimated earlier, our farmers are very much on the front line of climate change and the climate challenge that we face. I know that Ms Gougeon is in regular contact with NFU Scotland president Martin Kennedy and that she will continue a programme of engagement. It is right that those voices and the needs of those who are managing our land are heard, as we all need to work together to minimise the impact of what will certainly be more frequent weather events.

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): I, too, send my heartfelt condolences to the families and friends of those who lost their lives, and I pay tribute to all those involved in the response, particularly in Angus and Mearns. Thank you for providing rescue, support, supplies, welfare checks and so much more.

The cabinet secretary will know that we must not only consider what residents and businesses need now but consider longer-term mitigations, defences and adaptations. Will she say more about how we can support communities to become more resilient over and above the physical defences and infrastructure that we know that we need?

Angela Constance: We will continue to work with the voluntary and community sector and, in particular, with local authorities, which, as I said earlier, have the lead role in engaging with local

communities to understand their needs and to provide additional resources if required.

Doing what we all can to prepare our homes, families and communities for the disruption that might come from emergencies can make a huge difference. I once again point to the Government's website www.ready.scot, which has plenty of advice for the public on how to be as prepared as possible.

The other imperative lesson that we have learned in recent times is that flooding does not just occur in areas that have a history of flooding. There is an exercise to undertake in order to raise awareness that flooding can affect any individual or community at any time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the ministerial statement. I apologise to the member whom I was unable to squeeze in.

Skills

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-10922, in the name of Daniel Johnson, on ensuring that Scotland's skills system is fit for the future. I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak button.

15:32

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): The skills debate has never been more prominent nor more important. That is not just because of recent publications and reports in Scotland. When we look globally, we see demographic change, which means that we need to do more with a smaller and ageing working population. Net zero and technology mean that the pace of change that is required in terms of people's skills and qualifications during their working life has never been more rapid. Global economic change means that there is an emphasis on securonomics, on the resilience of individual economies and on a move away from the globalisation of recent decades, so we will need to be more self-sufficient in skills and across a number of economic areas. That is why the skills debate is so important.

I gently comment to the Government that the information in my motion comes from reports that it has commissioned and that the figures are ones that it has published. I would argue that there is consensus on the analysis not just between politicians and business but across the parties. Therefore, I wonder why the Government is seeking to amend my motion to obliterate all those observations and comments.

I believe that consensus is possible and that we need constructive discourse, albeit critical at times. We need to be frank in our reflections on our system in Scotland. If we look at the raw numbers, we see that the number of apprenticeship completions is down in 2022-23 compared with 2015-16, the number of graduate apprenticeships is largely flat and small relative to the number of people doing university degrees, and the number of employers and providers that are providing apprenticeships is down by a fifth.

We also see blockages in the system. Some 800 apprentices who started in 2017-18 have yet to complete their apprenticeships; we have year 5 and 6 apprenticeships, which should not be possible. That is down to blockages in assessment and in the ability of those apprentices to get recognition for the skills that they have acquired.

Key issues are also being raised by employers. According to the British Chambers of Commerce, some 70 per cent of respondents said that skills

shortages are impacting their businesses and their profitability. There are problems with throughput in the system and serious challenges for businesses because of the system's inability to provide the skills that they need.

The Office for National Statistics reports that barely more than a quarter of workers are also in in-work training. Flexibly provided training is not available for most people who are in work. The Withers review has been useful in that context. It provides analysis on which I think we can all agree—in part, if not in full—and some ways forward. However, I do not think that all its recommendations are of equal priority. It provides both functional recommendations and structural ones, and I think that some of the functional recommendations might be more important than the structural ones.

Our issue with the Government is not just that it has been largely silent in the six months since the Withers review was published but that it has been silent on some areas and overly specific on others. In its document "Purpose and Principles for Post-School Education, Research and Skills", the Government essentially commits to a single funding structure and a consolidation of the qualifications and frameworks, yet it is silent on the functional issues.

The points that James Withers highlights on flexibility, a digital passport and putting the vocational and skills regime on a commensurate basis with the other qualifications are critically important. Embarking on costly and time-consuming structural reforms could get in the way of those measures.

I also note that the proposal in the Conservative amendment on putting the skills regime on a commensurate basis is of critical importance. We would vote for that amendment were there not exemption involved.

Even if those structural reforms were correct, I have concerns about the capacity of the organisations that would be required to assume additional responsibilities to adopt those functions.

The Scottish Funding Council has not done as much as it could do to progress graduate apprenticeships, and there are huge challenges in the tertiary education sector. The Scottish Qualifications Authority has a huge task ahead of it if it is going to on-board the recommendations of the Hayward review. I am not clear whether it has the ability and capacity to assume additional functions from the skills regime.

In the meantime, the overspecificity in those areas and the lack of clarity in others leave a huge cloud over the whole system. We have organisations in limbo, structures such as the Scottish apprenticeship advisory board essentially

condemned and Skills Development Scotland looking as though it is going to be dismembered, but we have no real clarity as to what will happen.

A consensus is possible, and I look forward to future Government debates in which we talk about flexibility and additional pathways. I urge the Government to have those debates, because that is how we build consensus and a plan.

To conclude, I will alight on a quote from Jimmy Reid. In 1972, he said:

"To unleash the latent potential of our people requires that we give them responsibility. The untapped resources of the North Sea are as nothing compared to the untapped resources of our people. I am convinced that the great mass of our people go through life without even a glimmer of what they could have contributed to their fellow human beings. This is a personal tragedy. It's a social crime."

Jimmy Reid was right then, but I think that he is even more right now. The failure to provide a clear plan for our skills system will continue to let down people and ensure that they do not realise their potential.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the findings of the independent review of the skills delivery landscape, particularly that skills delivery has lacked clear leadership and direction, and substantial structural change is required to ensure that the skills system is fit for the future; regrets that Modern Apprenticeship starts are lower than in 2015-16 at a time when 70% of businesses are reporting skills shortages; is concerned that the proportion of people in employment who participated in job-related training is lower than it was in 2007; notes that net zero targets will require a step change in workforce skills but that the Scottish Government has only allocated 15% of its Just Transition Fund; considers that it is 21 months on from Audit Scotland's conclusion that urgent action was needed on skills from the Scottish Government and that it is therefore disappointing that no reforms are yet planned; believes that Scotland urgently needs a vision for a flexible and responsive skills delivery system that is fit for the future, and calls, therefore, on the Scottish Government to set out its response to the review of the skills delivery landscape before the end of 2023 and to bring forward legislation on skills reform, as referenced in its Programme for Government, within the parliamentary year.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call the minister to speak to and move amendment S6M-10922.2.

15:39

The Minister for Higher and Further Education; and Minister for Veterans (Graeme Dey): I genuinely welcome Labour bringing this debate, although it is brief, to the chamber because it gives me an opportunity to outline the work that has been undertaken in response to the Withers report thus far, ahead of my giving a fuller update to Parliament, subject to the agreement of the Parliamentary Bureau, in the coming months.

Like Daniel Johnson, I welcome James Withers's report, which makes a compelling case for change and is an important moment in moving us towards an education and skills system that delivers for our future needs. Not long after the report was published, as Daniel Johnson highlighted, we published "Purpose and Principles for Post-School Education, Research and Skills", which was clear about the outcomes that we want to see from the system in the short, medium and long term.

In that document, we welcomed the direction of travel that was presented by the Withers report and set out some of our initial priorities for reform. However, we were also clear that we needed to take time to consider the practicalities and implications of implementing change, and to listen to constructive and knowledgeable views. I therefore do not accept the idea that the Government has not moved quickly. It has moved at the right pace and with purpose, and it will continue to do so. When James Withers has appeared before committees, he has welcomed the measured approach that has been taken to considering his findings.

We must also be clear that we do not start from scratch. There is already much that is positive, but Withers was a review about future needs and how we meet them.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): Will the minister take an intervention?

Graeme Dey: I am sorry, but I do not have time. I apologise—I have five minutes.

Withers found that there is confusion and duplication in our public body landscape but, even if our current system was perfect, the world around us is changing and we cannot afford to stand still. Since June, my officials have been working on the priorities that are set out in "Purpose and Principles" to establish the appropriate governance and approach to implementing change. Alongside that, I have engaged widely in gathering views and developing my understanding of the challenges that organisations face, and how those are impacting on their staff and, ultimately, the learners.

Those conversations have helped me to be clearer on the steps that are needed to bring about improvement and on the prioritisation of those steps. That process will continue as we narrow in on the potential routes to reform. The programme for government already commits us to updating Parliament on our plans for reform of the public body landscape and our response to Withers, but I have been engaging directly with Opposition parliamentarians. For example, I have met Liam Kerr and Willie Rennie to hear their views and, next week, I will meet Daniel Johnson. I hope that

those interactions demonstrate my commitment to the widest possible engagement and to trying to find the consensus that Daniel Johnson referred to.

On net zero, it is clear that a step change is needed in our workforce if we are to deliver on our ambitions and meet our emissions reduction targets. That is one of the key reasons why we accept the recommendation that skills planning should move to the Scottish Government so that there is greater coherence and impetus behind that objective. We need to ensure that every part of our education and skills system can match people with the available opportunities and that we can put in place the relevant pathways. We are doing what we can in the area. The Government has already committed £500 million over 10 years to our just transition fund, including more than £10 million for skills-related interventions. It has been deeply disappointing that the United Kingdom Government has not matched that investment.

I have heard loud and clear the concerns that James Withers expressed about funding, which have been echoed by others, recognising the complexity and the fact that the multiple streams are confusing and inefficient. That is why, as part of the programme for government, we have committed to leading the development of new funding models to simplify the funding landscape and ensure that we get maximum return on our investment. That will be all the more important, given that we find ourselves in the most challenging financial situation since devolution.

To be clear, neither Withers nor "Purpose and Principles" was commissioned because of budgetary pressure or to respond to public sector reform, but that is the context that we are now in. The Labour motion does not mention the join-up with wider education reform, but it is crucial to see the reviews as part of a package of reform and, therefore, it is right that they are considered and presented to Parliament in that manner. We need a simpler and more efficient system that is more easily understood by learners and users and which equips young people to make the right choices for themselves and to make the fullest possible contribution to our society and economy.

The reforms that are being taken forward and the steps that we are taking to implement them will move us closer to that ambition. We will continue to move forward in close collaboration with colleges, universities, trade unions, industry and other stakeholders. I add to that list the staff in the potentially impacted agencies. Not only is it the right thing to do to engage with them, as I have done, but it has already fed into our thinking on the provision of a national careers service and how we help to make apprenticeships more accessible to small and medium-sized enterprises.

I move amendment S6M-10922.2, to leave out from “particularly” to end and insert:

“which it accepts set out a clear case for change; agrees that the skills landscape must fit the needs of the people of Scotland to ensure that everyone can fulfil their potential; understands that the Scottish Government will set out a full response to the independent review in the wider context of reform of the education and skills system, as set out in the Programme for Government 2023-24; agrees that it is right that the Scottish Government engages fully with stakeholders before setting out its full response, including education institutions, industry and trade unions; recognises that the Scottish Government’s ambitions for a just transition will be supported by the delivery of the Green Industrial Strategy; acknowledges that funding is being provided to support up to 25,500 new Modern Apprenticeship starts in 2023-24; welcomes the many areas of success in the skills landscape at present, such as the proportion of school leavers in a positive destination nine months after the end of the school year standing at its highest level since comparable data was first gathered; recognises that effective utilisation of the skills system will be vital in ensuring that Scotland has the workforce skills to meet its ambitious net zero targets and the wider needs of the future economy; welcomes the Scottish Government’s £500 million Just Transition Fund and the £75 million allocated in the Fund’s first two years, which includes £11.2 million on a package of skills-focused interventions; acknowledges that this is a 10-year fund, and that the Scottish Government is acting to support workers now, and in the future, with the skills needed to deliver Scotland’s just transition towards net zero; expresses deep disappointment that the UK Government has repeatedly refused to match the Scottish Government’s Just Transition Fund, and calls, therefore, on all parties in the Scottish Parliament to work to secure a matching commitment from the UK Government.”

15:44

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I welcome this debate on the future of the Scottish skills agenda, although it is a pity that it is taking place in Opposition time and that it is so short. A wide range of issues need to be addressed in relation to skills, including funding for universities and colleges, funding for apprenticeship schemes and the future of the agency landscape.

It is disappointing that the Scottish Government has not allowed time for a full debate on those vital issues, which are key to our economy’s recovery. Having listened to the minister and Mr Johnson, I suspect that there is more common ground on the matter than there is ground on which we disagree, so a full debate on such issues would be welcome.

We agree with every word of the Labour motion. When I read it, I did not realise that it was lifted from Scottish Government publications, but that does not stop me endorsing its wording. As Mr Johnson said, we have a short addition to it, which I hope that members will look sympathetically on.

The motion does not specifically mention the Withers review but, as others have said, we all owe a debt of gratitude to James Withers for the work that he did in preparing his independent

review of the skills delivery landscape, which was published back in May. I endorse Daniel Johnson’s call for the Scottish Government to formally respond to the review by the end of the year.

There are really important issues on which we need to make swift progress in order to meet the demands of industry. I will give one example. Yesterday, I met the Civil Engineering Contractors Association, which raised with me its concern about the difficulties that its member companies have in securing appropriate funding for apprenticeships. The construction sector needs to attract a large number of younger people to fill vacancies that are being left by an ageing workforce. The industry has highly attractive pay and conditions but, without public support, many smaller and medium-sized employers are struggling to afford to take on apprentices. Skills Development Scotland runs the flexible workforce development fund, which is supposed to provide funding for such apprenticeships, but many employers find it extremely difficult to access that funding in practice.

The Construction Industry Training Board made similar points in its briefing for the debate. It also highlighted important issues relating to the transition to net zero, which we all support. People who are currently employed in construction and other trades will need to be retrained if we are to meet those challenges, and that will require a stepped increase in the support that is available.

My amendment mentions parity of esteem, which James Withers highlighted in his report. When he appeared in front of the Economy and Fair Work Committee last month, he told us that, in relation to the funding of higher and further education and training more generally,

“Apprenticeships have been the poor relation.”

He told us that he

“would like to see universities having the freedom to utilise the core funding that they get from the Scottish Funding Council to deliver degrees through either apprenticeships or full-time study.”—[*Official Report, Economy and Fair Work Committee, 27 September 2023; c 32-33.*]

He said that we should not see those routes as separate and distinct; both should be part of the same main stream. His view was that there needs to be greater flexibility to use the total amount of funding that is spent in Scotland on skills—£3.2 billion—including using it to fund apprenticeships.

In that regard, we need much greater clarity on the apprenticeship levy. I hear from UK-wide employers that, south of the border, there is much more transparency about accessing the apprenticeship levy and how employers can get their hands on the money. In Scotland, our share of the levy goes into the block grant, so it is

difficult to identify how much of that money goes into funding apprenticeships. Not surprisingly, many businesses feel frustrated that they have to pay the levy but are not able to get anything in return. The Scottish Government needs to be clear and transparent about what happens to those funds, and it can address that in its upcoming budget. We need clarity on the apprenticeship levy—on exactly where the money goes and why it is not currently reaching the front line. That is the point that is made in my amendment, which I have the pleasure of moving.

I move amendment S6M-10922.1, to insert after “skills shortages”:

“; supports the principle of parity of esteem for different learning routes, but regrets that there is considerable unmet demand for apprenticeship places due to the shortage of public funding available; believes that this should be addressed in the Scottish Government’s forthcoming Budget for 2024-25”.

15:48

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): We will support the Labour motion, but I give credit to the minister following the Withers review. He has engaged in a positive fashion, and the omens are good for a good policy in the future.

However, the Government’s recent record on skills has not been positive. To be frank, the previous minister did not seem to be too interested in the whole area. We have been waiting for more than five years for skills landscape reform, but the then minister acted only after he was criticised by Audit Scotland for a lack of leadership. Although we have the Withers review, we do not have the Government’s formal official response, so it could be even longer from the initial start point when the landscape review was supposed to be undertaken before we get any change.

The world is changing fast. We are going through a new green industrial revolution. While we wait a long time for the reforms to come, the world is moving on, and I fear the consequences of that.

It would be wrong not to mention colleges today, especially following this week’s report from the Fraser of Allander Institute, which said that college graduates will boost the economy by £52 billion over their working lives. Shona Struthers was right when she said this week that that report

“quantifies the huge return on investment”

from Scottish colleges. However, the crucial bit is that she was puzzled that there

“isn’t a decisive move to invest more, and gain more”.

She said that

“in fact, investment is falling sharply”.

