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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 8 November 2023

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

Portfolio Question Time

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): Good afternoon. The first item of business is portfolio question time. If a member wishes to request a supplementary question, they should press their request-to-speak button or indicate as much in the chat function by entering "RTS" during the relevant question.

Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands

Community Gardens

1. Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its plans to support community gardens. (S6O-02680)

The Minister for Energy and the Environment (Gillian Martin): We recognise the benefits that community gardens can bring to the wellbeing of individuals, bringing communities together and improving local biodiversity. This year, we are providing £100,000 to the Green Action Trust to deliver the growing food together fund. Eight community food growing projects will benefit from that fund, which aims to increase the land available for community growing and to improve food-growing skills, empowering communities and individuals to grow their own food.

Community growing projects have also benefited from investment through the empowering communities programme, and a further £3.7 million from the vacant and derelict land investment programme will directly support six growing projects.

Kaukab Stewart: The Greyfriars biophilic community garden, in my constituency, has been shortlisted for the *Evening Times* community garden champion team awards later this year, with the winners being announced on 5 December. With projects involving the local community and improving primary schools, the community garden has been a force for good in the local community. Does the minister agree that community gardens provide significant improvements and wellbeing benefits and that Greyfriars is a shining example of what can be achieved by involving the community?

Gillian Martin: I absolutely agree. I am delighted to hear that Greyfriars biophilic

community garden has been nominated for the *Evening Times* community champion team awards. I wish it all the best in that. I am sure that the garden is a wonderful place, and I will put it on my list of gardens to visit. It is an excellent example of the huge range of benefits brought by community gardens, which include but are not limited to increased nature-based volunteering opportunities and education. Communities up and down the country are already reaping the many benefits of community gardens, which, as the member says, include significant environmental and wellbeing benefits. I wish them all the best.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): I put on record my thanks to James Barnes, David Lydiat and Stan Green for hosting an amazing meeting of the cross-party group on gardening and horticulture in the Parliament last week, at which we discussed the need for horticulturists, gardeners and farmers for future generations. How can the minister and the Government support skills and training to contribute to those sectors?

Gillian Martin: I had a good discussion with Stan Green, who had a stand on horticulture in the corridors of the Parliament. It was great to meet him, and it sounds as if the CPG meeting was great, too.

Our vacant and derelict land investment programme demonstrates our commitment to bringing sites back into use, particularly for horticulture. There are a number of such sites throughout Scotland, and they can use the funding for whatever they want to do in that space, including training. As I mentioned in response to Kaukab Stewart, that is what the two streams of funding are doing. We are talking not just about equipment, plants and soil; the funding can be used for training, too. It is up to individual projects to decide how to use the money, but there is certainly funding available.

Peatland Restoration

2. Foysoil Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the rural affairs secretary has had with ministerial colleagues regarding the development of rural skills to help deliver its commitments in relation to peatland restoration in the programme for government 2023-24. (S6O-02681)

The Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity (Lorna Slater): Training and retention of a skilled rural workforce is critical to delivering peatland restoration targets. A variety of skills initiatives is under way, including on-site demonstration days, a newly launched training course, a new entrants initiative and training on Public Contracts Scotland tendering.

Rural Skills Scotland was included in a discussion by the ministerial working group on the rural delivery plan. That meeting was attended by the Deputy First Minister as well as the cabinet secretaries for rural affairs, land reform and islands, skills and education, transport, net zero and just transition, myself and other ministerial colleagues. My officials are now increasing efforts to expand our work in that area, including by utilising existing links with other ministerial responsibilities.

Foyso Choudhury: The programme for government 2023-24 outlines plans to

“Restore 10,700 hectares of degraded peatland”

during the next year, as well as plans to “progress action with crofters” with regard to Scottish ministers’ crofting estates to support further peatland restoration. Can the minister advise how the Scottish Government is measuring the restoration of peatland and ensuring the maintenance of its unique carbon catching properties across Scotland’s rural lands?

Lorna Slater: I thank the member very much for his interest in the topic. We are ramping up our progress towards achieving our targets in peatland restoration. Between 2023 and 2024, we will have increased our restoration of peatland by 40 per cent, while between 2022 and 2023 we increased it by 35 per cent. That shows that it is ramping up significantly.

NatureScot, for example, is delivering activities through its peatland skills plan and supplier development programme to assist small and medium-sized enterprises in tendering successfully for such work, and we are also putting in place a range of training opportunities focused on key crofting areas in the Western Isles, Shetland, Sutherland and Skye.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): In recent weeks, we have heard both the justice secretary and the environment secretary talk about the need to include peatland restoration in plans to bolster natural flood defences, and the minister has also talked about ramping up peatland restoration, but the Scottish National Party-Green Government is well behind on its peatland restoration targets. Will the minister ensure that farmers and land managers are included in the Scottish Government’s flood resilience planning as we move forward?

Lorna Slater: I have come to the chamber to answer questions about skills development in peatland restoration, but I am very happy to write to the member with an answer to his question about including farmers in managing flood plains through peatland.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): The peatland restoration industry is in its infancy, and there is likely much that we can learn from the rewetting of peatlands that has occurred in countries such as Germany, Poland, Lithuania and Latvia. Can the minister say to what extent Scotland’s peatland restoration industry has been disadvantaged by being cut off from the skills and experience of practitioners in Europe by the hard Brexit that we have now—and that Labour now seems to support?

Lorna Slater: It is clear that a hard Brexit has had a detrimental impact on our rural skills sector. However, the Scottish Government is alive to that risk, and it recognises that international co-operation is crucial in addressing the dual challenges of the climate crisis and biodiversity decline.

We sponsored the peatland pavilion at the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP26—to champion international co-operation on conservation, restoration and sustainable management of peatlands. Moreover, NatureScot is working with counterparts on the island of Ireland through its involvement in the shared island fund, which is supporting, among other things, a new investment of €15 million in peatland restoration that will benefit cross-border collaboration, knowledge sharing and expertise building.

Scotland’s Botanic Gardens

3. **Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government how much grant funding it provides directly to each of Scotland’s botanic gardens annually. (S6O-02682)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): Scotland is home to many world-class botanical gardens, including the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, which operates across four locations in Scotland. The RBGE receives funding from the Scottish Government, as well as from a range of other sources, and, in the current financial year, the Scottish Government grant in aid to the RBGE was worth £30.4 million.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: Glasgow botanic gardens has provided free access to generations of visitors for more than 180 years, with huge benefits, including for health and wellbeing. In recognition of that, free access has been sustained for nearly two centuries. However, like so many cherished facilities and vital public services, it does not seem to have survived the Scottish National Party-Green Government cuts, with Glasgow City Council now suggesting charges of £3.50 for an adult and £1.50 for a child.

I note that the cabinet secretary did not mention Glasgow botanic gardens in her answer. What funding does she provide to Glasgow botanic gardens, and what is her view of charging during a cost of living crisis?

Mairi Gougeon: I will address a couple of points in Pam Duncan-Glancy's questions. First, I specifically mentioned the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh and its gardens in four different locations, and the fact that we directly fund it through grant in aid, because it is a non-departmental public body. It is a statutory body that was set up and established through the National Heritage (Scotland) Act 1985. I did not mention Glasgow botanic gardens because we do not directly fund it.

I completely appreciate the member's points about free access. The last thing that we would want to do is exclude people from green spaces, particularly those in our city centres, but we are in a really tough time with regard to our budgets. We are feeling that in the Scottish Government, and I know that local government is feeling it, too.

Last year, there was an uplift in local government funding. I would just come back to the point that—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, minister. I need to move on.

Mairi Gougeon: —in relation to Glasgow botanic gardens, that is a decision—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Minister, I need to move on. Thank you.

Question 4 has not been lodged.

Crop Protection (Flooding)

5. **Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what measures it is taking to support farmers to protect crops, including from future flood-related damage. (S6O-02684)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): The Scottish Government places a high priority on supporting farmers to protect crops from a wide range of threats, including pests, diseases and adapting to the changing climate. Key elements include our investments in the Plant Health Centre and the Farm Advisory Service. Overall, we invest almost £50 million a year in a portfolio of strategic research to support advances in sustainable crop production, natural resources and the environment, including research that is aimed at improving crop resilience.

In terms of future flood-related damage, I have seen and discussed at first hand the impacts on crops for farms that have been affected by the recent severe flooding. At NFU Scotland's autumn

conference on 26 October, I committed to working with the farming sector to provide support for repair of flood banks that were damaged by the extreme rainfall during October to protect our vitally productive farm land.

Jeremy Balfour: As the cabinet secretary will be aware, it has been widely reported that Scotland's farmers suffered extensive flooding and storm-related damage during October, with the cost being expected to run into millions of pounds. Will she commit to a support fund, and will she ensure that future food security remains a top priority in the Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Bill?

Mairi Gougeon: What makes the situation so concerning is that, although there have been some immediate impacts, it will be a while before we can assess the full extent of the damage that has resulted from the recent flooding events and storms.

I have already outlined an initial funding package and have said where we believe we can add the most helpful support at the moment. We will consider any measures as the Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Bill proceeds through Parliament.