In other words, the college sector delivers billions and could deliver more, but the Government is cutting millions. The symptoms of that are strikes, the threat of compulsory redundancies and the loss of opportunity for potential students. We need to invest in the college sector if we are to get the proper return that has been promised.

There is much to commend in the Withers review. It brings clarity for employers, training providers and students about roles and responsibilities, and it gives intelligent control over how the money is spent.

For students, there is a new careers service, which the minister thinks is a central piece of the Withers review, to be led by the newly reformed Skills Development Scotland. The aim would be to cover not only those who choose a non-university career trajectory but those who go into higher education, so that everybody gets the best advice.

For employers, there is better, clear advice from a single source through Scottish Enterprise, which is long overdue. There would also be more systematic involvement of employers in skills planning.

For everyone, there is a single source of funding that brings together education and skills under national and regional planning to set out immediate and future skills needs. There would be parity of esteem to use the Scottish credit and qualifications framework much more effectively.

There are questions about the role of the employers group—the Scottish apprenticeship advisory board—which I will meet tomorrow. However, the devil will be in the detail of subsequent decisions on policy and funding.

Simplification can sometimes mean a lack of sophistication, with some losing out. For example, although it does not quite state this, the Withers review implies that the flexible workforce development fund should end and be brought under the main central funding arrangements. As Murdo Fraser highlighted, some employers might lose out as a result of that simplification and lack of sophistication. We therefore need to ensure that the new system takes account of all those needs.

Bringing together funding for higher education, further education and skills will mean little if there is not a transfer of funds between those different functions. However, that transfer will be fought fiercely by those who are defending already-shrinking budgets. We must address the simplification on that front, too.

Those matters are difficult, but we must have such discussions—with much more time—if the reformed skills landscape is to be fit for the future.

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

15:53

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): If we want an illustration of the lack of leadership and urgency from the Government in facing up to and tackling the skills shortages that we face today, and which will become even more profound in the future, it comes from the treatment of Scotland's colleges, as Willie Rennie highlighted.

A week never passes without local businesses telling me about the acute labour and skills shortages that they face. Those businesses are desperate to recruit, upskill their staff and take on apprentices. However, when I speak to my local college in Dumfries and Galloway, it tells me that its Skills Development Scotland apprenticeship contract for 2023-24 has been cut by 13 per cent. At a time of peak demand for apprenticeships, crucial areas for the local economy, such as construction and engineering, have waiting lists for apprenticeship places at that college. It is the economics of the madhouse.

It was bad enough that the budget that was agreed in February meant a real-terms cut of £51 million for colleges, which would have led to a 10 per cent reduction in activity levels at the college in Dumfries, but the decision to axe a further £26 million has meant brutal cuts in colleges, with courses axed not because of a lack of ambition from our colleges or a lack of demand from students or employers but because of a lack of priority on skills from the Government. Where is the SNP's green fair work agenda when those cuts mean that colleges are now embarking on compulsory redundancies? Where is the fair work agenda when college staff are having to take industrial action to fight for a fair deal for last year, never mind for this year?

I have lost track of the number of times that ministers have stood up in this chamber and told us that there will be no strike action in the NHS because of their interventions or that their actions settled the teachers dispute, but when it comes to college pay, the perception of college staff is that Government ministers have been posted missing. I do not know whether the minister has been on a picket line and spoken to college workers; I have been on many. If he had been, he would know that none of them wants to be on strike.

The workers' demands are not unreasonable; what is unreasonable is the real-terms pay cut that they have been offered, the funding of that inadequate pay offer on the back of sacking staff and the lack of intervention from the minister to broker a deal. That says all that you need to know

about the lack of priority that the Government is giving to our colleges.

Our colleges are the powerhouse of our economy and skills at every single stage of the learning journey, whether that is in relation to new qualifications for school leavers or upskilling and retraining those who are already in the workplace. James Withers's review of the skills delivery landscape described that role as absolutely "pivotal", but it is being held back by Government cuts and by funding bodies that do not properly recognise the additional costs of delivering college courses in rural areas, where skills shortages are often most acute. The role is also being suffocated by the cluttered landscape in which it operates. When the Government eventually gets round to responding to the Withers report, I hope that it will heed the calls for stronger leadership and direction from the Government and—crucially—heed the recommendations that would see far more focus on our colleges as key anchor institutions that drive the skills agenda forward.

I will end on a final plea to the minister to take a more interventionist role in brokering the deal between college staff and colleges, so that they can get back to the job of delivering the figures that Willie Rennie highlighted, which strengthen Scotland's economy.

15:57

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): The roll-out of the Scottish Government's 10-year just transition fund is in its first years, and the substantial structural change that Labour's motion calls for is already under way. It is vital that there is a focus on being smarter about skills delivery by ensuring that it matches industry needs. That is exactly what is happening in the north-east.

In year 1, the just transition fund has supported initiatives throughout our region. For example, £1 million was awarded to the National Energy Skills Accelerator for its pilot energy transition skills project. NESA is a partnership between Robert Gordon University, the University of Aberdeen and North East Scotland College. The energy transition skills project is aimed at determining the exact skills that are required to meet the needs of the net zero energy transition from now until 2030 and developing targeted training, upskilling and reskilling for people who are impacted by redundancy or who are transferring from oil and gas, with a focus, of course, on retaining jobs in the north-east. The focus is on matching skills development to the exact needs of low-carbon industries.

In the words of Professor Underhill, who is NESA's chair and the University of Aberdeen's director of energy transition:

“This work will help prepare the education pipeline for the anticipated surge in key skills requirements and lay the foundations for upskilling and re-skilling to benefit sustainable energy careers for existing workers and future generations.”

Five million pounds has also been awarded to OPITO to deliver an energy skills passport, which will streamline the transfer of skills and address the lack of recognition of cross-sector skills. That will allow oil and gas workers to prove that they have the recognised qualifications and training that are needed to access new clean energy jobs.

The passport is also key to streamlining reskilling by identifying specific skills gaps and targeting training to those gaps, which will allow workers to be reskilled faster and more workers to be reskilled with the same resources. Pat Rafferty, Unite the union’s Scottish secretary, said on behalf of the Scottish Trades Union Congress:

“the passport will ... help identify to all stakeholders where there are skills gaps and shortages which can shape appropriate policy responses so that we can deliver a Just Transition and net zero economy.”

I recognise that that work is in progress and that there is some stickiness about the passport. I hope that ministers will be able to ensure that those difficulties become unstuck and that that works the way that it should.

Skills delivery cannot be restricted to reskilling today’s workers. It is vital that tomorrow’s workers who are currently in our schools and colleges come into the workplace with skills for the future. That is happening in the north-east with the just transition fund and the energy transition zones partnership with North East Scotland College, which is developing the advanced manufacturing skills hub at the Altens campus in Aberdeen and working in schools throughout our region.

With such excellent early work by the just transition fund, it is vital that Labour and the Tories in Westminster commit to matching the Scottish National Party’s £500 million just transition fund. It might be a little bit late, but it is not too late. Better late than never.

16:01

Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con): I am delighted to contribute to this debate on the importance of Scotland’s skills landscape to its future economy. I will support the amendment in the name of my colleague Murdo Fraser.

As someone who took an unconventional journey through the various stages of the education system, I have long been an advocate of the idea that one size does not fit all and that different people suit different pathways. For example, I have two boys. One of my sons took the more traditional route through higher education

and is now a doctor. My other son is training to be a mechanic through an apprenticeship. However, it is disappointing that there is still so much more work to do to achieve parity of esteem between different pathways such as those.

For many young people, an apprenticeship is an ideal way to learn on the job. That type of learning is supported by more than 12,000 employers in Scotland. However, demand for apprenticeships is outstripping supply. Earlier this year, the Scottish Government left training providers and young learners in limbo because of delays to apprenticeship funding. That is despite confirmation from the Scottish Training Federation that demand for apprenticeship places has never been higher. That failure to provide enough apprenticeship places is undermining the crucial role that they have to play in Scotland’s future skills landscape.

A report from the Fraser of Allander Institute that was released this week provides a fresh look at how important colleges will be to Scotland’s economic future. It highlights the point that highly skilled college graduates benefit the Scottish economy by around £8 billion in total. The study also found that a single year of college graduates has the potential to increase labour productivity by more than 0.3 per cent. Those are only two of many benefits that our college sector can offer our economy. However, that sector has struggled for years due to continued underinvestment.

I also highlight the point that there is a significant gender divide in apprenticeships, with female apprentices entering lower-paid work on average compared with their male counterparts. I hope that the minister will be able to set out in his closing remarks what he is doing to close that gap.

The Fraser of Allander Institute put it best this week when it said:

“Colleges sit at the forefront of ‘skilling up’ the nation through its diverse and extensive selection of further and higher education courses.”

Without taking full advantage of that pathway, Scotland cannot have a skills system that is fit for the future. Our colleges are capable of delivering the skills that our country needs, and the onus is now on the Scottish Government to deliver the funding for apprenticeship places that is clearly needed.

I fully support Labour’s motion, and I hope that members will support Murdo Fraser’s amendment, which calls on the Government to ensure that everyone who wants to pursue an apprenticeship is able to do so.

16:05

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow Pam Gosal in this debate, because she highlighted an issue that is so important—the fact that there are unconventional routes through education. There is not one system that works for all our young people, all our people in work or, indeed, all our older people. The need for flexibility sits at the very heart of the reasoning behind today's debate.

I echo what Colin Smyth and others said in their contributions about the importance of colleges and the need for, if not intervention or urging on the part of the Government, its facilitation of settlement of the current dispute.

All the discussion about skills talks to an issue that is so important to Scotland—the public finance picture. The Scottish Government's medium-term financial strategy, which was published in May, estimated that there would be a funding shortfall of £1 billion in 2024-25, which would rise to £1.9 billion by 2027-28. The updated fiscal framework might have reduced that headline figure but, as we have heard, the Fraser of Allander Institute estimates that the cost of the First Minister's announcement on council tax will come in at some £417 million.

It is in that context that we need to have a Government that is focused on economic growth and creating more well-paid jobs. That will be achieved through the dissemination of skills, whether that involves reskilling, the newly skilled or the pointing to skills for our young people and those who are already employed. That way, we can achieve an increased tax take to fund the public services on which we all rely. I welcome the minister's commitment to matching young people to skills, but perhaps that could be extended to matching people who need to be reskilled to the correct and proper level of skilling.

I also welcome the announcement about the simplification of funding streams, because the current landscape has created a situation in which our SMEs and other companies find it almost impossible to support people through an apprenticeship, which so many of those who run our SMEs went through when they were younger.

Addressing the skills shortage in our economy is our fundamental strategy for growth. It would be a good Government that was serious about growing the economy and addressing the skills shortages, but we have a situation in which many sectors that are integral to our growth are not planned for at all. That is particularly the case when it comes to our digital skills. There is a widening of that gap, and I can see no bridging that will cover it in the near or the foreseeable future.

As a result, do we have the ability to develop a resilient domestic supply chain? We do not. Let us look at the capital projects that are being held back by staff shortages. I welcome the briefing paper from the Construction Industry Training Board, which points out that the lack of a construction skills plan for Scotland, with a clear overview of existing delivery arrangements for upskilling and reskilling and specific funding programmes, is a significant omission from the skills delivery landscape.

Time is short, but it is worth pointing out that the independent review reported that there has been a lack of clear leadership and direction on skills delivery. There is an opportunity for the minister to change that, but that failure lies in a succession of Government ministers who have neglected that responsibility and who have not acted in the way that a good Government would have done. We are now paying that price.

The question of why it is taking so long for the Government to respond to the report is pertinent, because time that is spent waiting for a response from the Government is time wasted for our young people and those who are seeking change. We have heard about the benefits in the north-east, but we need to see those across the whole of Scotland.

We have a falling birth rate and an ageing population here. Our way round that is to support those people who are coming into work and who are in work to reskill. That is how we can build an economy that works for all of us.

16:09

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): I thank Labour for securing the debate for the chamber.

The motion calls for "structural change", and that has been committed to, I believe. However, I always have some reservations about too much emphasis on structures. Given the cost involved, there are other factors at play.

One factor that we need to take cognisance of is the emphasis that we as a society place on university education. Absolutely, we should enable every person for whom university is the right choice to get there, without fees or other barriers. However, university is not the right route for everyone, as other members have said. We need to get that message across to our young people, their families and wider society. Modern apprenticeships certainly are the right route for many, and that route often opens up a career and a way of earning more money, as well as providing more satisfaction, than university would.

Society needs a mixture of people with a mixture of skills. In my case, I decided to train as an accountant, and I needed to go to university to do that. However, currently, we find that some young people decide to go to university without much idea of what job they will do at the end of the course. That is disappointing for them and for us as a society. I would argue that we need to get the balance right between young people studying a subject that they would like to do and the longer-term career that they are looking to have.

James Withers's comments on parity of esteem were excellent. As he says, the way we talk about different pathways is

"fundamental to achieving parity of esteem."

Graeme Dey: I reassure John Mason that the points that he is making are perfectly valid and are informing a lot of our thinking around the national career service, in order to address those issues.

John Mason: That is great, and I am reassured by that.

James Withers goes on to say:

"different pathways are simply different: not better, not worse, just different."

We want to

"consign to the dustbin the outdated view that studying at university is somehow a 'better' kind of success."

We should be proud of our university sector, but there are multiple potential pathways available. Learning happens in schools, colleges, universities, workplaces and elsewhere. We need more of a single integrated system—I agree.

It is unfortunate that Labour's motion refers to skills shortages but does not mention Brexit. With the best will in the world, neither Scotland nor the UK will ever produce exactly the goods and services that we need. We always need to import and export. In the same way, however good our education and training system is, a flexible international labour market, as the EU provides, allows our people to take up opportunities in other countries and allows others to come and take up opportunities here.

The Government is taking time to consider the Withers review recommendations, and that is right. Withers makes 15 recommendations, some of which are more radical than others. Specifically, recommendation 5 proposes the establishment of a single national funding body, and I have certainly warmed to that proposal. Scotland is a relatively small country, and we should be able to run things in a simpler fashion compared with larger, more bureaucratic countries. My inherent feeling would be to support such a simplification. My only real concern would be to ensure that such a body would operate on the parity of esteem principle

and would not favour universities over colleges and modern apprenticeships.

An important point that I make in passing is that we should recognise the skills of migrants.

On the Conservative amendment, I welcome its support for parity of esteem, but I also note its point about

"the shortage of public funding".

That strikes me as slightly ironic, because the Conservative party is the party that wants lower taxes, which would inevitably mean a greater shortage of public funding—[*Interruption.*] I am sorry, but I do not have time to give way. As usual, the Conservatives do not suggest where the money should come from.

To finish on a positive note, 93 per cent of school leavers are going into positive destinations. Although we always want to improve those destinations, there are lots of positives in the present Scottish system, and we should not be afraid of celebrating those.

16:14

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in the debate. I thank the Labour Party for bringing such an important issue to the chamber. In my view, it is an issue that has been neglected by the Scottish Government. Let us face it, the SNP Government has been in power for 16 years, and skills development has been too far down its list of priorities for a generation.

We have good opportunities in the green economy, the blue economy and the rural economy. We talk about the need for a just transition away from oil and gas. The SNP and the Greens trawl out mandatory world-leading targets, pat themselves on the back and head off to the wine bar—job done.

I have always said that the Parliament voted for renewable targets to be set with the understanding that a route map to achieve those targets would be delivered. Case in question, minister Patrick Harvie introduced a bill to retrofit a million homes with heat pumps by 2030. It is a great idea, but who will fit them and service them, and who will pay for them, given that they need to be fitted to homes with good insulation and underfloor heating?

Graeme Dey: Brian Whittle makes points about delivery on emissions targets. Why is it that the Conservatives oppose every measure that comes forward in the Parliament to deliver on those targets?

Brian Whittle: If the minister had been listening, he would have heard that I said that that was a

great idea. As I said, who will fit and service those heat pumps, let alone pay for them?

The construction industry told us that it will need an extra 22,500 tradespeople and engineers by 2028 for it to have any chance of hitting that Government target. That would mean that they would have to be in training now. What an incredible opportunity for our pupils or for those who are looking to transition from the oil and gas sector into the renewable sector, but that obvious first step to meet the world-leading target of weaving a green economy into our education system has been overlooked by the minister. Not one person in the industry whom I have heard from believes for one second that the target will be hit. It is empty rhetoric, and the Government blames everyone else for its failures.

Thirteen per cent of our working-age population is economically inactive, and the majority of those people are inactive due to poor health. In fact, poor health—not just being economically inactive—is the biggest drag on our economy. The way to deal with that huge issue is through investment in our education system. Education has always been the solution to health and welfare. It gives pupils confidence, resilience and aspiration by showing them what the renewable economy could offer them and what they could in turn do for the green economy and for Scotland.

What an opportunity we can offer pupils in our schools, students in our colleges, people who are transitioning from the oil and gas sector, and engineers and tradespeople in our rural and blue economies. The Scottish education system should be at the forefront of delivering global net zero ambitions.

Remember this: some of the people who will pick up the baton and run with those ambitions by 2045 are currently in primary school or even pre-school. We should be enthusing them and encouraging them into these sectors. We should ensure that there is an understanding of the huge variety of skills that are required for future generations, but, unfortunately, we have a Government that cannot join up the dots and make the connection between setting targets and delivering a route map.

If we get that right, Scottish health, welfare and justice and our economy will benefit hugely. However, if we continue along the road down which the Scottish Government has been taking us for the past 16 years, we will slide further behind the curve when we should be leading. Scotland deserves much better.

16:18

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): Our economy is changing—indeed, it has

to change. Living in the midst of a climate emergency, as we are, it has perhaps never been clearer that business as usual, whatever the sector or industry, is not an option. Underpinning that economic transformation must be a skilled and supported workforce that comes from and sustains resilient, co-operative and compassionate communities. Education and the skills development of our workforce and communities are vital to achieving our ambitions across all aspects of our lives.

I thank James Withers for the work that he undertook for the independent review of the skills delivery landscape in Scotland. That wide-ranging review and its recommendations are challenging and thought provoking. I appreciated the Economy and Fair Work Committee evidence session that we had with him recently, and I know that those conversations will continue.

As we have heard, the Withers report warrants a dedicated and detailed response in its own right, which is forthcoming. The structural and operational recommendations speak to important issues such as the need for more strategic working, policy coherence and empowerment of regional and local partners and workforces.

Of course, specific skills are needed to ensure that we deliver the just transition that we want. We need skills in energy but also in areas such as affordable net zero housing. As we have just heard, the construction workforce that is needed for retrofits is a nice example of the urgent need for targeted Government intervention. We must work with industry to ensure that we have the in-work learning opportunities that our workforces will need.

I have one further comment to make on policy coherence—perhaps on strategy coherence, too. We will not meet our legal climate targets, nor will we achieve the just transition or creation of the clean, green economy that we want, if the different components of work do not join up. Agencies and industry are calling for that, too, so I am hopeful that the green industrial strategy will provide coherence, alongside the updated climate emergency skills action plan and just transition plan. We need to identify skills-balancing opportunities and accelerate investment in skills, as we have already heard from other members. The fair work agenda, which was highlighted by Colin Smyth, must be central to that coherence.

I highlight another important area that we cannot overlook as we create the strategic landscape for our future economy: that of gender inequalities and occupational segregation. I am grateful to Close the Gap for the conversations that I have had with it about that. Occupational segregation is all too apparent in our labour market. Women are concentrated in low-paid, undervalued and

increasingly precarious jobs. They are often low-carbon jobs, but they are overlooked when we talk about net zero skills and jobs.

The skills system in Scotland reinforces patterns of occupational segregation, as does the modern apprenticeships system. Women are vastly underrepresented in the energy sector and in green jobs more widely, and sectoral skills shortages are correlated with occupational segregation. Such labour market rigidity must not be sustained.

As we look to reform the skills landscape in Scotland, I hope that we will take seriously the opportunity to get rid of gendered patterns of skills acquisition and employment, so that we do not further entrench occupational segregation and gender inequalities across our workforces in different sectors.

I appeal to the minister and to all members in the chamber that we take seriously the calls not to be gender blind as we undertake reform of our skills landscape; that we take seriously the calls for genuine political leadership for that work to happen, and for it to happen at pace; and that we heed the calls for strategic and policy coherence within and across sectors. If we get that right, it will make so much easier our ambitions to create and sustain an economy that cares and provides for everyone.

16:22

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): This afternoon's debate has been fascinating. There has been a fair degree of consensus—well, in parts. In the first instance, we all accept that there is a clear case for change regarding how we further develop and improve our skills landscape.

It is of course right that, as we navigate any change, we take the time to fully engage with industry, trade unions and educational institutions. Some members in the Parliament who would wish to see the Scottish Government act more swiftly to consider and implement recommendations would also be among the first to complain—and rightly so—if there was not full engagement with industry, unions and the education sector. Let us do so timeously but meaningfully, and let us get any required changes right.

Covid has been devastating. However, the Skills Development Scotland website shows that there have been 25,447 modern apprenticeship starts from April 2022 to March 2023, and that modern apprenticeship starts are now 91 per cent returned to pre-pandemic levels. That is positive and, as SDS said, it shows

“employer demand for critical skills.”

The challenge is to ensure that we deliver the right skills and training at the right time to support our businesses and our workforce; that is what the review is all about. The skills review is crucial. However, Skills Development Scotland also confirmed that figures show that the number of apprentices in training currently across the country—despite some of the doom and gloom that we have heard today—is at its highest-ever level, at around 39,000.

It is important that we ensure that the needs of our school leavers and the workforce more generally are met when we implement changes to the skills landscape. We have solid foundations to build on, with 93 per cent of school leavers sustaining positive destinations. Many are in education, training and employment.

It is also encouraging to see the increase in the percentage share of individuals who start a modern apprenticeship who have a declared disability or care experience or who come from an ethnic minority community, although I note that members have raised concerns about gender segregation and the need for more women in those roles. The crucial role of apprenticeships as a pathway into highly skilled employment for those from our most deprived communities is clear, with the largest share of apprenticeship starts—24 per cent—coming from our 20 per cent most deprived areas.

The review talks about how the funds in the system are often fragmented and are not always used as effectively as they could be. I note that one example that was used was colleges, which often have to balance their sustainability between a mix of core funding via credits and bolt-on funding such as through national transition training funds and the young persons guarantee. I was therefore interested in recommendation 5, which would establish a new style of national funding body that would have responsibility for administering and overseeing the delivery of all publicly funded post-school learning and training. That is an interesting idea. It would leave a clear line of sight between ministerial priorities and policies and public funding. It also links to recommendation 6, which would redesign the process for implementing the funding of all learning and training provision. We must look at the position of colleges in that context. They are in a tight financial predicament and are making redundancies. They need investment and sustainability. If recommendations 5 and 6 are to mean anything, they must deliver for Scotland's college sector.

16:26

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): I echo Murdo Fraser's opening lament by noting that, in

closing a debate as important as one that is about ensuring that Scotland's skills system is fit for the future, I have a mere four minutes to hit the main points. As many members have said this afternoon, this is perhaps the key issue that we must address if we are to sort out Scotland's economy and give our young and not-so-young people the skills to succeed in the Scotland of the future as well as the Scotland of the present.

I commend Labour for using its Opposition debate time to move a sensible motion, which we shall support. However, I find it nothing short of appalling that, despite Audit Scotland's conclusion that the Scottish Government needed to take urgent action on skills almost two years ago, despite the Withers review's conclusion that skills delivery has lacked clear leadership and direction, and despite the substantial structural change that is recommended to ensure that the skills system is fit for the future, the Scottish Government has failed to bring such a debate to the chamber and give us proper debate time, just as, as Daniel Johnson pointed out, it has been largely silent since the Withers review.

This afternoon, we have heard that we all agree that Scotland urgently needs a vision for a flexible and responsive skills delivery system that is fit for the future, but we will not get to that by slashing around 150,000 college places since 2007, especially when, as Willie Rennie said, the Fraser of Allander Institute reports that college graduates will benefit the Scottish economy by around £52 billion over their working lives. We will not get there by seriously underfunding our further education sector and then, as Colin Smyth said, whipping a further £26 million away from it. We will not get there by failing to be transparent about funding from the apprenticeship levy and, as Pam Gosal highlighted, by delaying funding to training providers and learners, or by making it difficult to access flexible workforce development funding, as Murdo Fraser said, or by simply accepting a situation in which there are 350 fewer science teachers, 300 fewer maths teachers and 65 fewer physics teachers in 2022 than there were in 2008.

However, we have heard that things such as parity of esteem between further education, higher education and apprenticeships, as demanded by the Conservative amendment, will help. Increasing and properly funding the number of apprenticeships will help, alongside clarity and transparency around the levy. Offering every adult access to skills funding through a right-to-retrain programme will help. Taking note of the recommendations in the Withers review, such as ending the duplication of bodies and the creation of a targeted skills development board that directs funding and opportunities to industries and areas where there is a workforce shortfall, will also help.

As Martin Whitfield said, we need more urgency and more action.

With regard to what will help, Brian Whittle also made a key point. We have so many opportunities in areas such as the green, blue and rural economies, but those are often stymied, due first to an obsession with headline-grabbing targets that are not underpinned by a delivery plan, and secondly to a highly concerning tendency to engage in silo thinking instead of the cross-cutting vision and oversight that is required. For those reasons, Parliament should vote for the motion in Daniel Johnson's name and for the amendment in Murdo Fraser's name.

16:30

The Minister for Small Business, Innovation, Tourism and Trade (Richard Lochhead): I think that one thing on which we can all agree is that this is a very important debate. I welcome the fact that the Labour Party has brought it to the chamber as its topic of choice.

The importance of skills was brought home to me just before I came to Parliament for this debate today, when I visited the national robotarium at Heriot-Watt University. I was admiring that amazing state-of-the-art facility that is going to prepare Scotland for the rest of the 21st century by looking at the role of robotics and artificial intelligence, and it reminded me how quickly our society, our economy and the world are changing. That is why this debate is so important.

Scotland has two key windows of opportunity. We have the net zero and energy transition, which will bring great jobs and wealth to this country, and we have the high-growth sectors such as the tech sector, which represent another massive window of opportunity. Getting the skills right for the future is therefore vital.

We are at a crossroads. If we take the right road, we have big prizes to win and secure for our country and its future, in particular the future of our young people. That is why the Scottish Government commissioned the Withers review of Scotland's skills system: because now is the time to undertake a review and fix the system over the next few years. We have to get that right if we are going to capture those prizes of the future.

The reviews that we have undertaken have highlighted that there is widespread confusion about current public body roles and responsibilities, and they have recommended reform. That is what we are debating today, and what the Scottish Government is now considering. We have accepted the basis of many of the recommendations made by James Withers. We have to take the time to get reform in this area right, because it is so important. I welcome—as I

am sure that all members do—the minister's commitment to work to build consensus and speak to members on all sides of the chamber.

What that means, in the face of the fast pace of change in the Scottish economy and the global economy, is that we need a skills system and an education system that is agile and flexible, in which our colleges and universities in particular are able to upskill, reskill and deliver lifelong learning in a genuine, meaningful way. It is said that while people today may have three or four jobs in their lifetime, tomorrow it will be three or four careers in a lifetime. That is why we need a system that is agile and fit for purpose.

Brian Whittle: I am grateful to the minister for giving up some of his time. Would he agree that it is important that, in a marketing sense, we ensure that pupils at school understand the opportunities that will be available in the future economy?

Richard Lochhead: Yes—of course that is important. We have to talk about what is happening in our schools as well as in the further and higher education system and in the wider skills landscape.

I absolutely believe in parity of esteem. As someone who left school and went to college; went into work and did part-time college study while I was at work; and then left my job to go to university, got my degree and went back into the workplace, I know that there is no wrong path, as we say in the #NoWrongPath campaign to persuade young people that there is parity of esteem. That has to be an outcome of the changing landscape and the policies in this country as we move forward, with regard to people's impressions of what they can get out of the skills system and the education system in Scotland.

I will pick up quickly on a couple of issues that members mentioned. Pam Gosal and Maggie Chapman mentioned the debate around gender issues in relation to apprenticeships in particular. I point out that the Scottish apprenticeship advisory board created the gender commission to develop recommendations that offer real practical solutions to help to address the gender imbalance across all our apprenticeships. The Government was given recommendations on that important issue, which are now being taken forward and considered.

Brian Whittle and other members said that we are not training people for the net zero industries of the future. However, a lot is happening in our colleges and universities. Earlier this year, Scottish Renewables found that almost 22,000 students in Scotland are taking courses relating to renewable energy—that number is up by 70 per cent since 2019.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): Will the minister take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): No—the minister is just about to conclude.

Richard Lochhead: Colleges are training people to install air-source heat pumps and other equipment. A lot is happening. I hope that we can work together to build consensus and a skills system that delivers for Scotland and our young people, and captures those massive economic prizes for the nation.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Pam Duncan-Glancy to wind up the debate.

16:35

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): It is a pleasure to close the debate for Labour today. We brought today's debate before Parliament because the stakes to get skills right have never been higher, and my colleagues Daniel Johnson, Martin Whitfield and Colin Smyth highlighted just how high—there are yawning skills gaps and shortages of apprentices; families are struggling to make ends meet; the economy is declining; and public services are starved of cash.

Although I recognise that both ministers offered to engage widely on reform, I am yet to be convinced that the pace of change is sufficient or that there is the necessary breadth of the vision to create and spread opportunity for all.

Spreading that opportunity starts with education. When education is valued and nourished, it creates and spreads opportunity all through life: in school, when we learn about the world around us; in college and university, where we learn to live and work in it; and in the workplace or our community, where we learn to apply it. The opportunities that education can bring are endless, and the skills that it builds are crucial.

I welcome the minister's comments and those of others, including Brian Whittle, that the entire education system matters in relation to skills, but I remain disappointed that, at least until now, the area seems undervalued and deprioritised by this Government. Cuts are swathing, and inequality is holding back progress. Nowhere is that seen more obviously, as we have heard, than in science, technology, engineering and maths—skills that are widely recognised as the accelerating forces for future economic growth and to meet the challenges of tomorrow. It is also, consequently, where the well-paid jobs of the future lie.

To create a Scotland where opportunity is for all, we have to smash every glass and class ceiling that is in the way of pursuing those skills for the future. Economics, the law—and, yes, Jimmy

Reid, as we have heard—all tell us why opportunity must do that. Yet, as Bob Doris, Maggie Chapman, Pam Gosal and other colleagues have noted, women and girls are underrepresented in those subjects and sectors and are routinely denied opportunities to build skills in them.

There are many reasons for that, but they start in the early years of children's lives, when they get their first real exposure to the building blocks of skills that they will need, take an interest in and then excel at. As the Institute of Engineering and Technology reports, not focusing on STEM from an early age limits choices later in life, too, including for girls, and the data shows it. We know that girls are far more likely to study higher in art and design, French, fashion, food tech and childcare, and boys are more likely to study computing science, physics, engineering and graphic communication. We know that gender stereotypes continue into the workplace, as colleagues have said. Sixty per cent of people who work in care are women, yet women represent only 30 per cent of the STEM workforce. Of that number, 70 per cent leave, and only 12 per cent of the remaining women reach managerial levels. We have to use every opportunity to expose all young people to the broadest of skills, including in STEM, if we are to address skill shortages in key sectors and ensure that we take everyone with us.

Paul Sweeney: Will the member take an intervention?

Pam Duncan-Glancy: Is it possible to have the time back?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: Okay—I will take a very brief intervention.

Paul Sweeney: I thank the member for being so generous with her time.

Does she agree that the creation of the BAE Systems applied shipbuilding skills academy in Glasgow is a key example of how we can promote STEM across genders, classes and different groups in our communities?

Pam Duncan-Glancy: I thank my colleague Paul Sweeney for that intervention and I absolutely agree with that. The creation of the academy is a shining example of what we can do when we innovate to address skill shortages in Scotland.

We also have to address the fact that exposure to science, maths or computing often does not happen until a child picks them for their qualifications at the age of 16. Those opportunities should be open to them much earlier and aplenty throughout their school career. We must be innovative in how we do that. We need to teach

children that maths is useful and introduce them to real-life examples of science and technology early and often. Too often, schools in richer areas offer that exposure more than others, so we must spread that opportunity if we are to build the skills of the future. We have to smash that class ceiling.

If we want more pupils to access opportunities, including in STEM subjects, we also need a teaching workforce that is appropriately equipped. However, we are not there yet. As Liam Kerr has noted, there are far too few teachers in STEM. Numbers are plateauing and targets are missed, and the Government must urgently address that.

We also have to create parity of esteem in vocational and academic skills, including through apprenticeships, as Murdo Fraser has pointed out. That is why we will also support the Conservative amendment today.

As Colin Smyth, Willie Rennie and others have noted, further education is crucial. That is why it is disappointing that this Government has left the sector crying out for help and struggling for cash. It is not just key for skills development; it is key for addressing inequality, too. We have to change the way that we think about education and skills, the decisions that we make about them and the money that we allocate to them. We cannot keep saying that they matter and then do more of the same. The Government has a lot of work to do, and it needs to prioritise it. This matters.