I have visited farmers and I have seen at first hand the damage to flood banks in Perthshire, so I appreciate the seriousness of the situation. The damage is impacting on some of the most productive land in our country, so it is vital that we work together to try to improve the resilience of our farmland.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I agree with the cabinet secretary and with Mr Balfour about the need to compensate farmers for lost crops. However, could we involve farmers in offsetting floodwater at the start of a flooding episode in order to stop damage downstream and make sure that that is properly compensated and planned for?

Mairi Gougeon: It is clearly vital that we work across catchment areas. Given the recent flooding events, we need to consider the wider impact and what more we can do on various parts of rivers. Engagement at catchment level will, of course, have to include farmers and land managers in consideration of solutions to increase resilience and adapt to what could be—it is looking as if it will be—an increasing number of flooding events in the future.

Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): As well as needing practical support to mitigate and adapt to climate change, we know that the impact of extreme weather takes an emotional toll on people's mental wellbeing. As we know, farmers face particular challenges with mental health and isolation. What more can the

Scottish Government do to support farmers who might be struggling emotionally right now?

Mairi Gougeon: Karen Adam has raised an important point. As I outlined in one of my previous responses, I have been out to visit farmers and other people and businesses in my constituency, and I have seen at first hand the real and significant emotional toll that such events take on everyone. That includes our farmers as well as the professionals and the volunteers who were involved in responding to the events and are now involved in the recovery work.

We cannot forget that extreme weather events have devastating consequences and can really test people's resilience. As an acknowledgement of the effects of flooding on farmers, and in recognition of the increased need—as Karen Adam mentioned—for emotional, financial and practical support now and over the weeks to come, I recently announced £50,000 of funding for the Royal Scottish Agricultural Benevolent Institution to enable it to continue to provide help and to bolster the support that is available through its own flooding crisis fund. I record my thanks to RSABI for all the incredible work that it is doing.

Farmers (Succession Planning)

6. **Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government how it will help farmers to plan for their succession. (S6O-02685)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): Scotland's Farm Advisory Service, which is funded by the Scottish Government, currently offers farmers and crofters access to up to £1,000 in funding for specialist one-to-one advice on succession planning. The Farm Advisory Service also provides extensive guidance and advice on succession planning.

In addition, the Scottish Land Matching Service, which is also funded by the Scottish Government, is a free service that engages with those who are seeking or offering joint-venture arrangements in relation to land. It provides a platform for planning for succession for farmers and crofters who want to step back from their business.

Annie Wells: As the cabinet secretary will be aware, many of Scotland's farmers are elderly, and the younger generation are not attracted by the profession. Succession planning is essential, not only for the future of Scottish agriculture but in order to ensure that we tackle rural depopulation. Will the cabinet secretary ensure that the commitment to farmers for succession planning remains in place for the foreseeable future?

Mairi Gougeon: Annie Wells has raised an important point. I am glad that she asked the question, because we need to encourage our

farmers, landowners and land managers to think about succession planning.

I highlight the Scottish Land Matching Service's valuable work in that regard. It is currently working with the Crofting Commission to discuss succession in relation to crofting. I am committed to maintaining that support, and to ensuring that we do all that we can to get new entrants into the industry, because this is—as much as there are challenges—a really exciting time in our rural economy. It has a strong future, so I encourage people to get involved and to think of agriculture as a career choice for the future.

Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP): Farming is an intergenerational affair, and succession is often about custodianship and the viability of the farm business in the future. I was recently at the Dalmally blackface tup sale; the place was full of young people who are desperate to get involved in blackface sheep breeding.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that Scotland's farmers are better served in that regard by the Scottish National Party's commitment to active farming and food production, and that the best thing that the Tories could do to help farmers to plan for the future would be to demand from Westminster clarity about future funding for agriculture?

Mairi Gougeon: I agree entirely with that. We need certainty and clarity from the United Kingdom Government about future rural funding after 2025, because we have no idea what funding we are going to receive beyond then. Of course, if we were still in the European Union we would not only have certainty about funding but would have it for a seven-year period, so we would be able to provide longer-term assurance.

Agriculture is devolved, and it is crucial that Scottish Government policies are unhindered by the threats that are posed by the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020, the subsidy control regime and the lack of a long-term replacement for EU funds.

Agricultural Development Projects (Net Zero Targets)

7. **Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government how its agricultural development projects will boost organic produce and improve environmental practice, as part of its work towards achieving its net zero targets. (S6O-02686)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): I am fully committed to supporting organic farming under our vision for agriculture, in which we outlined our

ambition for Scotland to become a world leader in sustainable and regenerative agriculture.

We have funded the role of an organic development manager, with a key objective of addressing market opportunities, domestic and international, for Scottish organic produce. That has included significant research into organic abattoir provision in Scotland, as well as having contributed to work on a small producers pilot scheme. We are working with the organic sector to establish a new organic food and farming action plan to deliver sustained growth in the organic market.

Gillian Mackay: On the back of the Deputy First Minister's recent visit to Marshall farm, in my region, to highlight Scottish Government funding for the Scottish organic dairy goals 2023 project, how can the project identify meaningful measurements of natural capital in carbon and address issues relating to organic protein in central Scotland?

Mairi Gougeon: First, I am delighted that we have been able to fund that project through the knowledge transfer and innovation fund. The project, among a range of other outputs, undertakes a series of carbon audits and soil analysis testing among members of the organic co-operative. The tests are being discussed and benchmarked across the co-operative, with the support of experts, to explore the value in conservation management and the potential marketable value in measurables. The co-operative is having similar peer-to-peer support by hosting meetings about grasslands and soils in order to optimise forage utilisation and home-grown proteins.

The outcome that we hope to see across all that work is increased confidence for informed decision making on carbon efficiency, natural capital management and organic proteins. Overall, the work that the group is taking forward should offer a more efficient, resilient and market-led Scottish organic dairy sector.

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): Recent flooding has demonstrated how vulnerable Scottish agriculture can be to bad weather and has exposed the impact that it can have on crop resilience, including in East Lothian and the Scottish Borders.

Will the Scottish Government finally commit to kicking its political prejudices into touch and commit to using genetic technology as a means to bolster our future food resilience?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I think that Ms Mackay's question related specifically to organic produce and improving environmental practice, but the cabinet secretary might want to answer, perhaps in that context.

Mairi Gougeon: In previous responses, I have outlined that I recognise the damage that the recent flooding has done and how important it is to build resilience. I have outlined a number of measures that we are looking at in relation to how we need to work with our farmers and land managers. I have addressed that in previous responses.

Compulsory Sales Orders (Scottish Land Commission)

8. Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): My entry in the register of members' interests shows that I was previously an owner of a privately rented property in the North Lanarkshire Council area.

To ask the Scottish Government what continued engagement it has had with the Scottish Land Commission about its proposal for compulsory sales orders since it first proposed them in August 2018. (S6O-02687)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): The Scottish Government regularly engages with the Scottish Land Commission on a broad range of matters. That includes recent discussions relating to the "Rural and Islands Housing: Action Plan", which affirms our programme for government commitment to taking forward work in 2024 to consider the justification for, and practical operation of, compulsory sales orders, particularly in the light of our commitment to reforming compulsory purchase orders.

Mark Griffin: The cabinet secretary will, no doubt, be aware that there was cross-party support, including from Government party back benchers, for taking forward compulsory sales orders. Can the cabinet secretary give a timeline for delivering the potential new powers so that councils have the ability to address the blight that empty homes are on rural communities?

Mairi Gougeon: Mark Griffin has raised an important point and is absolutely right that there is cross-party support for considering the issue. That is why we had in our programme for government this year a commitment to continuing the work on that. However, the matter of compulsory sales orders is complex. It is only right that we consider that alongside the review of compulsory purchase orders that is getting under way.

As I have said, the PFG commitment says that we will continue the work on that this year, but I will keep Parliament updated, and I am happy to keep in touch with Mark Griffin as the work develops and progresses.

Kate Forbes (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): Setting aside the fact that land reform is the latest subject of Labour U-turns, does the

cabinet secretary agree that the stifling of community progress by absentee landlords reveals why the relationship between communities and the land must continue to be reformed?

Mairi Gougeon: I agree. Kate Forbes has raised an important point. Absentee landowners, who are often really difficult to trace, represent a substantial barrier when it comes to supporting communities to thrive. From all the community ownership that we have seen, we know that community-owned assets have a real and positive impact in rural and urban communities. That is why we are committed to strengthening and encouraging community ownership, and to continuing on our journey with land reform on an on-going basis.

We have made great strides in relation to land reform since devolution, and the Government is committed to progressing more land reform legislation. We have already consulted on proposals, and have published the results of that consultation. Again, we will bring forward legislation to the Scottish Parliament.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions on rural affairs, land reform and islands. There will be a short pause before we move on to the next portfolio, in order to allow front bench teams to change positions, should they so wish.

National Health Service Recovery, Health and Social Care

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next portfolio is national health service recovery, health and social care. Again, if a member wishes to ask a supplementary question, they should press their request-to-speak button during the relevant question or, if they are online, they should indicate by entering the letters RTS in the chat function during the relevant question.