It is about skills, jobs and the economy, yes, but it is also about spreading opportunity. That is why we brought today's debate. We have to smash the class, glass and stepped ceilings to do it, so that aspiration and opportunity are available to all. That is what is possible, what is needed and, crucially, what a Labour Government's mission will be. I urge the SNP Government to match that ambition so that Scotland can, once again, be a land of opportunity for all.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on ensuring that Scotland's skills system is fit for the future.

Culture Sector

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-10917, in the name of Neil Bibby, on supporting Scotland's culture sector. I invite members who wish to participate in the debate to press their request-to-speak button now or as soon as possible.

16:41

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): Scottish Labour has brought forward this debate because we recognise and revere the enormous contribution that the arts and culture sector makes to Scotland's national life. As Professor Jeffrey Sharkey, the principal of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, recently put it,

"Artists are the connectors, creators and envoys of Scotland, within our communities and across the world."

The sector is important to our society and to our economy, too. The creative industry is worth nearly £4.5 billion and it supports 80,000 jobs. The arts and culture sector punches massively above its weight in our economy. Its contribution to brand Scotland and our image around the world cannot be overstated. Our artists, writers, performers, directors, producers, creators and many more who support them should be the pride of Scotland. We owe them a debt of gratitude.

However, the sector is at breaking point after years of underfunding. What has the Scottish Government's response been to date? At the start of this year, the Scottish Government threatened to cut £6.6 million—equivalent to 10 per cent—from Creative Scotland's funds in the budget for 2023-24. On 21 February this year, the Scottish National Party did a U-turn, to much fanfare, and cancelled its proposed cut. However, in late September, just seven months later, the cabinet secretary disgracefully did a U-turn on the U-turn and confirmed that the £6.6 million cut was going ahead after all. That was met with a furious response, and no wonder—it was a serious betrayal of trust.

Since then, the cabinet secretary has been unequivocal when he gave me a "gold-plated" assurance on 5 October that the money will be restored next year. People in the sector are now asking what that commitment is worth, when previous promises were broken. I say to the cabinet secretary that a promise is a promise, and it should be kept this year. That is in order for the Government to start to rebuild trust with the sector, avert a looming crisis and prevent job losses and venue closures.

The Government has clearly been feeling the heat on that, thanks to the work of Campaign for

the Arts, Culture Counts, the Musicians' Union, Equity and many others. That pressure is why we had the First Minister's announcement on arts and culture funding at the SNP conference last week. Earlier today, the cabinet secretary challenged me to welcome that announcement. We do welcome that statement of intent, which is all that it is at this stage, but we welcome it given the parlous state of the sector and on the basis that there is a clear delivery plan. However, we do not welcome broken or baseless promises, and we do not welcome the cut this year, which risks organisations—which have to submit their applications to Creative Scotland today—going to the wall.

Today's debate is an opportunity for the cabinet secretary to cancel his cut this year, set out details of the announcement and answer a series of questions. I start with the question that he failed to answer earlier. Why is the Government stating that it is doubling the arts and culture budget by £100 million when the existing budget appears to be £175 million?

People in the sector deserve to know what is and is not included. Does the budget include the national performing companies? How will the £100 million be distributed over the next five years? Where is the funding coming from? How much of it will materialise in the coming budget? When will a timeline outlining the decisions on the distribution of funding be published?

I am happy to give way to the cabinet secretary now if he wishes to answer those questions, or perhaps he will answer them when he takes the floor in a moment's time, because it is essential that the Government provides answers and clarity not just to restore trust but to give certainty.

Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Neil Bibby: I mean no offence in saying this, Mr Brown, but I would be happy to take an intervention from the cabinet secretary, whom I was requesting details from.

Let me tell members why we in the chamber need that clarity. The Parliament has heard time and again pleas from a sector that is crying out for help. VOCAL Scotland has told us that

"publicly funded cultural service provision has been depleted to the most basic level."

Artlink has said that the current financial settlement is having a devastating effect, and Museums Galleries Scotland has warned of a

"hollowing out of museums services".

Prospect has said:

"We are at the breaking point",

and the Federation of Scottish Theatre has said that a

“continued lack of public investment ... may result in what could very easily be seen as a wilful demise of the culture sector as we know it.”

Equity, which protested outside this building, has warned that our national reputation is diminished with further cuts to support and funding, and even Creative Scotland has warned that many organisations are at risk of insolvencies and redundancies.

The picture that has been painted is one of increased costs and chronic standstill funding. Many organisations are on their knees. Combined with the pandemic and the cost of living crisis, it is a perfect storm. Stability, security and the ability to plan ahead are vital to the sector.

The Scottish Government is to refresh its culture strategy, but it is clear that there is a huge gulf between the levels of ambition and the levels of investment that are coming from the Government. That is the very definition of setting up the entire sector to fail.

The Government should keep its promise not to cut Creative Scotland’s budget this year and give the sector the funding, certainty, confidence and backing that it needs. Over to you, cabinet secretary.

I move,

That the Parliament values greatly the enormous contribution of the arts and culture sector to Scotland’s national life and economy, noting that the creative industry is estimated to be worth nearly £4.5 billion and 80,000 jobs; recognises what many in the sector have described as a “perfect storm” of crisis in the sector, resulting from years of underfunding as well as the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the cost of living crisis; condemns the Scottish Government’s decision to break its promise to the sector not to cut Creative Scotland’s budget by 10%, and notes the furious reaction in response; notes the commitment from the Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture that Creative Scotland’s funding will be restored in 2024-25, but recognises with concern that Creative Scotland has stated that up to a third of its regularly funded organisations are at serious risk of insolvency in the short term, and over half are financially weak, which will require redundancies or other cost savings, and therefore considers that there is an urgent need for funding now; further notes the announcement made by the First Minister on 17 October 2023 to more than double arts and culture funding over the next five years, but believes that, in the current context, financial certainty for the sector is crucial; calls, therefore, on the Scottish Government to reverse the 10% budget cut to Creative Scotland with immediate effect; further calls on the Scottish Government to set out full details for its proposed increase in the arts and culture budget, including timescales for funding increases, and believes that it is essential that this is clarified ahead of the publication of a refreshed Scottish Government Culture Strategy.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I advise members that there is no time in hand and that

that will be ruthlessly enforced. I call Angus Robertson, who has up to five minutes.

16:47

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): I apologise to you, Presiding Officer, and to members in the chamber that, exceptionally, owing to the change in parliamentary business timings, I will not be present at the close of the debate. I am particularly grateful for Neil Bibby’s understanding of the circumstances. Incidentally, I commend him for securing today’s debate, if not for the motion, which cannot bring itself to welcome a doubling in planned culture spending.

I fully appreciate that this is an incredibly challenging time for the sector. It has had to endure the shocks of Brexit fallout, the pandemic, the energy crisis and the mismanagement of the economy by the United Kingdom Government, which have sent prices spiralling.

From my first day in office, I have been in discussions with the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister on how the Scottish Government can best support the sector in navigating this perfect storm. I put on record my appreciation for their understanding and support.

The First Minister’s announcement last week not only responds to those pressures but signals our ambition. The Scottish Government will more than double our investment in Scotland’s art and culture by £100 million over the next five years.

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): Will the minister give way?

Angus Robertson: I will make a bit of progress first, if the member does not mind.

We have committed to increasing opportunities for participation and creative pursuits in supporting the protection of new works and ensuring that Scotland’s cultural output has platforms at home and abroad. We know that the sector welcomes the news. As an example, David Greig of Edinburgh’s Royal Lyceum Theatre Company has said:

“This is a seriously important intervention at a crucial moment ... this investment is to the benefit of all Scots as we build on our theatre, film, art, literature and gaming industries ... which ... are world class.”

I could not agree more with him, and I am delighted that the Scottish Government has committed to doubling spending on culture and the arts.

Craig Hoy: Is Mr Robertson aware that the future of the Lammermuir festival in East Lothian is in doubt after Creative Scotland withdrew all

funding from the programme this year? When I spoke with Creative Scotland earlier this month, it said that it was facing the double whammy of cuts to its budget and increased requests from arts and music bodies that have been hit hard by the withdrawal of funding from councils, which are subject to swingeing Scottish National Party real-terms cuts.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Briefly.

Craig Hoy: Is it not the case that what Scotland's arts and heritage organisations need—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary.

Craig Hoy: —is more funding today and not headline-grabbing promises for tomorrow?

Angus Robertson: If the member had been here for questions on the culture portfolio earlier, he would have heard my answer on the matter. I encourage him to read it in the *Official Report*, having taken so much time from me in the debate.

Colleagues across the chamber will appreciate that there is a complex funding landscape for arts and culture. Funding is provided by the Scottish Government, local government and philanthropy. Even within the Scottish Government, culture is funded through a variety of means, including Creative Scotland, which is our public body for the arts and creative industries, including the screen sector. There are also targeted funds to support key areas, such as youth music and festivals, and direct funding by the Scottish Government of our national performing companies.

Neil Bibby: Will the minister take an intervention?

Angus Robertson: I have to make some progress, and I have so little time. I am sure that Mr Bibby wants me to answer the questions that he has asked.

Due diligence and consideration are needed to ensure that the increase in funding over the next five years is directed for maximum impact. The priorities for that increased investment will be taken forward in line with the Scottish Government's upcoming refresh of the culture strategy action plan. I welcome input from all in the sector and invite them to get in touch. For now, I can say that the increase will start from next year, with further detail to be set out in the upcoming budget through established processes.

I appreciate that the sector is concerned about what Scottish funding and support look like this year. I have to put that in the context that, over the past five years, the Scottish Government has provided more than £33 million to Creative Scotland to compensate for the shortfall in National Lottery funding. As a result of rising costs

and pressures on budget across the Government, we cannot make up for the on-going shortfall this year. I agreed with the Creative Scotland board that it would use its National Lottery reserves to ensure that all regularly funded organisation payments are met in full, as was provided for in the 2023-24 funding agreement. That will mean that the regularly funded organisations will not receive reduced funding this financial year.

As I mentioned, spending on culture by the Scottish Government extends far beyond Creative Scotland. We are investing £278 million in Scotland's culture and heritage sector in 2023-24. Projects such as the youth music initiative, which has £9.5 million committed to it this year, have made a huge impact in helping young people across Scotland to access music making and develop their wider skills and learning.

I commend the Scottish Government's amendment to the chamber. It supports the Scottish Government's plan to more than double arts and culture funding by £100 million over the next five years. It endorses the Scottish Government's aim of working with the culture sector to implement a refreshed culture strategy action plan. It believes that the UK Government should match that stated ambition and at least double its investment in arts and culture over the same period. If Parliament supports a doubling in spending on the arts and culture, it will vote for the Government's amendment.

I move amendment S6M-10917.2, to leave out from first "recognises" to end and insert:

"understands that, in common with other sectors, arts and culture organisations are experiencing significant pressure due to increases in the cost of living as a consequence of Brexit, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the actions of the UK Government; welcomes that Creative Scotland has confirmed that it has used its reserves to ensure that funding for regularly funded organisations has been maintained in 2023-24; notes that, over the last five years, the Scottish Government has provided over £33 million to Creative Scotland to compensate for a shortfall in National Lottery funding; supports the Scottish Government's plan to more than double arts and culture funding by £100 million over the next five years; endorses the Scottish Government's aim of working with the culture sector to implement the refreshed culture strategy action plan, and believes that the UK Government should match this stated ambition and at least double its investment in arts and culture over the same period."

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Alexander Stewart to speak to and move amendment S6M-10917.1. You have up to four minutes, Mr Stewart.

16:53

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am delighted to open on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives.

The motion rightly speaks about the importance of the arts and culture sector and the numerous challenges that it faces, which have only been exacerbated by what the SNP Government has been doing. As such, the Conservatives will be happy to support Labour's motion.

In his recent party conference, the First Minister said a number of warm words about the Scottish culture sector. He spoke about Scotland being rich in culture and the arts, and about how it is important to look far beyond the economic impact. Such words would have been very welcome if only they matched the Scottish Government's record on the issue, which has been one of continually leaving the sector short of the funding that it is crying out for.

The additional arts and culture funding announcement by the First Minister in his speech is welcome, but let us not forget that it has been only a few weeks since the SNP U-turned on its own U-turn and reimposed a nearly £7 million budget cut. To say that the sector has been left struggling to trust the Government would be a major understatement. Speaking about the issue, the chief executive officer of Creative Scotland said that there was an erosion of faith and trust. People are exhausted trying to keep the show on the road—literally.

There is also a complete lack of clarity about where and when the newly announced funding will be distributed. On that issue, the sector has been left with more questions than answers. The Campaign for the Arts has warned that funding needs to be put in place quickly in order to ensure that jobs will not be lost in the sector.

Given the potential job losses, my amendment speaks about the need for the Government to take a more proactive approach to protecting the arts, music and culture sector in Scotland. As my amendment suggests, 2,000 jobs and 26,000 art opportunities will be at risk if the Scottish Government does not implement such an approach. That could be achieved by the introduction of an arts bill, which would introduce a more sustainable and long-term financial planning model. Scotland's creative industries contribute £5 billion to the Scottish economy every year, so it is important that the sector can properly plan the finances for its future. The recent fiasco around Creative Scotland's funding has demonstrated the need for multiyear certainty on budgets. That would give clarity to the organisations and greater security for the employees, for which they are crying out.

If one thing should be taken from today's debate, it is that the Government's record on the issue is not one of empowerment; rather, it is one of a non-committal approach and uncertainty. That non-committal approach and uncertainty continue.

Sector organisations the length and breadth of the country are struggling to come to terms with what the Government says on the one hand and then what it does on the other. The Government is not supporting the sector; it is leaving the sector to look after itself. If it were not for the Creative Scotland reserves, there would be massive cuts and job losses.

The Scottish Conservatives are committed to listening to the Scottish sector and to ensuring and safeguarding its contribution to society and our economy. It is high time that the Government put the warm words into action and took the same approach. If it did that, we would see something happening in the sector and it would not continue to wither on the vine.

I move amendment 10917.1, to insert at end:

“; notes warnings that, if the £6.6 million cut is not restored next year, 2,000 jobs and 26,000 artist opportunities could be at risk, and calls on the Scottish Government to implement a more proactive approach to protecting the arts, music and culture sector in Scotland through, for example, the introduction of an Arts Bill, which would introduce a more sustainable long-term funding model to provide multi-year certainty around existing budgets.”

16:57

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I am grateful to the Labour Party for bringing this important and timely debate to the chamber.

The playwright George Bernard Shaw once said:

“Without art, the crudeness of reality would make the world unbearable.”

On a daily basis, we come up against the crude reality of our time. When times are tough, as they are now, it is easy for Governments to lay the artistic and cultural sectors to one side. In uncertain times, such as those that we are living in, the public services that are crumbling around us often, rightly, take the focus of chambers such as this.

Arts will always play second fiddle to those other pressing concerns, but we dismiss the importance of the arts and cultural sectors at our peril. They have a unique and crucial part to play, as we have heard several times today, in enlightening us, unifying us and supporting our mental health in what are increasingly anxious and fractious times. It is also important to remember that the creative industry is estimated to be worth £4.5 billion to the Scottish economy. It keeps 80,000 of our fellow Scots in work. That is often overlooked.

We would also be remiss to overlook the positive impact that the sector has in attracting tourists to our shores. That is no wonder, given that the beauty of Scotland is advertised best in

dramas such as BBC's "Shetland". Scotland has a proud cultural heritage and a growing film and television industry that punches well above its weight on the international stage. It is therefore baffling that the Scottish National Party-Green Government has treated the sector so flippantly and with such great disrespect.

Despite the fact that the sector was only just beginning to get back on its feet following the lockdown years, last December, the Government announced a £6.6 million cut to Creative Scotland's budget, which was a cut of 10 per cent. That has been well rehearsed in the remarks already today. The very understandable uproar that followed that decision prompted the Government to reverse the cut in February this year, but we now have a U-turn on a U-turn, with the reinstating of the initial funding cut.