Winter Preparedness Plan

1. **Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on how its winter preparedness plan will aim to reduce pressure on the national health service. (S6O-02688)

The Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care (Michael Matheson): Our winter plan, jointly published with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities on 24 October, sets out a whole-system approach to respond to surges in demand for health and social care services and actions to relieve pressure points across the system.

The new funding measures include a £50 million boost for the Scottish Ambulance Service to assist with recruitment and up to £12 million to expand hospital at home services. That expansion will enable more people to be treated at home rather than in hospital, and it will deliver at least 380 additional beds this winter, which will relieve pressure on NHS wards.

Audrey Nicoll: The additional funding that is set out in the plan for hospital at home is welcome, and it will, no doubt, reduce pressure on our accident and emergency departments this winter. Can the cabinet secretary say any more about how the expansion of hospital at home will help people across Scotland, including my constituents, this winter?

Michael Matheson: The additional £12 million of investment for this winter, which will provide for the expansion of hospital at home services, will assist constituents in the member's constituency and throughout the country by providing additional capacity for a range of services, including those for children and people with respiratory conditions. That will help to support boards that are taking forward a range of initiatives to develop hospital at home in their respective areas to expand provision over the course of the winter. The funding that we are making available to them will allow them to go ahead and develop those services this month and into the winter months, in order to provide greater capacity.

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

Dr Donald Macaskill of Scottish Care has said that the Scottish Government's winter plan

"is not worth the paper that it is written on."

He also said:

"It says nothing. It gives no hope."—[*Official Report, Health, Social Care and Sport Committee*, 31 October 2023; c 37.]

Rachel Cackett of the Coalition of Care and Support Providers in Scotland agrees with him.

Further, Reform Scotland's recent report tells us that waiting times for hip operations are soaring, and the chair of the British Medical Association Scotland has commented that we have a system that is

"bursting at the seams, with a workforce running on empty."

In light of all of that, how confident is the cabinet secretary that, this winter, patients are going to get the service that they need and deserve, that he can maintain social care, and that this winter will not be, as previous winters have been, the worst winter on record?

Michael Matheson: We have taken forward a range of measures with our winter plan. We started its development earlier this year, and we have taken a partnership approach to its development. That is why it takes a joint whole-system approach with COSLA to meet some of the pressures that we know exist and expect to develop in our health and social care system. We have also engaged with the social care sector in the development of the plan.

Of course, the additional investment of some £50 million in our ambulance service and the additional £12 million investment in the expansion of hospital at home are part of the package of measures that we are putting in place to help to meet the demand that we will face over the winter months.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): The cabinet secretary will have seen the troubling statistics yesterday that show increased waiting times in A and E, delayed discharge rates—which are sky high—and the level of cancelled operations up again. This is only autumn. How much will his plan reduce A and E waiting times by over the winter period? Will his plan also eradicate waits of more than 12 hours?

Michael Matheson: As Jackie Baillie will be aware, the plan is to help to meet some of the challenges that we will face over the winter months. I have not hidden from the fact that A and E performance is not where we would want it to be. A big part of that is because acuity rates are greater and because we have numbers of people staying in hospital for longer periods than previously was the case, with greater hospital occupancy levels.

All of those factors will present challenges, which is why we have made very specific interventions with additional funding to help to reduce and manage some of that demand over the winter months. I cannot quantify exactly by how much the interventions will improve matters because, due to the varying nature of winter illnesses, we do not know what the demand or the pattern of demand will be over the winter months. However, I assure Jackie Baillie that we are determined to do everything that we can to support the system through what we know will be a very challenging period at the health and social care levels. That is why we have taken a whole-systems approach, in partnership with COSLA, to the plan's development.

Erskine Park Home

2. **Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the reported planned closure of Erskine Park home. (S6O-02689)

The Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport (Maree Todd):

Renfrewshire health and social care partnership and the Care Inspectorate are aware of the planned closure and have met the provider. We know that the national care home contract has been cited as the reason for the closure, and we are sympathetic to the rising cost of specialist care. However, we understand that Erskine is offering all residents the opportunity to move to its veterans village, which is very close by, should they wish to do so.

Regrettably, there will be situations in which independent sector or local authority-run care homes close. It is outwith the Scottish Government's remit to intervene. Our focus is on ensuring that local partners that are responsible do what is required to ensure a transition to suitable alternative placements.

Neil Bibby: Erskine, the charity for veterans, provides fantastic and specialist services to many older people in my region, and the closure will clearly be disruptive to residents. If a charity such as Erskine is having to make such a difficult decision because of the challenging financial situation that it and other independent care providers are in, how will the Scottish Government ensure that there is adequate funding in place for the whole social care sector, to ensure that staff are well paid and that people are kept out of hospital and looked after so that they can receive the appropriate and quality care that they need?

Maree Todd: Neil Bibby will welcome the fact that social care funding has increased by over £800 million compared with 2021-22, as part of a record-high health and social care budget of over £19 billion. We have made a commitment to increase in this parliamentary session spending on social care by a quarter, and we are ahead of trajectory on that.

We continue to work with partners to address the pressures that they face and to take forward reform to deliver improved and sustainable services.

On social care workers' pay, those who deliver direct care and commissioned services will see their pay increase to a minimum of £12 an hour from April next year. That is up from the £10.90 minimum rate that was introduced this year.

The creation of a national care service will help to provide consistency in further improved pay and conditions and access to training and development, and ensure that a career in social care is attractive and rewarding. We are beginning to make those improvements now.

Scottish Ambulance Service (Recruitment and Retention)

3. Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP):

To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on what steps are being taken to increase recruitment and retention of staff in the Scottish Ambulance Service this winter. (S6O-02690)

The Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care (Michael Matheson):

The Scottish Government has provided £50 million above baseline funding to support the Scottish Ambulance Service this year. That investment supports on-going work to recruit 317 front-line staff, to help to increase capacity to respond to emergencies. That includes 18 additional clinicians in the integrated clinical hub who, through additional triage, can offer patients alternative treatment routes, and thereby reduce the number of hospital admissions.

To support the retention of staff, the Scottish Government invested £568 million in the national health service agenda for change 2023-24 pay deal, to ensure that NHS Scotland agenda for change staff remain the best paid in the United Kingdom.

Jackie Dunbar: The £50 million in funding that was announced in October to support recruitment in the Scottish Ambulance Service is very welcome. That will play an important role in ensuring that the service is prepared for the winter months ahead. Will the cabinet secretary join me in recognising the incredible efforts of our ambulance service, particularly during the busy winter period? Can he say any more about how that investment will help to support increased demand?

Michael Matheson: I join Jackie Dunbar in paying tribute to the incredible work that is carried out by our ambulance staff throughout the year, and particularly during the winter months, when we see demand at its peak.

The £50 million in funding that I announced last month will assist the Scottish Ambulance Service to further develop its demand and capacity work, which will help it to continue to build on the additional staff whom it has been recruiting over the past couple of years. As a result of our investment over the past few years, the service has been able to recruit 1,388 additional staff since 2020.

I advise Jackie Dunbar that the Scottish Ambulance Service is working to recruit staff in its ambulance control centres as well as clinicians to work in its integrated clinical hubs, which help to guide patients to the most appropriate community pathway, where that is applicable. That will reduce unnecessary admissions to hospitals and—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, cabinet secretary. I need to move on to the supplementary question.

Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con): The £50 million is welcome. However, a freedom of information request revealed that more than 850,000 hours of overtime was worked by SAS staff between April 2022 and July 2023 at a cost of £24.4 million. Recruiting and onboarding ambulance service staff takes time. Can the cabinet secretary promise our overworked ambulance staff that they will receive better support this winter than they did last winter?

Michael Matheson: That is why we are providing the ambulance service with additional funding so that it can recruit more staff and provide additional clinical staff in its clinical hubs, who can support paramedics on the ground when they are dealing with patients. The purpose of that funding is to provide additional staff capacity.

High Blood Pressure (Detection and Treatment)

4. David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to improve the detection and treatment of high blood pressure, in light of reports that an estimated 1.3 million people in Scotland are living with this condition. (S6O-02691)

The Minister for Public Health and Women's Health (Jenni Minto):

Our heart disease action plan and stroke improvement plan include the aim of minimising preventable cardiovascular disease by improving detection, diagnosis and management of risk factor conditions such as hypertension and high blood pressure. The connect me programme delivers a national pathway for high blood pressure diagnosis and management. The pathway is already used in every health board and by most general practitioner practices in Scotland. Evaluation has shown that it is having a positive impact on reducing blood pressure. It has enabled more than 85,000 people in Scotland to remotely monitor their blood pressure, and it has contributed to improved blood pressure control.

David Torrance: Data from the Scottish national health service suggests that only a quarter of the people who have high blood pressure are treated to target. With high blood pressure being associated with around 50 per cent of heart attacks and strokes, will the minister commit to prioritising action on high blood pressure in order to reduce the burden of ill health that it causes for people in Scotland?

Jenni Minto: I recognise the importance of taking action to tackle risk factors such as high blood pressure in order to minimise preventable

cardiovascular disease. That is why, as I said in my initial response, we have already prioritised that by including actions to improve the diagnosis and management of high blood pressure in our heart disease action plan and stroke improvement plan. For example, our heart disease action plan supports community models of detection, although it is important to note that such efforts should be aligned with clear referral pathways for further investigation and clinical advice.

Covid-19 Vaccination Programme

5. Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the winter Covid-19 vaccination programme. (S6O-02692)

The Minister for Public Health and Women's Health (Jenni Minto): The winter flu and Covid-19 vaccination programme began on 4 September and will run until 31 March 2024; the majority of vaccinations will be completed by 11 December to ensure that there is maximum protection over the festive period.

At the midway point of the programme, uptake is strong. As of 29 October, more than 810,000 Covid-19 vaccinations, along with more than 1.2 million flu vaccinations, have been administered. Getting vaccinated is the safest and most effective way for people to protect themselves and the national health service this winter, so if anyone who is eligible has yet to book an appointment, I encourage them to do so.

Liz Smith: That is an encouraging answer in terms of uptake numbers. However, I asked my question because I have had representations from quite a few constituents that they are not being sent information on the time when they will be eligible for vaccination. Will the minister have discussions with the NHS to ensure that that information is as clear as possible?

Jenni Minto: I agree that the information that is sent has to be absolutely clear. I am happy to speak to my officials about that.

Mental Health Law Review (Legal Status of Autistic People)

6. Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the impact of the Scottish mental health law review on the legal status of autistic people in relation to treatment and involuntary detention. (S6O-02693)

The Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport (Maree Todd): The Scottish mental health law review recommended making changes to the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003 while retaining provisions that cover non-consensual care and

treatment. As part of our mental health and capacity reform programme, we will work with partners to consider those proposals, and, in particular, the definition of mental disorder, to reach a position on who should be within the scope of the 2003 act. That work will be undertaken alongside the development of the proposed learning disability, autism and neurodivergence bill, which would enhance and protect the rights of people with learning disabilities, autistic people and neurodivergent people.

Maggie Chapman: The minister will be aware that the current definition of mental disorder that is outlined in the 2003 act incorporates autistic people. Although the Scottish Government's commitment to work with partners on definitions in this space is welcome, the Scottish mental health law review's recommendation that autistic people should continue to fall within the scope of the 2003 act is not.

Given that autism is a lifelong neurodevelopmental difference, and not a mental health condition, does the minister agree that autism must be removed from the scope of the 2003 act as part of the promised reforms? Will she commit to working with partners to deliver that much-needed change?

Maree Todd: The issue of the definition of mental disorder under the 2003 act is complex and sensitive. I absolutely recognise the concerns of many people with a learning disability, autistic people and organisations that advocate for them or on behalf of them.

I can confirm that scoping work has already started in the mental health and capacity reform programme to consider that issue, and that includes plans to engage with stakeholders. It is too early in the programme to establish whether autism should remain in the scope of the definition. Significant work is needed to inform that position.

Children in Temporary Accommodation (Access to Mental Health Services)

7. Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the ability of children living in temporary accommodation to access health services, in particular in relation to current levels of treatment from mental health services. (S6O-02694)

The Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport (Maree Todd): Everyone should receive the best possible care and treatment from our health services, including mental health services, regardless of whether they are living in temporary accommodation. Children who are living in temporary accommodation can

access local general practice and mental health services, including referrals to child and adolescent mental health services if that is appropriate.

CAMHS is available for all children and young people who meet the agreed referral criteria. For others, community-based mental health support might be the most appropriate form of support. We are providing local authorities with £15 million per year to fund community-based mental health supports and services for children and young people.

Miles Briggs: A total of 2,265 children are living in temporary accommodation here in the capital, so it is little wonder that, last week, City of Edinburgh Council declared a housing emergency. I have been supporting and working with a number of families living in temporary accommodation who have been unable to register with general practitioners in the capital. Many GPs are operating closed lists and are therefore telling families to go to accident and emergency to access health services.

What review has been undertaken to look at the health services that are available to children who are living in temporary accommodation? If there has not been such a review, will ministers agree to urgently undertake one?

Maree Todd: I am not aware of a review having been done—my portfolio area is mental health, and I can assure Miles Briggs that children are able to access CAMHS even when they are staying in temporary accommodation.

Local authorities have statutory obligations to assess the needs of the household—not the needs of children in particular—and that encompasses assessing people's health needs. If there is difficulty in registering with a GP, as Miles Briggs narrates, the health board has a role in ensuring that everybody can access general practice services. Should he have examples of where that has not been the case, I would be more than happy to take that up with him outside the chamber, if he writes to furnish me with the details.

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): An important strand of ensuring that mental health services are accessible to young people involves ensuring a high standard of community-based mental health support, which the minister referred to. Will she provide an update on the steps that the Scottish Government is taking to support community-based mental health services?

Maree Todd: The £15 million of annual funding that I referred to has enabled local authorities to put in place more than 300 community services across the country for children, young people and their families. Local authorities report that more

than 45,000 people accessed those supports in the second half of 2022. The services focus on prevention and early intervention, and they provide support for positive mental health and wellbeing, as well as with emotional distress. Easy accessibility is a core principle of community services, and many of the supports are accessed through self-referral.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): Members across the chamber will be familiar with young people who have struggled to access mental health support. The Government made a commitment that 10 per cent of NHS expenditure would be dedicated to improving mental health, but that target is still not being met—in fact, funding is currently £180 million adrift in cash terms. How does the minister justify that? How will she ensure that people can access mental health services, given that the Government is so far off meeting the target?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The focus of question 7 is, of course, children who are living in temporary accommodation.

Maree Todd: I am happy to address the question. We have made a commitment, in this session of Parliament, to ensure that 10 per cent of the entire health budget is spent on improving mental health and that 1 per cent of that is spent on CAMHS.

Although challenges undoubtedly remain, we see positive signs of improvement in CAMHS as a result of the Government's action. The waiting list for first-time appointments has been reduced by almost a third in the past year, and the number of children who waited more than 18 weeks decreased by two thirds in the same period. National performance against the 18-week CAMHS standard is at the third-highest level to have been achieved since the quarter that ended in June 2017. The median wait time for CAMHS is 11 weeks, which means that way more than half of children who are referred for CAMHS appointments see a CAMHS specialist within the 18-week target.

Waiting Times

8. Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what progress it has made on eliminating long waiting times for national health service patients. (S6O-02695)

The Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care (Michael Matheson): We are working closely with NHS boards to reduce long waits and to deliver the commitments in our £1 billion NHS recovery plan to increase in-patient, day-case and out-patient activity. In each of the next three years, we plan to provide NHS

boards with £100 million to help to reduce in-patient and day-case waiting lists by an estimated 100,000 patients and to deliver year-on-year reductions. We will work closely with NHS boards and stakeholders on a number of key actions that will result in patients being treated as quickly as possible.

In addition, 2023 is a milestone year for the national treatment centre programme. NTC Fife and NTC Highland opened in the spring and, later this winter, NTC Forth Valley will open and the extension of NHS Golden Jubilee will be completed.

Alexander Burnett: Patients are waiting years for NHS treatment. One patient who lives in the NHS Grampian area has waited six years for surgery. Another constituent, who was hospitalised with gallstones in March 2020, is still waiting for his gall bladder to be removed. He is in significant pain, suffers regular attacks that result in hospitalisation and vomits for up to 12 hours at a time. He has had to take a significant amount of time off work, which has caused financial difficulty for his family.

The backlog is having devastating impacts on people across Scotland. In addition to what the cabinet secretary set out, what concrete plans does the Scottish Government have to ensure that health boards are able to reduce waiting lists and that my constituent will receive his operation?

Michael Matheson: I recognise the concern that the member has raised on behalf of his constituent. I deeply regret that someone has had to wait an extended period for treatment that they clearly require.

Decisions about priorities are for clinicians to make, but the member will recognise that a significant backlog of elective work has developed as a result of the pandemic. We can see the impact that the pandemic has had on healthcare systems not just in Scotland but across the United Kingdom and globally.

The member challenged me to set out the specific action that we are taking to address the issue. As I outlined, we will invest an additional £100 million in each of the next three years to ensure that there are sustained reductions in waiting lists across all specialty areas. We have made that a funding priority because we want to ensure that waiting times reduce for individuals such as the member's constituent. That investment over the next three years will allow us to treat an extra 100,000 people through the NHS.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I have received requests for three supplementaries. If we have brief questions and answers, I will squeeze in all three.

Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP): Technology has a key role in increasing capacity to clear NHS waiting lists. How many NHS operations were carried out last year, and how many were carried out using robotic surgery? How does the Scottish Government plan to increase that number?

Michael Matheson: We have provided in the region of £20 million to support the introduction of robots, and we now have 16 in operation across NHS Scotland. Data provided by Public Health Scotland shows that, last year, there were 230,000 NHS operations and that, of those, some 3,180 were undertaken by robot-assisted surgery. We have 90 surgeons trained in a variety of techniques who are operating across the system to help to maximise the potential benefits for clinical outcomes for patients from new technologies such as robot-assisted surgery.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): For children who are on waiting lists for clinical operations, waiting for months can feel like years. What is the Scottish Government doing to reduce child waiting lists?