The First Minister's latest announcement at the SNP conference was no more than a cynical move aimed at garnering good headlines. That may seem like no more than a joyless round of hokey cokey, but it has had profound consequences for Creative Scotland, which has been forced to use up its cash reserves to cover the shortfall. The chief executive of Creative Scotland, Iain Munro, described the situation as

"like trying to change the engines on an aeroplane while you are flying it."—[*Official Report, Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee, 28 September 2023; c 8.*]

The offhand way in which the Scottish Government is treating the arts industry is reminiscent of the way in which it has disregarded the business community. The industry needs certainty in order to thrive, grow and safeguard precious jobs. However, on the Government's watch, the Edinburgh international film festival has been stripped back—it almost ended—and the Edinburgh Filmhouse has closed, with the building sold and more than 100 jobs lost. Now, Screen Scotland is under pressure following the most recent cuts. The Government is guilty of cultural vandalism—nothing more, nothing less.

Large parts of Scotland are being left entirely behind when it comes to culture spending, which is largely geared towards our metropolitan areas. Rural and island communities are not getting their fair share of funding. One example that has been mentioned before relates to Screen Machine, Scotland's only mobile cinema, which serves the Highlands and Islands. It has been running for 25 years, but it could be set to end next year if it fails to get the funding that it needs for a new custom vehicle. The service currently relies on a French leased truck, but that lease expires in April. The group that runs the service estimates that a brand-new Screen Machine will cost £1.4 million, and it has asked the Scottish Government for 50 per

cent of that. I think that we can all agree that such initiatives deserve our support, which is why the Liberal Democrats will support the Labour motion.

17:01

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): I am pleased that Scottish Labour has chosen the culture budget cuts as the topic of its Opposition debate. We need to clear up some of the confusion in the sector about the recent announcements. Some of it has been cleared up today, but not all of it.

As Alex Cole-Hamilton said, the culture sector has played a central role in Scotland's public life and has created an international reputation of excellence. Indeed, the sector characterises the Scottish nation as a country that is passionate about its music, art and museums, and it accounts for 80,000 jobs and contributes a not insignificant £4.5 billion to the economy.

In February, the Scottish Government heralded its decision not to cut culture funding, but it has still indicated that there will be a 10 per cent cut to Creative Scotland's budget. The Government has not provided certainty for the workforce, which has been through so much as a result of the pandemic. In fact, for many of us, when we were at home, worrying about our families and our jobs, the culture sector was the sector that we relied on most.

Over the past 10 years, the national performing arts companies have had a 20 per cent real-terms cut in funding. The level of insecurity for workers in the sector is high—higher than it is in most sectors—and the poor pay does not conform to fair work objectives. We are way behind where we ought to be. As Neil Bibby said, Creative Scotland has said that, of the 120 bodies that it regularly funds, up to one third are at risk of insolvency and half are financially weak. That is not a strong position for the sector to be in. Every key organisation has something striking to say. They talk about the hollowing out of services, the wilful demise of the sector and being at breaking point. The position could not be more bleak.

I want to spend some time discussing the confusion that still reigns in the arts sector following the recent announcement. Neil Bibby rightly welcomed the Government's U-turn—let us begin with that recognition—but we require clarity on the £100 million. In its briefing, the Musicians Union set out pretty well the questions that the Government needs to answer. If the £100 million is meaningful and real, which budget lines have been included in the calculation to get to that £100 million? What does the doubling of the budget mean for the sector? What does it mean for the national performing arts, for example?

It is easy to make speeches at a party conference, but it is harder to provide funding and certainty to organisations. All they want to know is where the money is, when it will come, how the £100 million will be distributed, whether there is a timeline for the money, and when crucial decisions will be made. Can the cabinet secretary give us some indication of that? He is shaking his head, but he could clarify things. I do not think that it is unreasonable for the sector to say, "This is great, but we would like some certainty." I would be delighted to take an intervention.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have very little time.

Angus Robertson: I have just a quick question. Does Pauline McNeill agree that such decisions need to go through the normal budgetary processes—yes or no?

Pauline McNeill: Why do you not give us a yes or no answer on whether that is real money and when we will see some detail? You could have answered my question. You could have used your intervention to do that—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Speak through the chair, please.

Pauline McNeill: —but you chose not to.

I will finish on that point.

17:05

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): The Scottish Government is evidently committed to growing a more sustainable, diverse and impactful culture sector in Scotland. Given that the creative industries are worth billions to Scotland, supporting tens of thousands of jobs, the importance of that commitment has never been greater.

We are fortunate to live in a country with so many talented people and a unique and vibrant culture, which makes Scotland a desirable and diverse place to live, providing opportunity to grow the economy and create skilled jobs and successful businesses.

The Scottish Government's dedication to funding arts for Scotland's young people cannot be overlooked. I was pleased that the cabinet secretary talked about the youth music initiative, which ensures that every school pupil in Scotland can access a year of free music tuition by the time they leave primary school, which represents a very sound investment of £9.5 million a year.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): Several members have now commented that the figure of £100 million appears to have been plucked out of the air. As convener of the Finance and Public

Administration Committee, would you like to talk about how you think—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Speak through the chair.

Sarah Boyack: —that that money should be allocated and budgeted and the timescales revealed?

Kenneth Gibson: I think that that would be set out in the draft budget, as is normal. We are talking about a five-year investment, starting from the spring of 2024, which is the next financial year. Regardless of what we do, you will vote against the budget—we know that full well. That is how the budget is done. It will be put into the draft budget, like any other spending line. I would have thought that that would be fairly obvious to someone who has been here for so long.

Creative Scotland strives to ensure that funding delivers the widest possible public benefit across Scotland, but that has not always been the case. Even taking into account the fact that prestigious national companies such as Scottish Opera and Scottish Ballet are based in Glasgow and that our capital has an important role, not least through the Edinburgh festival, other areas of Scotland, including Ayrshire, have received a disproportionately low share of Creative Scotland's funding. It is important to encourage growth in those areas. I ask the cabinet secretary to ensure that funding is allocated fairly across all regions of Scotland, including rural and island regions that often face barriers to accessing the arts. I thank Alex Cole-Hamilton for also raising that point.

Amid the unprecedented pandemic, in which the culture and events sectors were among the worst affected, the Scottish Government delivered £256 million of support to creatives, many of whom were otherwise unable to earn a living during that time. Support that was provided by the £85 million Covid-19 emergency fund prevented 82 per cent of Scottish organisations from cutting jobs or becoming insolvent, which highlights the Government's dedication to supporting the sector.

The Scottish Government's plan to more than double arts and culture funding by more than £100 million over the next five years is very welcome, and I am astonished by the Grinch-like comments that we have seen from the Opposition in response. Talk about rejecting a solid increase in funding. It is astonishing.

Reckless economic decisions made by the UK Government undeniably created a perfect storm of long-term budget pressures, reduced income generation and increased operating costs, forcing the Scottish Government to make difficult financial decisions. The Tories have some cheek to talk about arts and culture, which they have completely eviscerated south of the border, so let us have no

more crocodile tears in that regard. We all know about the damage that Brexit has done, too.

I support calls on the United Kingdom Government to seek visa-free and work permit-free arrangements for Scots working in European Union countries on a short-term basis. Creatives in Scotland previously benefited from funding from Creative Europe, but the final round of funding of more than €18 million is now lost. In its first year, the UK Government's shared prosperity fund has offered only a measly £7 million in replacement funding to its global screen fund, which is something that the Tories should maybe raise with their bosses down south.

Had we remained in the EU, our creative industries would have received an additional €184 million. As long as Labour joins the Tories in supporting Brexit, Scottish businesses and workers in the culture sector will suffer financially, given that, across the UK, £200 million in arts and culture funding has been lost.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please conclude.

Kenneth Gibson: Lastly, I make a plea for Screen Machine. Arran and Cumbrae in my constituency will benefit, as will many in the Highlands and Islands, and I hope that the cabinet secretary will help to deliver additional funding for that.

17:09

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): One of the main characters of one of my favourite TV shows, the much-acclaimed "The Wire", is the cigar-smoking and curmudgeonly Baltimore detective Bunk Moreland. The actor who plays Moreland, Wendell Pierce, said that culture was a

"form through which we as a society reflect on who we are, where we've been, where we hope to be."

I am fortunate to represent the Highlands and Islands, a region that rivals any in Scotland for the strength of its cultural offering—in fact, it rivals anywhere in the world. As well as being important for those of us who live there, it attracts visitors from across the globe.

There are, of course, well-known events such as Up Helly Aa in Shetland, the St Magnus international festival in Orkney, the many local highland games and, of course, the annual Royal National Mod, which celebrates our Gaelic linguistic and cultural heritage. However, culture and the arts play a part in communities right across the Highlands and Islands, from local events to the smaller museums that celebrate the diversity of my region. Those are supported by passionate and committed organisations and local

volunteers, as well as by the work of charities and others.

However, there is real pressure on the sector, not just because of the SNP's cuts to Creative Scotland. Local government also plays an important role. I am sure that the cabinet secretary, when he was the MP for Moray, will have visited the Falconer museum in Forres. He would not be able to visit it today, because it was closed in April 2020 by Moray Council's previous SNP administration, because of his SNP Government's squeeze on local government funding.

In addition, I and Scottish Conservative MSP colleagues have concerns over the planned cuts by the University of the Highlands and Islands to its history department. As a history graduate, I recognise that history is important to both understanding the past and inspiring the future.

Understanding and valuing the past, and learning from the mistakes of the past, are vital. That principle seems to have passed many in the SNP by, but would we expect anything else from a party that, in the past year or so, has mirrored some of the most popular genres of TV culture? The SNP has moved from soap opera to police drama to comedy. Its leadership contest quickly descended from "Succession" to "Game of Thrones"—and now, given its new leader's endless policy U-turns, including on arts funding, it is more reminiscent of a pantomime. The SNP claims that it is "Stronger for Scotland". I say, "Oh no it isn't."

The arts journalist Brian Ferguson described the funding cuts as

"the biggest betrayal of Scottish culture, artists and performers in modern times",

and even the most loyal of the SNP's arts and culture loyalists recognise that the blame falls squarely on SNP ministers in Edinburgh. Iona Fyfe accused the Scottish Government of flip-flopping on arts funding, arguing that workers in the culture sector have already "lost faith" in it.

The Scottish Government's response to such criticisms is, as is exemplified by its cloth-eared amendment, the usual and sadly predictable blame bingo. "It's Brexit." "It's Covid." "It's the UK's fault." However, it is not any of those things. The blame lies squarely with SNP ministers in Edinburgh, who always seem to be able to find money down the back of the Bute house sofa when they need something for their own priorities—just not for culture or the arts.

Both the Labour motion and the Scottish Conservative amendment highlight the uncertainty that the SNP's cuts are creating and the damage that they are doing. There is a real threat to jobs.

However, we risk losing much more, because our arts and culture bind together communities across the country, and help us to

“reflect on who we are, where we’ve been, where we hope to be.”

17:13

Foysoyl Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): The value of Scotland’s culture sector cannot be denied—in Edinburgh alone, upwards of 3 million people flock to the capital every August for the festival—yet our culture sector is in desperate need of help and support. Scotland is world renowned for its culture and arts, but that legacy is in danger if the culture and arts sector continues to face a lack of funding. Following a difficult few years through the Covid-19 pandemic and the cost of living crisis, continued cuts will cause many key cultural institutions to be lost if we do not step up and solve the problem.

Edinburgh is feeling the brunt of that lack of funding for culture. Last year, we saw the closure of the legendary Filmhouse in Edinburgh, after its parent company went into administration. I was happy to hear the news that the Filmhouse may reopen, due to crowdfunding, and I am hopeful that that great cultural institution will be restored. However, that is still just one example of the bleak future that our cultural institutions may have.

More recently, Creative Scotland turned down Lammermuir Festival’s funding application last month. The festival expected the grant to make up 23 per cent of its budget and now its future hangs in the balance as a result. When I questioned the Scottish Government about providing crucial funding to rural cultural projects such as the festival, the Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development reminded me that the allocation of grant funding is Creative Scotland’s responsibility. However, in previous years, Lammermuir Festival has been partly funded through that grant. Scottish Government cuts to Creative Scotland’s budget means that difficult decisions such as the one on the festival’s grant will continue to be made.

I was honoured to sponsor a celebration of the major Indian festival Dussehra last night in the Parliament. Throughout our work to support Scotland’s cultural sector, we must continue to make sure that we encourage and invite diverse cultures in Scotland to work towards a vibrant, more inclusive Scotland. That is why I was pleased to hear the minister’s comments last night about the future funding options.

It is not enough simply to rescue and support our current cultural institutions. We must ensure that Scotland’s cultural sector is protected well into the future. Only a few months ago, Scottish Opera

commented on difficulties due to a lack of young people in the industry. Arts and cultural jobs and career paths must be made available and promoted in schools alongside more traditional career pathways. Children must have access to music tuition, dance and arts throughout their educational journey. That way, we can allow our cultural sector to continue to survive.

17:17

Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP): I acknowledge that everybody in the chamber supports Scotland’s cultural sector and the fact that it is important to the economy and our lives. That includes in my constituency, where we have not only national cultural highlights such as the Japanese garden at Cowden, which is about a mile from my house, but innumerable creative businesses and two independent cinemas—one in Alloa and another at the Macrobert Arts Centre, which offers a fantastic and wide-ranging cultural and creative programme that goes far beyond simply screening films—as well as many other local creative groups that contribute immensely to public life. I think of the Dunblane museum, for example, and the Leighton library in Dunblane, which was the first purpose-built library in Scotland.

For that reason, I was pleased to hear the First Minister’s announcement last week that the Scottish Government will more than double its investment in Scotland’s arts and culture sector with an additional £100 million of funding over the next five years. That is an immense vote of confidence in our culture sector from the Scottish Government. It is merely a small additional bonus to hear all the whingeing from the Opposition parties, who seem to be far more concerned about such an announcement than they were about the culture sector before the announcement. I thank the Labour Party for taking the time to show its appreciation for the commitment in its motion, which notes

“the announcement made by the First Minister on 17 October 2023 to more than double arts and culture funding over the next five years”.

It was one of many positive announcements from the SNP conference in Aberdeen last week, and I look forward to the Labour Party supporting more of those positive announcements.

I mentioned that there are many creative organisations in the culture sector across my constituency. In our politics and society, we can often be guilty of underestimating the value of culture and the arts and focusing purely on the economic value that we know they can contribute. It was always true, but it became particularly notable during the difficult pandemic, that regardless of any economic input to or output from

the culture sector, culture and the arts are an essential part of the human experience. It is essential that we recognise that as a Parliament.

Although funding is extremely important for it, I note that there are bigger-picture constitutional considerations when it comes to Scotland's culture and arts sector. Those are not mentioned in the motion. One of the greatest upsets to Scotland's culture and arts sector in recent years has been the changes that Brexit has represented for Scottish artists. I know that the Tories hate to mention it or have it mentioned, but the artists know that to be the case, especially those who seek to tour and sell merchandise in the European Union. I am aware that some progress has been made on that, but any agreement that the UK has with the EU or individual member states is absolutely no replacement for the freedom of movement and the free movement of goods that were enjoyed by Scottish artists across the continent prior to Brexit.

If we are serious about supporting Scotland's culture sector, we should also be serious about addressing those constitutional issues. I note that Angus Robertson's amendment to the motion rightly makes that clear. I cannot think why the Brexit parties do not want to mention the issue at all, given how important it is to the sector.

Another way in which Scotland promotes our distinct culture and arts offering is through the Scottish Government's international presence. Although I note that the Labour Party has been supportive of Scotland's international ambitions in the past, the recent muscular unionism that has been on display from the Labour Party indicates that it would fall in line behind the Tories to quell Scotland's international voice if it was given the chance to do so. I therefore argue that it is very telling that the Labour Party has chosen to omit any mention of any constitutional issue from its motion.

While the SNP Government is taking action to support Scotland's culture sector by doubling funding over the next five years—I very much welcome the Government's announcement—it is clear that the current constitutional arrangement does Scotland's culture and arts sector an immense disservice, and I urge all members to consider that when they make decisions on how best to support Scotland's culture and arts sector in the future.

I support the Government's amendment.

17:21

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): This morning, I saw a social media meme on Facebook—it is clear that my phone listens to

everything that I say in my office these days—that simply said:

“Art should disturb the comfortable and comfort the disturbed.”

What does that mean? That will be the theme of my short contribution. I hope that this debate makes the Government's front-bench members somewhat uncomfortable, not because of anything that members have said so far in the debate but by virtue of the fact that it has spurred so much contact from so many individuals and organisations in the cultural sector, asking us to speak up for culture in Scotland. That leads me to believe that this debate is entirely necessary.