Michael Matheson: I recognise that a wait for anyone for an extended period is not acceptable, which is why we are investing an additional £100 million in each of the next three years to see sustained reductions in waiting lists across all specialties, including where children are waiting for procedures. That will allow us to increase the number of procedures by 100,000, and it will result in sustained reductions in waiting times across all the specialty groups.

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): I have been advised that reduced access to community health facilities and the increased pressure on and workload for community midwifery teams have led, in relation to in-person appointments in Ayrshire and Arran, to a situation in which

“many women do not ‘meet’ their named midwife until 22 weeks of pregnancy”.

That wait is far too long and is of significant concern.

Will the cabinet secretary outline how the Government is working with health boards to eliminate long waits for pregnant women who are looking to meet their named midwife in person? Has the Government explored asking health boards to formally record the length of those waits per case?

Michael Matheson: I do not want expectant mothers to wait unduly long periods to meet their named midwife. If there are specific issues in Ayrshire and Arran that the member wants to provide me with the details of, I will be more than happy to look into that and to try to identify where

actions can be taken to address the concerns that she has raised.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I have a late entrant—Craig Hoy has a supplementary question.

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): In September, only six in 10 accident and emergency patients in NHS Lothian were seen within four hours. What does the cabinet secretary have to say to the four in 10 patients who are often waiting in pain for many hours or for more than a day? Surely it has to be more than sorry.

Michael Matheson: It is more than sorry. It is about the actions that we are taking to address the issues. As I mentioned earlier—I am sure that the member was here for the earlier part of portfolio questions—we are expanding hospital at home, with an extra £12 million being invested in that, on top of the £3.6 million that we announced earlier this year, to see an even more rapid expansion of the service. We are also providing an extra £50 million to the Scottish Ambulance Service to increase its capacity to see and treat, as part of our winter resilience programme.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions on NHS recovery, health and social care. There will be a short pause to allow front-bench teams to change position, should they wish to do so.

Fisheries Negotiations

14:54

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a statement by Mairi Gougeon on Scotland's approach to the 2023 coastal state fisheries negotiations and securing principled, sustainable outcomes. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of her statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions. Cabinet secretary, you have around 10 minutes.

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I welcome the opportunity to set out Scotland's approach to the negotiations with coastal state partners on fishing opportunities for 2024. I hope that it is an approach that Parliament can support.

This is my third year of leading Scotland through the annual negotiations and, every year, the objective is the same: to protect Scotland's interests. These negotiations are crucial for Scotland, providing economic opportunities for our coastal communities and safeguarding the health of fish stocks and ecosystems for generations to come.

Going into 2024, I want to build on the successes of last year's negotiations, which resulted in outcomes worth around £500 million to Scotland. The negotiations also have a role to play in the evolution of Scotland's world-class fishing sector and help to deliver a range of the objectives that are embedded in our "Future fisheries: management strategy—2020 to 2030", "Scotland's National Marine Plan: A Single Framework for Managing Our Seas" and the "Blue Economy Vision for Scotland".

As was the case in previous years, we will be fully involved in multilateral, bilateral and trilateral negotiations on shared stocks and exchanges of opportunities. We will also take part in meetings of the North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission, where management measures in international waters will be discussed.

The Scottish Government's overarching approaches to this year's negotiations remain consistent with our well-established principles and are underpinned by our national and international commitments. We remain committed to ensuring that Scotland continues to be a reasonable and co-operative partner within the UK and on the international stage. All but one of Scotland's quota stocks are shared with other coastal states, meaning that the most sustainable management measures are best agreed jointly and in collaboration with our negotiating partners.

As usual, the scientific advice for 2024 presents a mixed picture, but I am pleased to see positive indications for the health of some of our key North Sea and west of Scotland stocks. That is a testament to the efforts of Scottish fishers, who have engaged and worked so closely with us to protect and recover those stocks. We will continue to advocate for responsible fisheries management approaches, informed by the best available scientific evidence. That means working within environmental limits and ensuring that fish stocks are managed sustainably to help to provide a resource for future generations and safeguard the diversity of the marine ecosystem.

As a guiding principle, we will follow the scientific advice where appropriate, working towards fishing at maximum sustainable yield, or MSY. However, we should not be constrained to follow the advice when it is not the most appropriate course of action. Socioeconomic factors, potential choke risks and total allowable catch fluctuations must also be considered, in line with national and international commitments, including the joint fisheries statement.

For data-limited stocks that are not assessed under the MSY approach, we view the precautionary approach as a viable path to sustainability. As a Government and as a fishing nation, we are committed to recovering stocks that are in decline by introducing appropriate management measures: reducing discarding, addressing choke situations and balancing the socioeconomic challenges of negative scientific advice for our key demersal stocks in particular.

We will continue to seek to mitigate large TAC fluctuations at a sensible level, to reduce and manage the potential adverse effects for offshore and onshore fishing businesses and to protect the long-term sustainability of stocks. When deviating from advice, my mandate to Scotland's negotiation team makes it clear that we must adopt an incremental approach to achieve sustainable catch levels, with a focus on at least maintaining or increasing spawning stock biomass whenever possible. Sometimes, that approach might span several years.

At the same time, this Government remains wholly committed to identifying areas where additional benefits to Scotland's fishing sectors—catching and onshore—can be secured while being mindful of the impact on our negotiating partners. Our goal is to be seen as a strong yet fair partner in negotiations.

Talks for 2024 are well under way and, as I speak, Scotland's negotiators are in London for bilateral and trilateral consultations with the European Union and Norway. Further negotiation rounds are scheduled over the coming weeks to discuss a wide range of stocks. Consultations

have already been held to set catch limits for the coastal state pelagic stocks, in parallel to discussions on longer-term management elements, including sharing.

Next week, coastal states will come together again for the annual meeting of the North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission. In December, we will begin bilateral discussions with the Faroe Islands on possible exchanges of opportunities for 2024. I thank fishing and environmental stakeholders for their close and constructive engagement with the negotiations teams in the lead up to the discussions. Their input will continue to be invaluable as the negotiations progress.

We have three main priorities for this year's TAC negotiations. The top priority within the trilateral and UK-EU bilateral is the newly defined northern shelf cod stock. The latest scientific information gives us a strong basis for transforming the way in which we manage that stock. It shows an extremely positive picture for the health of the north-western stock, better reflecting what fishers have been seeing on the ground. It is also a step change away from the previous zero TAC advice for the west of Scotland. Our aim is to secure catch limits that reflect that positive outlook, including an appropriate and evidence-based allocation to the west of Scotland. I do not underestimate the complexity of those changes, but coastal states now have the information to make better management choices for fishers, and it is time to get that right.

Secondly, monkfish remains a priority for Scottish interests for 2024. It is a stock of key socioeconomic importance to many Scottish vessels, and I have instructed my negotiators to work to mitigate any further cuts in quotas next year. I also look forward to the completion of the benchmark on that stock early next year, which will help to inform discussions about the stock's future management.

Finally, I have instructed officials to seek further discussion with our negotiating partners on the approach to stocks where decreases are routinely proposed simply because of the methodologies that are being used by the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea rather than because of actual changes in stock dynamics. Scientific advice is critical to sustainable fisheries management and decision making, but we need to have confidence that we are working with and making decisions based on the best available evidence.

As well as setting TACs, we will seek to agree exchanges of opportunities with two of our closest fishing neighbours: Norway and the Faroe Islands. I am pleased that we were able to agree on exchanges of opportunities for 2023 with both

parties. Those bilaterals provide much-welcomed additional opportunities and flexibility for Scotland's fishing industry. In particular, the Faroese deal is enabling our larger white-fish vessels to divert effort into Faroese waters, in turn putting less pressure on stocks in Scottish waters. For 2024, I have instructed my negotiators to continue to seek balanced and equitable bilateral arrangements, building on our long-established relationships and our shared goals to see fish stocks managed sustainably.

As usual, advised quota changes will need to be considered carefully when exploring exchanges of opportunities. My priority here is to secure balanced deals that enhance the package of opportunities available to Scottish fishers next year. I appreciate the importance of both bilaterals in achieving that.

We are, of course, also fully involved in the multilateral negotiations as part of the UK coastal state. I am pleased that coastal state consultations on shared, highly migratory pelagic stocks concluded with agreement to set 2024 catch limits in line with the scientific advice. Those stocks are significant for Scotland economically. The need to agree sharing arrangements is becoming urgent.

Parties have set individual quotas in recent years that, when totalled, are above agreed limits. That is not a situation that can continue. Although progress has been positive and dialogue is constructive with most of our fishing partners, there is still further to go. Accordingly, in these multilateral negotiations, a top priority for Scotland is for the parties to agree comprehensive, evidence-based sharing arrangements as soon as possible. That will provide the long-term stability and management that we all wish to see for those stocks.

The annual fisheries negotiations matter hugely for Scotland. Responsible fisheries management is a cornerstone of a healthy, productive marine ecosystem and, for so many of our fish stocks, agreeing shared management approaches with our fishing neighbours is an integral part of the process. We are fortunate, in Scotland, to be represented by negotiators with a wealth of experience, and I am confident that they will, again, deliver the best deal possible.

While the rest of us are beginning the countdown to the festive season, Scotland's negotiating teams are preparing to spend days and weeks away from home and are moving between locations in London and Europe to ensure that Scotland's interests are represented, our voice is heard and our fishing industry benefits. They are ably supported by a team of data analysts and technical experts at home, whose expertise enables us to keep up with the pace and movement of discussions.

Throughout the 2024 negotiations, the Government will continue to seek the best outcome for Scotland's environment, fishing interests and coastal communities. That means balancing environmental, economic and social considerations, and considering short and long-term impacts on fish stocks and the fishing industry. That matters for the onshore supply chain, which depends on fishing effort as much as it does for the offshore businesses. We will take principled, robust positions based on the best available scientific information and take into account socioeconomic factors. We will also work closely and collaboratively with stakeholders and coastal state partners to ensure the sustainable use of those important stocks in the long term.

Every day, Scotland's fishing fleets put themselves in the front line of climate change. They go out to sea in increasingly unpredictable weather not only to secure a living but to ensure that we all benefit from healthy produce that is important to our future food security. It makes me all the more determined to safeguard their future in these and, indeed, future negotiations. Scotland's fishing industry deserves nothing less.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary will now take questions on the issues raised in her statement. I intend to allow up to 20 minutes, after which we will need to move to the next item of business. Members who wish to ask a question but have not yet pressed their request-to-speak button should do so now.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for prior sight of the statement. I wish her teams well with the negotiations.

The fantastic work of our fishermen is placing Scotland's seas on a sustainable footing, and I commend them for that. Under the UK Fisheries Act 2020, we must consider the biological, social and economic pillars of sustainability equally. However, in light of the lessons learned from the highly protected marine areas calamity—which was presided over by the Scottish National Party and Green Government—putting jobs and livelihoods at risk, will the Scottish Government ensure that our hard-working fishermen are put at the heart of that sustainable approach to ensure that we keep the lights on across Scotland's coastal communities?

Mairi Gougeon: Rachael Hamilton's comments started off well and I thought that we were going to be on an agreeable footing. However, I welcome her initial comments.

I hope that I was able to emphasise in my statement how important the negotiations are for our fishing industry and the wider economy of

Scotland. We recognise how vital fishing is for our food security, among many other reasons.

Rachael Hamilton rightly outlines the different objectives in the Fisheries Act 2020 that we have to try to balance. I outlined in my statement the balance between the environmental objectives, sustainability and economic factors. We try to get that balance right and we will continue to do that.

As I hope that I made clear in my statement, the key for the negotiating teams when they are out looking for opportunities is to do the best for the Scottish fishing industry and support it as much as possible. They engage closely throughout the negotiations, so I hope that Rachael Hamilton and other members across the chamber can support the approach that I have set out.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): Having finally recognised that HPMAs were not fit for purpose, does the cabinet secretary recognise that poor management of a well-meaning policy has significantly damaged trust between the fishing industry and the Government? What will the Government do to rebuild that trust in a way that protects the thousands of jobs in Scotland that depend on the industry?

Mairi Gougeon: The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Net Zero and Just Transition published the results of the consultation on HPMAs yesterday. An important part of setting out that approach was to outline the next steps and how we will engage. People made it abundantly clear that they felt they had not been appropriately engaged with or consulted. We made it clear throughout the process that we did not want to impose anything on communities. That is why having community involvement and the involvement of all the industry that is impacted by any future proposals will be critical.

There is no getting round the fact that we need to do more for the climate and biodiversity. We failed on 11 of the 15 good environmental status objectives, so there is more work to be done. However, it is critical that we work with our industry, communities and all the other interested stakeholders to find a way through. Measures have already been implemented in parts of Scotland where that approach has worked and continues to work well. We want to build on that success.

Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): The annual negotiations are critical to the fortunes of Scotland's fishing industry, but it is also important that we manage to reach longer-term sharing arrangements with some of the parties. Of course, it has proven challenging to do that with some of the coastal states in the recent past. Has any progress been made in that area?

Mairi Gougeon: Karen Adam raises a really important point. As I outlined in my statement, it is becoming urgent that we reach agreement on longer-term sharing arrangements, given their importance. I reiterate that that remains a top priority for Scotland. Over recent months, parties have worked closely together to find sharing solutions for mackerel, blue whiting and Atlanto-Scandian herring. Good progress has been made on that, but there is more work to be done. I assure Karen Adam and other members that we will continue to put our full energy behind the ongoing negotiations to ensure that we see the long-term sustainability of those important stocks.

Discussions on all three pelagic stocks will continue in the coming months, and I hope that all parties will engage in the negotiations with an open mind. Everyone must show a bit of flexibility as well as working closely with one another in an effort to find a solution and a way forward. Of course, Scotland will, as always, push for agreements that are fair, that are based on robust evidence and that reflect the distribution of the stocks.

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Yesterday's U-turn by the Scottish Government on highly protected marine areas was welcome. Credit must go to those coastal communities, fishing organisations and politicians from across the parties who opposed those hated proposals. However, given this SNP-Green Government's record and its slavish devotion to its Bute house agreement, it is perhaps not surprising that not everyone is convinced that yesterday's decision represents the final death knell of HPMAs. I therefore ask the cabinet secretary to confirm, once and for all, that this really is the end of the Government's plans for HPMAs and that something that looks suspiciously like a rebranded version of them will not appear under a different guise at some point in the future.

Mairi Gougeon: As has already been made abundantly clear by the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Net Zero and Just Transition, we are not looking to seek to implement HPMAs across 10 per cent of Scotland's seas by 2026. That commitment is no longer going forward. As I stated in my response to Rhoda Grant, we have committed to work with stakeholders and communities to ensure that, when we implement measures, we work with people to do that. I have talked about some of the examples in Scotland where such management is working. We want to build on that success.

Kate Forbes (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): Considering the nature of the questions today, I suggest that listening and changing tack is a sign of strength. Other parties might want to recall that.

Fishing is obviously a vital economic and social foundation stone for coastal communities. It is great to hear that we have a top-class team and to hear about the progress that is being made in establishing the newly defined northern shelf cod stock. How does the cabinet secretary see the outcome of the negotiations strengthening communities and reversing depopulation in Scotland's coastal communities?

Mairi Gougeon: It is vital that, in addressing the challenges that Kate Forbes outlined, we secure the opportunities that are afforded by the negotiations.

When I talked about the outcome of our negotiations last year, I mentioned that it brought in £500 million-worth of fishing opportunities. That is no small amount, particularly to the fishing communities that operate in our island and rural and coastal areas. It is critical that we put all our work into making the most of those opportunities and capitalising on them. As I mentioned in my statement and in previous responses, our top priority in all our work in this area is to work for the benefit of our industry in Scotland. We will work closely with the industry throughout the negotiations in an effort to do just that.

Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab): The value of landings in Scotland last year was £617 million, and the industry employs 4,100 fishers in Scotland. Will the national marine plan 2 include spatial plans for all activities, including fisheries, for all appropriate locations in our inshore waters?

Mairi Gougeon: It is the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Net Zero and Just Transition who is leading on the development of the national marine plan 2, work on which is already under way. A few sessions were held earlier this year on the start of that process. The spatial element that Mercedes Villalba mentioned is being considered in the national marine plan 2. I am happy to follow that up with colleagues and provide the member with further information.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): What would independence in Europe mean for Scotland's fishing interests? Last week, the Scottish Government published the latest "Building a New Scotland" paper, which is on migration. How might those proposals benefit Scotland's offshore and onshore seafood sectors?

Mairi Gougeon: It will not be a surprise to anyone here that Scotland is a welcoming and inclusive nation. We want to make Scotland as attractive a place as possible for people to choose to live, work, study, raise their families and build their lives here, and a key part of that vision is to ensure that we have thriving coastal and island communities. That means enabling the inward

migration that they need and ensuring that our fishing, seafood processing and other sectors can access the vital labour that they need.

However, the UK Government has, in stark contrast to our position, implemented an increasingly hostile immigration policy that has exacerbated labour shortages and rural depopulation, and it has consistently shown a lack of understanding of Scotland's needs. That includes a visa system that has persistently maintained an uneven playing field based on the geographic location and operational area of fishing vessels, which is particularly detrimental to the Scottish inshore fleet in the Highlands and Islands and which imposes charges for people to obtain visas that are far in excess of what would be reasonable.

I make no secret of the fact that I continue to believe that Scottish independence and membership of the EU is the best way to overcome the harms of Brexit, give Scotland a voice and influence at the heart of Europe and help our marine sector to reach its full potential.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Can we listen to the questions and responses from the cabinet secretary without the running commentary from members, please?

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of her statement and agree that the annual fisheries negotiations matter hugely for Scotland. I note the cabinet secretary's comments on catch limits for coastal state pelagic stock and discussions on longer-term management elements. Does the Scottish Government still agree that unilateral mackerel quota increases, such as the 55 per cent increase by Norway and the Faroe Islands in 2021, are unacceptable starting points for negotiations this year?