My region is not blessed with some of the blockbuster-sized and blockbuster-budgeted events such as the fringe or the majestic V&A, but our local culture and art are just as important as, if not even more important than, what happens in our capital and in the central belt cities. It is true that Murrayfield and the Hydro can attract Taylor Swift, but it is Greenock that attracts the Taylor Swift tribute act, which is a bestseller. “Matilda the Musical” will be gracing the presence of the Playhouse in Edinburgh, but it is the Matilda production by young people at the Prominence Academy of Performing Arts in Inverclyde that I am prouder to attract. Edinburgh's Royal Botanic Garden is putting on a wonderful Halloween trail display, but it is Greenock's Galoshans festival that inspires people in my community and neighbourhood to dress up and have fun.

It is said that all politics is local, but I would say that all culture is local, too. That is the theme of my contribution today. The sad reality is that nearly half of the organisations that are regularly funded by Creative Scotland are now deemed to be in a financially weak position. That will be no surprise to the minister, because Creative Scotland's core cash budget fell by £13 million between 2010 and 2022, according to the Scottish Parliament information centre's analytical figures on the budget. It is those that are struggling most, such as local theatre groups, youth theatres, creative arts groups and drama groups, that are doing what they can in spite of the fierce financial pressures that they face.

I say to the Government that to have overtly or even inadvertently presided over the demise of local culture is a legacy that any minister would want to—and must—avoid. Let us bear in mind that many of the projects in question are funded through local authorities, and we all know about the precarious state of local authority funding. I do not want to get into that argument today, but goodness knows what impact the council tax freeze that the First Minister has announced will have on local authorities' budgets, and especially their culture budgets. Whether we like it or not, it is

often culture that is the first thing to be dropped when we are in tough financial times.

I said that art comforts the disturbed. I am not necessarily talking about those who are disturbed or deranged, but the value of art and music and culture cannot be measured in pounds and pence. They have a much deeper value. Calls have been made for 1 per cent of the Scottish Government's budget to be spent on culture and the arts. I understand that that seems a big ask in numerical terms, but the return on that investment would surely be much higher. For a sector that contributes 4 per cent of Scotland's gross domestic product, the ROI on the money that is put into it seems to be immense.

I am afraid that Governments the world over are guilty of the same fatal error whereby culture always seems to suffer first and suffer the most in tough financial times. Funding a youth theatre group or a community orchestra is nowhere near as sexy or headline grabbing as using the same money to fund a pay rise for nurses or teachers. However, it is not just cash that is needed; it is certainty, and long-term certainty at that. That certainty will bring about the sort of self-confidence that saw Glasgow put in a bid for the Eurovision song contest. That is the sort of self-confidence that we need to see from the sector, and that starts here, with this Government.

17:25

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): I thank Labour for using its time to debate the plight of the cultural sector in Scotland.

It is a privilege to sit on the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee and be given the opportunity to learn from an incredible array of cultural organisations and artists every week. What is clear to me is that many of those bodies are real anchor organisations in their own communities. They are the spaces where artists get opportunities for paid creative work that would otherwise simply not exist and where pipelines of talent are nurtured from the grass roots up, and they are places where mental health and wellbeing can be nurtured and communities can come together to educate and organise.

During the depths of the Covid crisis, it was often cultural organisations such as Creative Stirling that helped communities to look after each other. Whether it was through opening safe spaces when others were closing them down or through delivering core services such as food ladders, those organisations were central to supporting and galvanising action. Scotland's cultural sector is not just an economic generator. It is about life, creativity and community.

I had hoped that, in this debate, we could all agree that Covid's impact on the economy, coupled with Brexit and the cost of living crisis, has helped to create a perfect storm for the cultural sector. The funding outlook was already challenging, but in this environment a small change in public funding can have a disproportionate impact on delivery. Some organisations are already stuck with what has been called doughnut funding, whereby project delivery costs are funded but the core running costs are missing.

I understand why many in the cultural sector have been concerned about recent changes to Creative Scotland's funding from the Scottish Government and what that might mean for funded organisations. However, the cabinet secretary has confirmed that £6.6 million will be paid to Creative Scotland in the upcoming financial year, which means that the reserves used in this financial year will be replenished by the Scottish Government.

Of course, that does not mean that everything is fixed. The long-term future for cultural funding remains challenging. The funding settlement that has been given to the Scottish Government from Westminster does not keep pace with inflation and it is forcing difficult choices. We must find a way forward that provides the financial security and certainty that our cultural sector deserves, so I am pleased that the First Minister has made the commitment to double cultural funding. Like many members, I look forward to examining the detail of that in the forthcoming budget.

We now need to take the opportunity to radically rethink the way in which the sector is funded in order to secure a future for it and its workers. We need a long-term strategy for culture that pivots away from stop-start funding towards multiyear budgets and values the wider benefits that culture brings, including through preventative spending and creative use of the transient visitor levy at local level. We need a strategy that co-produces with the cultural sector and reflects calls from artists' unions for fair work conditionality on arts funding to value, protect and grow the workforce while attracting even more talent, and a strategy that encourages the big culture sector to support its grass roots, whether that is through a levy on stadium tickets or through screen companies giving back to communities that host big-budget productions.

Cultural organisations have shown the incredible value that they deliver. It is time for the Government to help to reset its relationship with the sector, build on trust and allow it to thrive.

17:29

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I am going to say that this is a very reasonable motion—up to a point. It is very reasonable that, across the chamber, we are collectively recognising, through many local examples, the great contribution that arts and culture bring to Scotland's life.

It is reasonable to note the £4.5 billion of value to our economy and the 80,000 jobs that the arts and culture sector supports. It is reasonable to mention the “perfect storm”—a phrase from our committee evidence. It is reasonable to recognise Covid and its impact on our cultural sector. It is reasonable to mention Brexit and its impact on our touring artists. It is reasonable to talk about the cost of living crisis and the fuel costs that have affected our place-based cultural organisations. Covid, Brexit and the cost of living crisis have played their part.

Support from the Scottish Government was highlighted by Mr Gibson, and the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee also highlighted that in our budget scrutiny work. However—here is where reason leaves the Labour argument—if members come to the chamber demanding that money be restored to that budget, where should that money come from?

Neil Bibby: The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Europe gave a clear promise in February to restore £6.6 million and then did a U-turn. It is the Scottish Government's problem. You need to deliver on your promises.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Through the chair.

Clare Adamson: The cabinet secretary came to our committee and explained what the pressures have been in-year on the Scottish Government's budget. He explained the settlements for pay across different portfolio areas. He talked about increased costs as a result of Liz Truss's trashing of our economy and the impact that that has had on all organisations. I remind members that we are the only place in the UK that did not have a junior doctors strike, because we were able to settle that dispute.

We had a Labour Party debate this afternoon on the skills coming from our colleges. We heard calls to have more modern apprenticeships, to settle the college pay disputes and to invest more money, but we live on a fixed budget. It is not reasonable to say that that money should be put back into the portfolio this year without saying where the money will come from, because the money that the Scottish Government has is being spent across portfolios for the benefit of the Scottish people.

We also heard the cabinet secretary say that he has made an argument about major events. People have asked, “Where are the budget areas?” but nobody talked about major events. The UCI world cycling championships came under the culture budget this year. The cabinet secretary made the argument that, when there are budgetary pressures, such as from major events in Scotland, they should be spread across portfolios and not fall on what is, as has been said, the Scottish Government portfolio with the smallest budget.

We should support our arts, and we do support our arts. In fact, the Scottish Government has given £33 million over five years to fill the gap from lottery funding, which was a commitment that was made for three years. This year, Creative Scotland has been asked to use its reserves at no detriment to any regularly funded organisation. I will work with any member on the question of where the money is coming from if they have a reasonable argument for supporting our culture.

17:33

Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con): I agree with the sentiments made by a number of colleagues that it is extremely disappointing to see the Scottish National Party Government continue its deprioritisation of culture through its deep and enduring real-terms cuts in funding to the sector. Creative Scotland is faced with the “perfect storm” of recovering from the pandemic, the cost of living crisis and wage inflation, and one third of the bodies that it funds are at risk of insolvency, as pointed out by Pauline McNeill and Foysoil Choudhury.

The SNP has turned the screw on the sector by reimposing a 10 per cent reduction in Creative Scotland's budget. If Creative Scotland had not found that money from its now-depleted reserves, it would have amounted to a 40 per cent reduction in its upcoming quarterly payments to regularly funded organisations. Those organisations, as highlighted in Neil Bibby's motion and during the debate, are already at breaking point.

Neil Bibby pointed out that a promise is a promise and it must be kept, and Alex Cole-Hamilton stated that we dismiss the importance of arts and culture at our peril. In an entertaining and insightful speech, Jamie Halcro Johnston said that culture helps us reflect on who we are, where we have been and where we hope to be. Jamie Greene spoke about his region and the importance of local arts and culture, including a Taylor Swift tribute act in Greenock. I only wish that I still represented the west of Scotland; I might pop along.

I echo the point that has been made by many today that, within weeks of the announcement to break a promise and slash Creative Scotland's budget, the First Minister stood in front of his conference and made another promise to double the culture budget within five years; the SNP will not be in government in five years.

Keith Brown: Would Maurice Golden acknowledge that 13 years of austerity economics has had any impact on public services in Scotland? Also, can he point to one instance in the past 16 years when the Tory party has proposed an amendment seeking more funding for culture?

Maurice Golden: When I was covering the culture budget, I made many proposals—including an arts bill that would secure long-term funding for Scottish arts and culture—and I fundamentally agree with that.

If the First Minister is serious about supporting the sector, then rather than making new promises he could start by not breaking existing ones. We have heard this quote numerous times, but it is worth repeating. The CEO of Creative Scotland said in response to the cut:

"It will deepen the concern within the sector about support for culture. It is an erosion of faith and trust."

The First Minister should reflect on that because, with the culture sector's faith and trust in the Scottish Government lost, does he think that anyone will believe him when he announces long-term support while almost simultaneously reneging on budget promises on a whim?

We on the Conservative benches are fully supportive of the Labour motion today. Our culture sector is too important. The economic benefits are massive in terms of creating jobs and promoting tourism, but there are less tangible benefits in addition to those.

As my colleague Alexander Stewart pointed out in his speech and amendment today, warm words from the First Minister are not enough; we need firm commitments including a sustainable long-term funding model that would provide multiyear certainty to the sector.

17:37

The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development (Christina McKelvie): First, I thank my colleagues from across the chamber for their contributions today. Among it all, there has been some joy and much to be proud of, and I am very pleased that we have had the opportunity to discuss the Scottish Government's continued commitment to culture.

Jamie Greene asked us to be uncomfortable. I am sure that the Brexit parties here today are uncomfortable. Well—I hope that they are. Much

of the perfect storm that the sector is weathering was, in fact, created by UK Government policy, and I have heard directly from stakeholders across Scotland about the challenges that are posed by Brexit. That was also highlighted in conversations that Keith Brown has had.

Leaving the EU has taken away important structures that supported the Scottish culture sector's international relationships. The Creative Europe programme, for example—which was mentioned by Kenny Gibson—was a valuable resource for Scotland's culture sector. It provided funding but it also—which is most important—supported the development of connections with peers across the EU. That scheme cannot be replaced through domestic alternatives.

Moreover, our ability to respond to the impacts—never mind the cost crisis—is limited by the inactivity of the UK Government and the financial restrictions of devolution.

The Scottish Tories suggest in their amendment that we should support their arts bill, which is a promise from the Conservative manifesto of 2021 that—like many other bill proposals from the Tories—we are yet to see. I think that they said: "A promise is a promise."

I reassure Parliament that our long-term recovery plans will look to address challenges collaboratively and strategically in order to secure a more stable and sustainable future for the culture sector and the people whose livelihoods and wellbeing rely on it. That is why I welcome the First Minister's announcement. That work is already under way and, as the cabinet secretary said, we are working with the sector on our approach and are happy to work with anyone on it.

Tomorrow, I will meet trade union representatives to hear their thoughts on arts and culture funding. Our conversations will continue. I am more than happy to discuss the fair funding measures that Kenny Gibson and other MSPs have called for today. Additionally, I am pleased that the culture conveners are again meeting in response to actions that have been developed under our culture strategy. That is welcome, as we seek collectively to address the pressing issues that we face.

Jamie Greene mentioned Inverclyde and the area that he represents. I recently had the great honour of visiting the Inverclyde Culture Collective and seeing how our local authorities, our culture sector and, more importantly, our communities are working with the collective to create wonderful opportunities. It is a great example.

I co-chair the culture conveners group with COSLA's spokesperson for community and wellbeing, Councillor Maureen Chalmers, and we are working with the group on how local and

national organisations can work together to support and promote culture. I hope that other members will do the same. The work includes exploring and discussing provision of culture services and the impact of the cost of living crisis, the pandemic and Brexit, as well as an accessible recovery, all of which were highlighted eloquently by Clare Adamson.

It is clear that to harness that potential fully we need to collaborate strategically across central and local government, using all the lessons, levers and comparative advantage—

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): Will the minister take an intervention?

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The minister is about to conclude.

Christina McKelvie: A number of MSPs have asked about Screen Machine. I can update Kenny Gibson, Alex Cole-Hamilton and others on that. The Scottish Government is engaging with Screen Scotland to explore all avenues for supporting the future of Screen Machine. The cabinet secretary met Screen Scotland on 5 October to hear directly about the support that Screen Machine needs, so we are continuing that work.

As I saw at the wonderful Dussehra event that was hosted by Foysoyl Choudhury last night, we are a nation that cherishes culture for its empowering, strengthening and transformative power, as is underlined in “A Culture Strategy for Scotland”. In the coming months, we will publish a refreshed culture strategy action plan, which has been developed through close engagement with the sector and will respond to the challenges.

I want to make a point about Creative Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: Do so very briefly, please, minister.

Christina McKelvie: I am coming to an end. Clare Adamson reminded us that we provided Creative Scotland with more than £33 million over five years.

Jamie Halcro Johnston: Will the minister take an intervention on that point?

The Presiding Officer: The minister is concluding.

Christina McKelvie: That was to compensate for reduced lottery funding. We now face difficult decisions about Government funding. The time is right for Creative Scotland to draw on those—

The Presiding Officer: I must ask you to conclude, minister. Thank you.

I call Sarah Boyack to wind up. You have up to five minutes.

17:42

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): In closing the debate for Scottish Labour, I feel as if I have gone back in time, because this is exactly the same debate as the one we had last year about the proposed cuts to the Creative Scotland budget that would have had a huge impact on a sector that was facing a perfect storm.

Our motion is absolutely clear, so it is so good to hear members across the chamber accepting that the creative sector makes a huge contribution to the Scottish economy, because culture is part of who we are as a country. The Edinburgh festivals have an impact in my region. They also have a global reach and create jobs and opportunities for people to access culture on their doorsteps, but many people who live in our area still find it hard to afford to go to the festivals. We have to make our culture affordable across the country.

Scottish Labour has worked hard with the sector, because the challenge of uncertain annual funding has had huge impacts on it. Putting on cultural events needs long-term planning and commitment to be successful—not in-year budget cuts and vague promises. Last year, the evidence sessions at the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee were powerful. John Leighton summed it up by saying that the challenge was to

“keep the lights on and doors open”.—[*Official Report, Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee, 29 September 2022; c 25.*]

It is therefore absolutely heartbreaking to hear the evidence that has been given at committee this year and which Neil Bibby quoted in his speech. The evidence is powerful, because the sector is facing the same challenges and has been worried that it will get more cuts. Organisations such as Culture Counts and the trade unions have done a fantastic job of standing up for their members and our communities by making the case for investing in culture.

It is important that the SNP Government does not just talk about culture. Warm words will not cut it; we need to see the evidence. That is why we have asked again and again when the £100 million will be allocated and how it will be spent. We have had two years in which cuts have been proposed in the budget, and we have potential U-turns. That is the last thing that our culture sector needs.

Christina McKelvie: Can I answer that question for you?

Sarah Boyack: If you are going to give us the detail as to exactly how you are going to spend it even in this year’s budget, that would be a step forward.

The Presiding Officer: Speak through the chair, please, minister.

Christina McKelvie: Thank you very much for taking the intervention—I know that time is tight, so I will be quick.

The draft budget will be proposed to Parliament on 19 December, so I would welcome your involvement in that.

Sarah Boyack: Again, that does not clarify the issue of this year's budget, at all. The creative organisations are waiting, and are praying that they will get the resources.

In Edinburgh—as Alex Cole-Hamilton and Foysof Choudhury mentioned—we have a fundraising campaign by the Filmhouse team. They have two weeks—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Ms Boyack, could you give me a moment?

I ask colleagues to cease conversations while Ms Boyack is speaking.

Please continue, Ms Boyack.

Sarah Boyack: Thank you, Presiding Officer—I should not have to shout.