Mairi Gougeon: I hope that I have made it clear that reaching those sharing agreements will be hugely important. We are putting all our strength into negotiating on that front. It comes back to the point that all parties need to approach negotiations with an open mind and a willingness to be flexible.

I hope that that will be the approach of other parties to the negotiations, because we cannot be in a situation where unilateral decisions are made that result in our stocks being fished at unsustainable levels. I do not think that any of us want to be in that position, so we will put the full force of our teams behind ensuring that we have as good a sharing agreement as possible and that we are fishing to sustainable levels.

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): The cabinet secretary said:

“We will continue to advocate for responsible fisheries management approaches”,

which means safeguarding

“the diversity of the marine ecosystem”.

How can we safeguard the diversity of 6,500 species in Scottish seas, many of which are caught as bycatch, when fisheries management plans will cover only 43 individual species? Can the Scottish Government commit to developing, in conjunction with stakeholders, multispecies ecosystems-based fisheries management plans to help fulfil our obligations under the UK Fisheries Act 2020 and make fishing truly sustainable for our ecosystems and our fishing communities?

Mairi Gougeon: Fisheries management plans are just one of the tools that we will use to manage our fisheries and marine ecosystems. As we set out in our fisheries management strategy, a comprehensive programme of work is already under way to help us to deliver the aspiration of being a world-leading, responsible and sustainable fisheries manager. That includes our policy commitments to introduce fisheries management measures in our MPA network and our future catching policy, which will reduce unwanted bycatch and look at other marine species. We will also roll out remote electronic monitoring and tracking to key parts of our fishing fleet, which will improve compliance with legislation and increase accountability.

Of the 6,500 marine plants and animals that Ariane Burgess cited, 150 are caught by fishing gear on a regular or semi-regular basis. It is also important to remember that we cannot deliver everything at once. Change takes time, but I re-emphasise our commitment to delivering those improvements.

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): In 2017, Michael Gove—the then UK Government minister for fisheries—promised that leaving the EU was a “sea of opportunity” for the fishing industry in my Aberdeen South and North Kincardine constituency and across Scotland’s coastal communities. He indicated that we would be able to “dramatically increase” the amount of fish that we catch. Can the cabinet secretary advise whether the trade and co-operation agreement that was negotiated by the Tories has delivered on that?

Mairi Gougeon: The promise of a sea of opportunity and of a dramatic increase in the amount of fish that we could catch was one of many that were made by UK Government ministers both during and after the Brexit referendum, and it was one of the many promises that were clearly—and quite shamefully—broken.

Under the trade and co-operation agreement, for some species, Scotland has effectively lost quota share and we have access to fewer fishing opportunities than we had under the common fisheries policy. Quota gains have been made for a small number of species, but some of the other gains are also what are known as “paper fish” on which the quota has never been fully utilised and where additional quota is not needed nor, in fact, wanted.

The trade and co-operation agreement also makes the explicit link between access to waters and access to markets, which means that there is scope for retaliatory trade measures if the UK Government seeks to restrict or deny EU vessels access to UK waters from 2026. The tariffs that could be imposed as a result would not only be devastating to sectors such as Scottish aquaculture but could also be applied to other economic sectors in some cases.

Throughout Brexit negotiations, we consistently said that no deal could be reached that would be as favourable as EU membership, and the UK Government has now proven that conclusively.

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): In the statement, the cabinet secretary quite rightly praised the efforts of Scottish fishers who have engaged and worked closely with her to protect and recover stocks. I would like to be positive, but despite the welcome U-turn, the fisherman—and singer of Skipinnish’s anti-HPMA protest song—Donald MacNeil said, “I would not trust anything they say”, “they” being the Scottish Government.

Given previous debacles, such as the Clyde cod box and the failure to deliver key policies, how will the cabinet secretary go about restoring trust between fishers, fishing communities and her Scottish Government?

Mairi Gougeon: It is never good to hear comments like that, and, as I have made clear in previous responses—the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Just Transition has also made this clear in relation to HPMA proposals—those proposals are not going forward. We want to ensure that we are working with people in relation to marine protected areas and on where we need to do more for the climate and biodiversity.

We can do that only with the industry and with communities, and that is why we listened through the consultation process. The cabinet secretary for net zero made an announcement before the summer, and we have just published the results of the consultation, because, understandably, that took a long time to go through, but rebuilding trust is critical. We made it clear throughout the process that we would not impose anything on communities that they did not want. Rebuilding

that trust and working with communities is a key priority.

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): Just to pick up on what Audrey Nicoll said, Michael Gove also told the fishing industry in 2017 that

“once we take back control of our territorial waters, we can decide who comes here, we can decide on what terms.”

We all know that the Tories view anyone who comes here as unwelcome and that they ignore the benefits of international vessel landings, especially in small harbours. Has taking back control created more fishing opportunities for Scottish fishing fleets, or is that another example of Brexiteer Tories promising what they would never be able to deliver?

Mairi Gougeon: No, it did not provide more opportunity. As I outlined, under the trade and co-operation agreement, access to UK waters for EU vessels is guaranteed until at least 30 June 2026. There is ability within that to unilaterally prevent or restrict access thereafter, and it is subject to retaliatory trade measures. Those measures would not affect only the fishing industry, but could also lead to tariffs being applied to aquaculture exports as well as other sectors of the economy. That has wide-reaching ramifications, and because of the Tories’ broken promises on replacing EU funding in full, Scotland now has less funding to invest in our ports and harbours as well as in other forms of support for growth and innovation in our seafood sector.

The contrast between the UK Government and Scottish Government approaches could not be starker. We will always champion the interests of the Scottish seafood sector in the round, including recognising the important role that foreign vessel landings play in ensuring the prosperity of ports such as those of Lochinver and Scrabster.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We are in danger of moving away from the substance of the statement.

I call Colin Smyth. Please be brief.

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): Given the clear legal duty that the UK Fisheries Act 2020 places on the Scottish Government, will the cabinet secretary tell us how she will use the negotiations and the outcomes to incentivise low-impact fisheries through quota allocation?

Mairi Gougeon: We make sure that we are in alignment with and are adhering to our legal obligations. We must meet the different objectives that are set out in the Fisheries Act 2020. I do not know whether the member is referring to additional quota that we have received through that. We have tried to incentivise lower-impact fishing methods such as hand-line mackerel.

I emphasise to all members that we are consulting on the allocation of Scotland’s additional quota. The consultation, which will be open until 11 January 2024, sets out a number of options. I encourage the member, and others, to take part in it and to make their views known.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes this item of business. There will be a brief pause to allow for a changeover of those on the front benches.

Cashback for Communities

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-11127, in the name of Siobhian Brown, on cashback for communities. I invite members who wish to participate in the debate to press their request-to-speak button now or as soon as possible.

I invite Siobhian Brown to speak to and move the motion. Minister, you have around 11 minutes.

15:27

The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Siobhian Brown): Many members will already be familiar with the cashback for communities programme and the work that it delivers in their communities. Some may have even visited projects in their area to see the work at first hand.

The cashback programme, which is unique to Scotland, takes funds that are recovered from criminals under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 and returns them to communities. The funds are used to deliver a range of community projects and activities to support children and young people who are aged between 10 and 25.

The Scottish Government has delivered five phases of the cashback programme since its inception in 2008, committing up to £130 million over that time. The investment has provided more than 2.5 million activities and opportunities, and it has supported more than 1.3 million young people as it has grown in breadth and diversity over the years.

In its early days, the programme funded investment in football facilities and playing fields to divert youth away from antisocial behaviour. It has now developed into a multifaceted programme of activities that range from intensive one-to-one support for young people and their families, including counselling for trauma, to skills development, creative arts development, volunteering and employability work.

The diversity and accessibility of the programme is greater than ever, with projects being offered to young people in every one of our local authorities. It supports young people of all backgrounds to engage in projects that help to build their confidence, encourage positive life choices and raise their aspirations.

Today, we publish the “Cashback for Communities Impact Report 2022-23”, which is the final annual report from phase 5 of the programme, which ran from April 2022 to March 2023. Almost all of phase 5 was delivered during the global Covid-19 pandemic period. That was a

time of unprecedented upheaval and challenge, when young people faced immense disruption to and uncertainty in their lives, and when all the projects were impacted.

Year 3, which was from April 2022 to March 2023 covers a period when lockdown restrictions finally ended and young people started to rebuild their lives.

Against that context, the 2022-23 impact report shows that the programme still achieved remarkable outcomes for children and young people. That is testament to the dedication of all those who were involved in delivering the cashback programme. Projects that would traditionally have been delivered face to face or inside a venue became very difficult to run during Covid, and it was a real challenge to find activities that could be offered to young people, as access to venues and facilities was unavailable due to social distancing restrictions.

Many organisations piloted online delivery and outdoor approaches to ensure that thousands of potentially isolated young people could be reached and supported during that time. Where that was not possible—for example, in projects working with young people in prison—alternative creative approaches were used to keep in touch with participants, such as broadcasting messages to prisoners using prison radio.