The Filmhouse team has two weeks to go to meet the fundraising target that it has set. It has done phenomenally well, but again, the problem is uncertainty.

Comments have been made today about the Scottish Government proposing to use Creative Scotland's reserves. That is a huge reversal of the Government's approach. The whole point of reserves is that they are meant to be there for crisis situations. It is an irony—is it not?—that a crisis is exactly what the Scottish Government has itself created.

We know that we have a cost of living crisis, and about the challenges that have followed the Brexit vote. The Scottish Government needs to address those challenges—it does not need to do U-turns year after year and make cuts to Creative Scotland's budgets.

Only this week, National Museums Scotland—a nationally funded organisation—warned that it is having “a struggle for survival”. The national performing companies have been mentioned several times today. Their budget has been frozen since the financial year 2016-17. That is how bad things are.

We note the £100 million that has been suggested, but we have not been told in either of the Government speeches how that figure has been arrived at, how the funding will happen, how it will be distributed and how we will see decent funding for our local authorities. In that regard, we

hear that discussions are on-going but, as we saw recently, the Verity house agreement is not exactly respected in detail.

How do we know that every school in Scotland is going to have the music, arts and dancing tuition that every young person should be able to access? We need the funding; if the Scottish Government was serious about the matter, we would have heard about that today. As ever, though, there is no certainty. It is particularly disappointing that we did not get that clarified.

I would be very interested to hear the detail of Alexander Stewart's proposed arts bill. As members have commented, we have been hearing about the bill for some time, so we would like to see the detail.

In closing, I note that I hope that colleagues on all sides of the chamber will do the right thing and call on the Scottish Government to reverse the proposed 10 per cent budget cut for Creative Scotland with immediate effect, and to set out in detail how it intends to increase the arts and culture budget. The timescales are critical for organisations that must invest in staff. As Pauline McNeill said, fair terms and conditions and longer contracts mean a longer-term financial commitment—

The Presiding Officer: Please conclude.

Sarah Boyack: Companies that are putting on shows in two years need to know that they will have the money. Let us come together and support the Labour motion, and let us have a refreshed strategy—

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Boyack.

Sarah Boyack: —that is actually funded properly.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on supporting Scotland's culture sector.

Business Motion

17:48

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-10950, 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 31 October 2023

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Rural and Islands Housing Action Plan

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 1 November 2023

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy;
Finance and Parliamentary Business

followed by Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.10 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 2 November 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: The Edinburgh Tram Inquiry Report

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Early Childhood Development Transformational Change Programme

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 7 November 2023

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee Debate: A Modern and Sustainable Ferry Service for Scotland

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 8 November 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 9 November 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 30 October 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 five Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motions S6M-10951 to S6M-10953, on approval of Scottish statutory instruments; motion S6M-10954, on designation of a lead committee; and motion S6M-10960, on suspension of standing orders.

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (George Adam): Every single one moved, Presiding Officer.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that the Carer's Assistance (Carer Support Payment) (Scotland) Regulations 2023 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Deposit and Return Scheme for Scotland (Miscellaneous Amendment) Regulations 2023 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Legal Aid and Advice and Assistance (Miscellaneous Amendment) (Scotland) (No. 4) Regulations 2023 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Abortion Services (Safe Access Zones) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

That the Parliament agrees that, for the purposes of consideration of the second supplementary legislative consent memorandum on the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Bill, Rule 9B.3.5 of Standing Orders is suspended.

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

The next item of business is consideration of motion S6M-10913, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument. I call Shirley-Anne Somerville to move the motion.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Social Security (Residence and Presence Requirements) (Israel, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem, the Golan Heights and Lebanon) (Scotland) Regulations 2023 [draft] be approved.—[*Shirley-Anne Somerville*]

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

Decision Time

17:49

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): There are eight questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Graeme Dey is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Murdo Fraser will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S6M-10922.2, in the name of Graeme Dey, which seeks to amend motion S6M-10922, in the name of Daniel Johnson, on ensuring that Scotland's skills system is fit for the future, be agreed to. Are we all agreed?

Members: No.

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

17:50

Meeting suspended.

17:52

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: The question is, that amendment S6M-10922.2, in the name of Graeme Dey, be agreed to. Members should cast their votes now.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (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)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)

Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 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)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)

McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 65, Against 52, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: Amendment S6M-10922.1, in the name of Murdo Fraser, falls.

The next question is, that motion S6M-10922, in the name of Daniel Johnson, on ensuring that Scotland's skills system is fit for the future, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app would not work. I would have noted no.

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

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (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)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)

Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

Against

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Dowe, 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)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 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

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-10922, in the name of Daniel Johnson, as amended, is: For 65, Against 30, Abstentions 22.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

That the Parliament notes the findings of the independent review of the skills delivery landscape, which it accepts set out a clear case for change; agrees that the skills landscape must fit the needs of the people of Scotland to ensure that everyone can fulfil their potential; understands that the Scottish Government will set out a full response to the independent review in the wider context of reform of the education and skills system, as set out in the Programme for Government 2023-24; agrees that it is right that the Scottish Government engages fully with stakeholders before setting out its full response, including education institutions, industry and trade unions; recognises that the Scottish Government's ambitions for a just transition will be supported by the delivery of the Green Industrial Strategy; acknowledges that funding is being provided to support up to 25,500 new Modern Apprenticeship starts in 2023-24; welcomes the many areas of success in the skills landscape at present, such as the proportion of school leavers in a positive destination nine months after the end of the school year standing at its highest level since comparable data was first gathered; recognises that effective utilisation of the skills system will be vital in ensuring that Scotland has the workforce skills to meet its ambitious net zero targets and the wider needs of the future economy; welcomes the Scottish Government's £500 million Just Transition Fund and the £75 million allocated in the Fund's first two years, which includes £11.2 million on a package of skills-focused interventions; acknowledges that this is a 10-year fund, and that the Scottish Government is acting to support workers now, and in the future, with the skills needed to deliver Scotland's just transition towards net zero; expresses deep disappointment that the UK Government has repeatedly refused to match

the Scottish Government's Just Transition Fund, and calls, therefore, on all parties in the Scottish Parliament to work to secure a matching commitment from the UK Government.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-10917.2, in the name of Angus Robertson, which seeks to amend motion S6M-10917, in the name of Neil Bibby, on supporting Scotland's culture sector, 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)
 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)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

Against

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

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-10917.2, in the name

of Angus Robertson, is: For 65, Against 51, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-10917.1, in the name of Alexander Stewart, which seeks to amend motion S6M-10917, in the name of Neil Bibby, on supporting Scotland's culture sector, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 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)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 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)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (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)

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

Abstentions

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-10917.1, in the name of Alexander Stewart, is: For 33, Against 65, Abstentions 19.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-10917, in the name of Neil Bibby, on supporting Scotland's culture sector, 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)
 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)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

Against

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

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-10917, in the name of Neil

Bibby, as amended, is: For 65, Against 52, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament values greatly the enormous contribution of the arts and culture sector to Scotland's national life and economy, noting that the creative industry is estimated to be worth nearly £4.5 billion and 80,000 jobs; understands that, in common with other sectors, arts and culture organisations are experiencing significant pressure due to increases in the cost of living as a consequence of Brexit, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the actions of the UK Government; welcomes that Creative Scotland has confirmed that it has used its reserves to ensure that funding for regularly funded organisations has been maintained in 2023-24; notes that, over the last five years, the Scottish Government has provided over £33 million to Creative Scotland to compensate for a shortfall in National Lottery funding; supports the Scottish Government's plan to more than double arts and culture funding by £100 million over the next five years; endorses the Scottish Government's aim of working with the culture sector to implement the refreshed culture strategy action plan, and believes that the UK Government should match this stated ambition and at least double its investment in arts and culture over the same period.

The Presiding Officer: If no one objects, I propose to ask a single question on five Parliamentary Bureau motions.

The question is, that motions S6M-10951 to S6M-10953, on the approval of Scottish statutory instruments, S6M-10954, on the designation of a lead committee, and S6M-10960, on the suspension of standing orders, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Carer's Assistance (Carer Support Payment) (Scotland) Regulations 2023 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Deposit and Return Scheme for Scotland (Miscellaneous Amendment) Regulations 2023 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Legal Aid and Advice and Assistance (Miscellaneous Amendment) (Scotland) (No. 4) Regulations 2023 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Abortion Services (Safe Access Zones) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

That the Parliament agrees that, for the purposes of consideration of the second supplementary legislative consent memorandum on the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Bill, Rule 9B.3.5 of Standing Orders is suspended.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S6M-10913, in the name of Shirley-Anne Somerville, on the approval of an SSI, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Social Security (Residence and Presence Requirements) (Israel, the West

Bank, the Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem, the Golan Heights and Lebanon) (Scotland) Regulations 2023 [draft] be approved.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Climate Justice

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-10793, in the name of Maggie Chapman, on climate justice and support for a global loss and damage fund. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises what it sees as the severe impact that human-caused climate change is having on the planet; believes that communities across Scotland, including in the North East Scotland region, as well as globally, are already being negatively affected by the climate emergency; considers that, disproportionately, those most acutely affected by these impacts are those who have contributed the least to the climate crisis; believes that this is a fundamental and grave injustice, compounded by histories of colonialism and oppression; welcomes the decision at the 27th UN climate conference (COP27) to establish an international solidarity fund for climate-related loss and damage; recognises and welcomes that Scotland reportedly played a key role in breaking a 30-year logjam on loss and damage after COP26 in Glasgow; notes and welcomes the reported support of parliamentarians across the world for the loss and damage pledge, including supporters in the Scottish Parliament, and notes the calls on the UK Government, as a party to the 28th UN climate conference (COP28), to support the operationalisation of the fund, to ensure that the money attributed is new and additional to the climate finance commitments already made, and not taken from existing official development assistance budgets, and to commit to providing loss and damage finance in the form of grants, not loans.

18:05

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): I am pleased to lead the debate. I thank all members who supported the motion to enable us to talk about this subject now. I also pay tribute to the third sector organisations, especially the Stop Climate Chaos Scotland coalition, Christian Aid and the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund, who have done so much painstaking work on this vital issue.

Climate devastation is here. After the raging tempest of the past week, no one in Scotland, especially in the north-east, can be in any real doubt about that. I hold in my heart all who have suffered in their homes, their families, their communities and their livelihoods, and most especially the families and friends of those who lost their lives in such sad circumstances.

Everyone, everywhere, is affected by the impacts of climate change. For a fortunate few, so far, those may seem little more than inconveniences. That is the deadly gamble that Rishi Sunak and his Westminster Government are throwing the dice for, in the cynical hope that voters will be incapable of looking out of their own

windows to see the storms on the horizon. I do not believe that it will work in England, and I know that it will not work in Scotland. We face not only more extreme weather events, such as storm Babet, with all the destruction that they bring, but slower and quieter assaults such as coastal erosion, which threatens to displace whole communities; decimated harvests; degraded soils; wildfires and floods; disease; loss of home and habitat; and extinction of keystone and beloved species. That is unthinkable painful, even for us, here and now, with all our accumulated privilege and defence. For the next generations, it will be harder still.

For billions of our fellow humans across the world, the blow falls now, heavily and relentlessly. In the majority world—the global south—climate devastation is a daily reality for many. It is lived out in bodies and homes, in year after year of disrupted seasons—rains that come late or not at all, or come too hard, washing away the frail shoots of hope—and in year after year of lost harvests, lost water resources, lost livelihoods and lost children. That is not down to bad luck, poor planning or insufficient resilience. It is an injustice that is as brutal as it gets.

The people who bear the heaviest burden of climate chaos are, almost universally, those who are least responsible for its reality. However we might calculate emissions, theirs are minute—they are scarcely visible on the charts. Far from benefiting from the fossil economy and the capitalism that it supports, they have borne the curse of extractivism and the exploitation of resources, environment and labour. Colonial and post-colonial oppressions have forced them to use precious land for export crops, denied them the kind of economy that can brazenly outsource its emissions, and callously suppressed indigenous people whose knowledge of and care for non-human nature we need now more than ever.

Our response to this gravest of crises must be wide and it must be deep. It must acknowledge that in many ways the decision makers of Scotland and the United Kingdom have been complicit in colonialism and climate injustice. It must impel us towards rapid emissions reduction, urgent decarbonisation and global co-operation on both mitigation and adaptation. However, it requires us to do more.

Escalating emissions have led to climate impacts that it is now too late to prevent or adapt to. They can be addressed only by compensation, reparations and the provision of resources by those most responsible. That is what we mean by loss and damage. They include harms that are tangible and intangible, and economic and non-economic, and those that are caused by either rapid or slow-onset events.

Scotland has played an important role in amplifying the issue of loss and damage, not least in its symbolic and real commitment at the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP26. I pay tribute to and thank Nicola Sturgeon for her leadership on that, which helped to bring about the decision at last year's COP to establish an international loss and damage solidarity fund. Now, however, we urgently need to do more.

That global loss and damage fund exists only as an idea. Many of us had hoped that, at this year's COP, in just a few weeks' time, that idea would become operational following the work of the transitional committee, of which the UK is a member and which has been working on the issue over the past year. However, I am angry and bitterly disappointed that, just last weekend, at the last of four meetings of the transitional committee, it failed to draft recommendations on the operationalisation of the global loss and damage fund.

There will now be an extra meeting in November, at which I hope that the European Union and the US will listen to the Alliance of Small Island States—AOSIS—and other developing countries and will not impose the World Bank's business model on them or the fund. AOSIS is clear that that does not work for it. Again, the developed countries are trying to control and determine other people's futures. Developing countries are also clear on who should be eligible for the fund: it should be all developing countries. Again, the global north wants to restrict eligibility.

There are several other points of disagreement between developed and developing countries, but the fund must be governed robustly, with effective resources that meet the need of compensation and with the weight of financial contribution resting squarely on the shoulders of those who are most responsible.

That procedural work must be followed by substantive finance from the UK to the new fund. That must be new money, reflecting the historical and current responsibilities that the UK bears. It cannot simply be redesigned funds from the already insufficient climate finance or development and aid budgets. It must be based on need, and not on benefit to UK businesses and geopolitical interests. It must take the form of grants, and not loans that suck countries further into the spiral of toxic debt. It must not be used as an excuse to avoid the essential work of emissions reduction and adaptation. Its costs must not be borne by the people and communities who are already suffering from the domestic crises of cost, greed and underinvestment here. "Polluter pays" must mean just that.

We in Scotland need to amplify those messages, speaking with clarity and conscience. There is specific work that we can do here to develop and expand Scotland's loss and damage programme and our wider climate justice fund, ensuring that its work is locally led, transparent and effective, and sharing what we have learned, and what we have yet to learn, with generosity and humility.

I urge members to consider signing the global parliamentarians' pledge on loss and damage. I invite all colleagues to attend an event that I will host next Tuesday, when we will hear directly from representatives of the global south about the devastating impacts that our industrial revolution and fossil economy have had on them.

We carry knowledge of our history and of the ways in which we have failed in justice, in solidarity, in compassion and in humanity, but we also carry a determination to do better. Now is the time to make that real.

18:13

Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow Southside) (SNP):

I thank Maggie Chapman for securing this important debate. This is a topic that goes to the very heart of the moral obligation—I use that term deliberately—that developed countries owe to those in the global south. The devastating effects of climate change are now impossible for any politician, bar the mendacious, to deny or ignore. Here in Scotland, as Maggie Chapman has just reflected on, storm Babet has just delivered a tragic reminder that those impacts are now being felt everywhere. My thoughts, too, are with those who have been affected.

Although the impacts are global, they fall most acutely, and massively disproportionately, on countries that have done the least to cause climate change—countries that are already poorer and less equipped to deal with the consequences of the emissions that have fuelled the prosperity of those of us in the developed world. For example, the carbon emissions of countries in east Africa are negligible in a global context, and yet human-induced climate change has contributed to drought and famine there—a hunger crisis that, earlier this year, was estimated to be claiming two lives every single minute.

Finance provided by rich countries to help the poorest deal with climate change is woefully inadequate. Shamefully, the much-lauded \$100 million-per-year commitment, first made 14 years ago, has still not been delivered in full. As well as being inadequate, such finance is also far too limited in scope. Current funding covers mitigation action to reduce emissions and adaptation action

to build resilience through, for example, flood defences.

Both of those matter—of course they do—and they are hugely important. However, not covered at all at this stage is the loss and damage being wrought by the impacts of climate change that are of a type and scale that can no longer be mitigated or adapted to. Such impacts are already causing loss of life, loss of livelihoods and enforced changes to how and where people live, and they are doing so on a truly massive scale.

Countries and individuals across the global south have been campaigning for explicit recognition of and recompense for loss and damage for 30 years, yet it was only at COP26 in Glasgow that the first glimmer of a breakthrough was made. I am very proud that Scotland played its part and became the first developed country in the world to pledge funding for loss and damage. Momentum continued last year at COP27 in Egypt, with an agreement to set up a dedicated fund and the establishment of a transitional committee to agree the detail. Again, Scotland was at the forefront of efforts to make that progress.

However, it will be at COP28 in Dubai, in just a few weeks' time, that we will know whether those promises are to be honoured—indeed, whether it is any longer possible to expect global south countries to keep faith with the multilateral process at all. I hope for the best, but already fear the worst. By all accounts, progress in the transitional committee is nowhere near where it should be.

In the short time that I have today, I simply want to add my voice to those demanding true climate justice. COP28 must ensure that the loss and damage fund becomes operational without delay. It must be open to all developing countries. The finance that it offers must be additional to that already available for mitigation and adaptation. It must be in the form of grants, not loans. To deepen the indebtedness of developing countries would not address injustice—it would compound it. Such finance must cover the full range of the loss and damage that are being suffered. That means not just the impacts of sudden events such as floods and storms, but those of slow-onset climatic changes, and not just the impacts of economic loss, such as damage to infrastructure, but those of non-economic loss of life, culture and heritage.

My final call falls closer to home. I understand—probably more than most members in the chamber—the financial pressures confronting Government. However, I ask the Scottish Government to ensure that our overall climate justice fund commitment for this Parliament, which increased during COP26, is delivered in full and that, as a bare minimum—I stress that—we honour in full the world-leading commitments that

have been made to loss and damage funding. This is a matter of basic justice. It is the obligation that we owe to those in the global south who pay the price of our prosperity. I hope that Scotland will continue to lead the way.

18:18

Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con):

I thank Maggie Chapman for bringing this important debate to Parliament. Climate change is a global threat, which means that we all have a responsibility to act, especially when those who will be impacted most are often least able to adapt.

Many organisations, such as SCIAF and Tearfund, are working hard to improve access to food, water and energy in those vulnerable communities. I will always be grateful for the opportunity that I got to witness and support those efforts during my trip to Nepal with Tearfund in 2018.

The work of such charities is important, impactful and inspirational. However, what we need most is for Governments to take action, which is why the decision at COP27 to establish a loss and damage fund was so significant. There are still operational details to work out, but I welcome the UK's commitment to encourage mobilisation of a broad range of finance.

That builds on COP27's recognition of the role that private finance can play in supporting climate projects. The UK Government has a strong track record here. Between 2011 and 2023, it has driven significant investment in climate projects in developing countries, with £6.9 billion of public finance and £6.8 billion of private finance. That combination of public and private funding is vital, given the scale of the threat that we face. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, up to 3.6 billion people—almost half the entire human race—live in areas deemed “highly vulnerable” to climate change.

Let me also say—as I have done before—that I welcome the role that the Scottish Government has played in helping to mitigate climate impacts in vulnerable communities, such as through training women in leadership roles. I have also urged it to do more, such as supporting efforts to provide reliable waste management services in developing countries. A 2019 Tearfund report estimated that as many as 1 million people a year die from mismanaged waste—that is one person every 30 seconds. So, action on that would save lives as well as tackling climate change and laying the foundation for circular economies.

I am pleased that the UK has been active on that issue, having committed millions in funding, but, historically, waste management has received

little global attention. Solid waste management accounted for less than 1 per cent of development funding between 2003 and 2012, according to the International Solid Waste Association. Scotland has a wealth of technical expertise and experience in waste management, so there is an opportunity for the Scottish Government to draw on that to help provide training and solutions for developing countries.

We also have an opportunity to support Britain's global effort to support those at risk from climate change. Since 2011, we have provided direct support to help more than 100 million people cope with climate change effects; improved access to clean energy for 69 million people; and reduced or avoided 86 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions.

Of course, there is more to do. Although I recognise the commitment of the UK Government, welcoming that does not mean that we have to support everything that it does. As members know, I have been quick to point out where I think that it is not doing enough. However, if we do not recognise where progress is made, it risks making calls to go further and do more sound hollow.

18:22

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): I congratulate Maggie Chapman on securing the debate and on her speech.

As others have said, this summer, we saw the impact of climate change right across Europe—we have discussed that in previous debates. Temperatures across southern Europe reached 40°C, and that is now being discussed as the kind of temperature level that we might experience in the future. In the middle east, the temperature reached 50°C, and countries in east Asia have been experiencing very high temperatures for a long time. However, I think that this summer brought things home to us.

Colleagues and constituents will have had horrendous experiences over the past few weeks. Two weeks ago, we had a month's rain in 24 hours, which saw our railway industry come to a halt, and, this afternoon, we discussed the impact of storm Babet. However, countries such as Bangladesh and Pakistan have experienced major and damaging floods for years. This is not new to them. We woke up to it when we saw the scale of the flood in Pakistan last year, which impacted 33 million people. The scale of that is hard for us to imagine but, when we start looking at the issue, we see that Bangladesh had floods more than a decade ago that had a massive impact on the country. We have been waking up to the issue slowly. For countries in sub-Saharan Africa, and in east Africa in particular, drought has a massive

impact on their capacity to grow food and access clean drinking water, which leads to vulnerability to diseases.

We have to be up front that the climate emergency has been here for a long time but that we have not reached the stage at which we have begun to deliver the support that we need to.

I was going to talk about two key areas in which we need to act, but Maurice Golden has made me add another. First, we need to work together to deliver on our own climate targets. There is a leadership issue in that regard. The fact that the industrial revolution started in central Scotland is something that we can be proud of, although we should not necessarily be proud of the climate emissions. We need to think that through in relation to our homes and buildings, transport and land. The leadership that we could provide by meeting our own radical targets would be important.

Secondly, on the points that Maurice Golden made about a circular economy, we have had cross-party groups and briefings, and we have a bill in front of us. It is about thinking about how we take responsibility and do not simply use our waste more wisely but create less in the first place by reusing, repairing and remaking. We need to do more in relation to those difficult angles.

The third issue is what everybody has been talking about today, which is leading on climate justice, loss and damage. Two years ago, we started debating the issue in the cross-party group on international development, and we heard incredibly powerful evidence from different countries about the impact that climate change was having at that time. They came up with clear and specific asks for us in order to see progress at COP26. We heard from Maggie Chapman and Nicola Sturgeon today about the leadership role that we played as a country in making the recommendations, but we have not seen the progress that we would want to. At COP27, we agreed the principle, but we have not seen the action that we need in advance of COP28.

I thank SCIAF and Oxfam for the briefings that they sent in advance of today's debate. Both were incredibly useful. In looking at what loss and damage mean in practice, we have to look at the impact on countries that need the funding now, particularly low-income and middle-income countries. The money needs to be accessible to communities in the global south so that they can decide how it is spent. It also needs to be restorative and in the form of grants, not loans. That issue has come up in the cross-party group on international development. There is a huge impact on the health and education services of low-income countries that have massive debts that they are not able to pay off. It is crucial to see loss

and damage funding as investment and grants and to use subsidiarity principles underpinned by human rights.

The information from SCIAF about the impact of climate change included the point that, according to United Nations statistics, women and children are 14 times more likely to die in a disaster than men and that, with every disaster, women's rights and progress are threatened. It is a now issue, with impacts right across the world.

The last point that I will make is that we need an efficient and effective response through loss and damage funding. We need to provide not only a rapid response but long-term support. We can be proud of the UK's Disasters Emergency Committee, and we can see that members of the public are happy to donate. People who have cash are willing to make donations, but the challenge is that we need long-term support. We need support not only for charities but for countries in order that they can make the investment that will protect people from future climate disasters. We need to give them the resource to invest, adapt and tackle the challenge, which is a now issue.

We know that we will have more and more extreme weather events such as droughts, floods and cyclones, and that low-income countries will be most impacted. We have a duty and a responsibility, so coming together today is not only symbolic but important.

18:29

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): This is, indeed, a short debate, but I echo Sarah Boyack's comments about its importance. The cabinet secretary might wish to consider whether, in due course, the Government might bring forward a longer debate in which we can consider the issue, probably in the aftermath of COP28.

I, too, offer my thanks to organisations such as SCIAF and Oxfam, principally for the work that they do on climate justice but also, in the context of the debate, for the briefings that they provided, which make for very grim reading.

There is no doubt or dispute that the climate emergency and crisis that we face is a global one. In recent weeks, we have had immediate evidence that there is not really a part of the world that the climate emergency does not touch. However, I think that everybody recognises that there is a gross imbalance in the way in which those effects are manifesting themselves now and will manifest themselves in the future.

There are economic impacts. Christian Aid has set out some of the impacts that we are already seeing in respect of gross domestic product per person and the reductions in the global south.

There are also health impacts, given the excess deaths that there have been. Figures from the World Health Organization are truly alarming, and they are set to get even worse. There is the loss of things such as heritage, culture and community, which are very difficult to regain and rebuild if they are lost.

I have had the privilege to be one of the co-conveners of the Scottish Parliament cross-party group on Malawi over a number of sessions. Malawi is not the country in the global south that is worst affected in this regard, but we have seen the devastating impacts that floods and droughts have had over the years and their effect in diverting funds away from building resilience and encouraging diversification in crop production, for example, into the immediate and urgent life-saving efforts that are required on the back of such devastating floods and droughts. For every step forward that we take, we seem to take five, 10 or 15 steps back. I do not think that the experience in Malawi is different in any way from that in other parts of the global south.

On the strides that were taken forward in COP26 and COP27, the establishment of the loss and damage fund is significant. I pay tribute to Nicola Sturgeon for her personal efforts and those of the Government that she led in getting to that stage. That was a significant diplomatic success. However, she is equally right to point to the stalling of the progress that we saw last year, whether that relates to the World Bank's administration or who pays for what and to what extent. There has been a loss of momentum, and it is very difficult to regain momentum when it has been lost.

Earlier today, the chair of the UK Climate Change Committee, Chris Stark, spoke to the Conveners Group in a private session. What he said was not very different from what he has been saying in public, so I do not think that I am breaching any confidences. He talked about the fact that Scotland, the UK and other countries in the industrialised north have gone through a kind of sugar-rush phase in which they rushed to set ambitions and targets, but they now seem to find themselves in a buyer's-remorse phase in which they are struggling to work out how they can realise the ambitions and meet the targets. That was not a particular criticism of any Administration; it was a recognition of the fact that the easy thing is setting the targets and the hard thing is following through on that. We see that with the loss and damage fund, as well. As Chris Stark indicated, COP28 is likely to return to energy transition, emissions reductions and adaptations, so the moment to capture and embed our work on loss and damage could be lost unless we get the progress that is needed over the coming weeks.

I finish by echoing Nicola Sturgeon's call to have the scale of the funding allocated met not through loans and saddling the global south with yet more debt, and by making a plea to the cabinet secretary that the Scottish Government steps up its own commitment to those funds.

I thank Maggie Chapman for allowing us to debate the issue. I hope that we can return to it at some point in the not-too-distant future.

18:34

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Net Zero and Just Transition (Màiri McAllan): As many colleagues have reflected, recent events at home and around the world have served to make it abundantly clear that climate change is happening here and now. In October alone in Scotland, we have seen two highly unusual rainfall events, including, most recently, storm Babet, which disrupted transport, destroyed infrastructure and crops, meant that communities had to be evacuated and, tragically, took lives in Scotland and across the UK.

While I have the opportunity, I offer my heartfelt condolences to those who are mourning the loss of a loved one. I also pay tribute to all our emergency responders, our resilience partners and the scores of volunteers who worked so hard to keep people safe in those frightening events.

Those were not normal autumn rainfall events. They compromised a flood defence in Brechin, which was designed to withstand a once-in-200-years event. It is clear that Scotland is feeling the effects of climate change but, equally, the health of our economy, society and, of course, environment is now abundantly linked with how well we mitigate climate change and adapt to its impacts.

That is why we are making an extra £150 million available this parliamentary term on top of the £42 million that we provide for flood risk management annually. It is also why we have provided £12 million on coastal adaptation, which is another front on which Scotland will experience climate change. In response to a number of colleagues who rightly called for ambitious plans from the Scottish Government in line with the targets that the Parliament has set, I state that it is also why we are determinedly preparing ambitious plans: a climate change plan on emissions abatement and an adaptation plan that will rise to challenges such as flooding and coastal erosion.

Colleagues rightly reflected that, as we take those actions in Scotland, we have to be clear that communities throughout the world—principally, communities in the global south—are squarely on the front line. The inherent injustice of climate change is its ability to exacerbate existing

inequalities and the fact that the people who have contributed least to the problem are now first and most severely impacted. Maggie Chapman, Sarah Boyack and others were absolutely right to reflect the fact that historical, systemic prejudice and inequalities have ensured that people in those communities feel climate impacts disproportionately and that those impacts fall disproportionately on women, children and those who are already marginalised. That extends suffering, exacerbates poverty and creates the risk of conflict.

In Scotland, as Nicola Sturgeon articulated, we have benefited from the industrial processes that are driving climatic breakdown and, therefore, we hold a moral responsibility to address the resultant loss and damage. Indeed, we have sought to pioneer putting people and justice at the heart of our international climate policy for many years. In 2012, the Scottish Government launched the world's first climate justice fund. As has been narrated a number of times, when we hosted the world at COP26 in Glasgow, we became the first global north country to commit funding explicitly to address loss and damage.

In that regard, I pay enormous tribute to my friend and colleague Nicola Sturgeon, who—she will not admit this herself—when she was First Minister and when no one else was willing to do so, stood shoulder to shoulder with the global south and with committed campaigners and helped to broker the breaking of a three-decades-long impasse on that most important issue. I know that she will continue to champion the issue, and she can be forever proud of that breakthrough.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): I absolutely concur with the cabinet secretary's comments about Nicola Sturgeon's leadership on the issue. However, given the scale of loss and damage around the world—some estimates put it at \$580 billion by 2030—many states are considering going beyond just funding reparations to address loss and damage. They are also considering establishing in international law a crime of ecocide. Is the Scottish Government open to considering how we could embed the concept of ecocide in Scots law in the way that the EU is looking to adopt it? Some states, such as Belgium, have already started to implement that.

Màiri McAllan: I discussed the issue with Mark Ruskell's Green colleague Lorna Slater earlier today. We were talking about it in the context of the human rights bill that the Scottish Government is developing, and I would be glad to work with him on that.

The point that I was going to make prior to that intervention was that, with humility, we recognise that the sums that we have made available directly to address loss and damage are exceptionally

small compared with what is required in a global context. However, that has encouraged others to follow, with about \$300 million now thought to have been pledged globally to address loss and damage. I am proud of what the funding has delivered.

Maurice Golden: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Màiri McAllan: I am conscious of the time, but I am glad to.

Maurice Golden: I appreciate the remarks about funding, but is there a way that Scotland could utilise soft power in the way that we have the GlobalScot network for the business community? I have mentioned the waste management sector, and in Scotland—in Dundee—we have the UK's only United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization centre for water law, policy and science, to which international students come. Might the cabinet secretary consider using that vibrancy to get Scottish expertise globally, linked to funding if possible, although I appreciate the constraints?

Màiri McAllan: Absolutely. I welcome that suggestion, and I like the idea of the GlobalScot network for business as a model for that kind of work. Maurice Golden is right to make the point about soft power, because our funding has not only been delivering on the ground. In October 2022, we hosted a conference that brought together international practitioners to articulate best practice on loss and damage. The key purpose of that was to listen to the views of marginalised groups and people from the global south. From that, we successfully established deliberative dialogues on mobilising finance and delivering climate change interventions.

As part of all that and the learning from our direct support programmes, we have been exceptionally privileged to be able to feed into some of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change processes, which are not working as well as I would like, to operationalise the COP27 fund. I will look to press that when the First Minister and I both, we hope, attend the 28th United Nations climate change conference of the parties later this year. We will call on all parties to support the urgent operationalisation of the UNFCCC loss and damage fund.

As Liam McArthur suggested, I will be happy to bring the issue back to the chamber so that we can debate it more fully. In advance of that, I will be keen to hear from colleagues across the chamber what they would like Scotland to put forward at that conference.

The key point is that we urge all developed nations to provide loss and damage funding in a

way that ensures that the money is new, additional and adequate and that never exacerbates indebtedness. Nicola Sturgeon is absolutely right that our ability to do that as a global community of nations will be a test for the global south's faith in the UNFCCC process. I say to that community that the Scottish Government stands with them and for climate justice.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate.

Meeting closed at 18:42.

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