The impact of the pandemic was far reaching, and cashback organisations responded to the immediate needs of many children, young people and families, including, for example, by delivering food parcels. Phase 5 organisations are to be commended for their response to the pandemic at a time when their own organisations were also dealing with challenges as a result of sickness and furloughed staff.

Up to £19 million was committed to support the phase 5 cashback programme. The impact report shows the positive benefits of the projects that were funded during that phase. There were 28,060 young people participating in year 3 activities, and 78 per cent of the participants were from the 30 per cent most deprived communities. Young people achieved a wide range of outcomes. More than 21,000 reported “increased confidence” and improved health and wellbeing; nearly 17,000 reported positive behavioural changes and achieved positive destinations that included staying on at school, further education, training and employment; and nearly 15,000 said that “they felt less inclined” to take part in antisocial behaviour. In addition, more than 4,000 undertook 115,000 hours of volunteering.

We can all celebrate those positive achievements, but it is directly from those young people that we get some of the most powerful

endorsements of the programme. On their time in the programme, one young person offered the following reflection:

“I’m keeping my head down. Since I got this job, I haven’t been hanging about and it’s kept me busy. If I hadn’t got this job, I would probably still be kicking about getting into trouble.”

The feedback from families was also positive. For example, one parent observed:

“I’ve never seen him so confident, he is quite happy being independent at the session now and getting involved with activities and making friends.”

In addition, 97 per cent of other stakeholders, such as teachers and project workers, perceived improvements in wellbeing indicators, and

“92% ... reported a reduction in risk-taking behaviours”.

The incredible work of our cashback-funded partners is founded on their total commitment to understanding the needs of the young people with whom they engage. Phase 5 partners were the first group of cashback organisations to embed children’s rights and wellbeing in the cashback programme. All 24 cashback organisations reviewed their work against the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in order to ensure that the needs and rights of children and young people remained central to the programme, and the children and young people themselves were active participants in that process. They were also involved in shaping phase 5 projects and in providing feedback to help to frame our next phase.

We surveyed more than 850 cashback participants during phase 5, and the findings were clear. Most of the participants thought that

“the proceeds of crime should be reinvested in those communities most impacted”.

There was also an

“Overwhelming positive response”

to

“the value ... wide range and easy accessibility of CashBack ... projects”,

which participants viewed as

“highly inclusive”.

Young people placed

“most value on ... mental health, particularly in relation to confidence, anxiety and social interaction”,

alongside

“acquiring new skills and experiences”

and

“improving support networks through 1 to 1 support and guidance, from trusted and experienced mentors and staff.”

It was noted that, in several instances, young people reported that that had allowed them to stop or reduce

“offending behaviour, drug and alcohol abuse, self-harming”,

and to rebuild

“positive family relationships”.

In addition, “volunteering and community connectivity” were also highly valued by the participants.

I hope that members will take time to view the 2022-23 impact report in full and agree that it demonstrates that cashback is a highly impactful programme that is worth every penny invested.

A full evaluation of phase 5 will be published before the end of the year. It is important that we do that at the end of each three-year phase to ensure that the work that we fund remains relevant, adds value to our young people and has a positive impact on our communities.

The end of phase 5 this year also marks the beginning of the next phase of the cashback for communities programme. Phase 6 will run from April 2023 to March 2026, with a further commitment of up to £20 million. That significant investment, which comes from money that is recovered from the proceeds of crime, reflects our confidence in the programme.

Each phase is underpinned by a robust application process where organisations are able to submit project proposals. Successful applicants were awarded grant funding for a three-year period. Phase 6 was the most competitive round of funding so far, with the programme significantly oversubscribed. Unfortunately, we were not able to fund every proposal; only the strongest applications were successful, and I am sure that they will all be as successful as previous projects.

I recently had the pleasure of meeting all 29 phase 6 cashback partners to learn about the range of work that is planned for the next three years. I was really impressed by the strength of the projects and the passion and professionalism of all the organisations.

The focus of phase 6 projects is to support young people—who are most at risk of being involved in antisocial behaviour offending or reoffending—towards or into positive destinations. Fund projects will provide support for young people, parents and families who are impacted by adverse childhood experiences and trauma, support young people to improve their health, mental health and wellbeing, and also support the people, families and communities who are most affected by crime.

The latest cohort of projects is both strong and diverse. In addition to traditional youth work, sporting activities, employability, and culture and arts projects, we have strengthened the range of options that are available to support girls and young women, young carers and homeless young people.

We have also increased our commitment to diversity by investing in key work to promote children's rights, racial equality and disability. Cashback also aims to include support for young people who have been in conflict with the justice system.

This morning, I was pleased to visit the violent offender watch—VOW—cashback project, which is delivered by Police Scotland in partnership with the charity Aid & Abet. The intensive support project aims to remove young people from the criminal justice system and support them into positive destinations. The collaboration between police officers and peer mentors is a fantastic model for building trust with young people and helping them to make positive choices. It was a privilege to meet those people who are involved in delivering the project as well as one of the young people who has really benefited from it in the past few months.

Previous feedback from one young person who engaged with the project during phase 5 is testament to the impact of the programme. They said:

"Had I not ... met the VOW Project I have no idea where I would be with my drinking but believe I would have continued to escalate further in criminality and self-destruction."

The cashback project work that is delivered in those and similar settings across the country is helping young people to rebuild their lives, family connections and relationships with their community.

I move,

That the Parliament commends the CashBack for Communities programme, which is now in its 15th year and sixth phase; understands that the programme is unique to Scotland and reinvests money recovered under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002; acknowledges that the aims of the programme are diversion from antisocial behaviour, provision of positive activity, support for wellbeing, and building confidence and skills for young people; notes that, since its inception, the programme has committed £130 million to supporting around 1.3 million young people; understands that, over the next three years, phase six of the programme is expected to reach around 34,000 young people; welcomes and thanks the CashBack for Communities-funded partner organisations for their dedication, passion and hard work; recognises the opportunities and benefits that the programme brings to children, young people, families and communities, and applauds the achievements of the many thousands of CashBack for Communities participants.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We are tight for time across the rest of the afternoon, so members who want to speak should press their request-to-speak buttons now.

I call Russell Findlay to speak to and move amendment S6M-11127.2 for up to seven minutes.

15:38

Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con): We agree with the Scottish Government motion on cashback for communities, and I hope that the Government finds agreement with our constructive amendment.

Drug dealers prey on the weak and the vulnerable, they inflict misery and death across Scotland, and their dirty money poisons society and the economy. The Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 was groundbreaking when it came into force in 2004. The police were excited at the prospect of the powerful new weapon, and the crime gangs were in a panic. The rules, we were told, had changed—crime would no longer pay. Working as a journalist, I bought it. Dirty fortunes could be seized by using the less onerous civil standard of proof, "the balance of probabilities". Crucially, a criminal conviction would not be required.

In the crosshairs were the besuited bosses who do not get their manicured hands dirty. They stay at arm's length from the drugs that kill countless numbers of our people and they never personally wield the knife or fire the gun. The first significant Scottish case became a protracted farce—a decade-long quagmire of legal attrition—and, in the end, the dirty fortune was whittled down to nothing, having lined only the pockets of lawyers.

That exposed the limitations of the new law and resulted in a fundamental change of direction. The new focus was instead on proceeds of crime being pursued after a criminal conviction had been secured. Of course, every single penny that is snatched from criminals and ploughed back into our communities is welcome—there is no question about that. Many young people across Scotland have benefited from the £130 million of dirty money distributed by cashback for communities, and the programme's work makes a positive difference to many young lives. However, the cost of organised crime in Scotland is counted not in the millions but in the billions. The early optimism of the proceeds of crime programme has become blunted, and every week we see examples of that in the courts: cases in which vast criminal fortunes have been generated only for a fraction to be subject to a confiscation order.

Take the example of the international drug dealer James White from Glasgow. The Crown Office says, with confidence, based on the

evidence, that he made £126 million—£126,241,001.29, to be precise—from killing countless Scots. That drug dealer has made the same amount as the entire 15-year spend of cashback for communities. How much of White's drug money do the authorities hope to get their hands on? The answer is just more than £118,000, which represents less than 0.1 per cent. I hope that that example, and many others, will persuade the Government to look again at the legislation.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): The member makes a very important point. I want to ask a question that I intend to be helpful, although it might be too complicated to answer here and now. What can one can do to recoup the extra money that he refers to? What is missing? What would he suggest that the review should do?

Russell Findlay: I will attempt to come on to that, but I have a lot to say.

Criminals now regard proceeds of crime orders as a form of retrospective taxation—essentially, an occupational hazard—but, even then, once they have been served with a confiscation order, they often refuse to pay up. Last year, £12 million of confiscation orders were unpaid and unknown sums have been written off. That is wrong and should form part of any widespread review. A renewed and robust proceeds of crime law could yield even more money for our communities.

I have a specific concern that relates to cashback for communities and amateur boxing. Many boxing clubs are great forces for good; they are at the heart of communities and are run by decent people who support young people and help keep them out of trouble. However, they tell me of significant infiltration by organised crime. We see the same in professional boxing, with the Kinahan cartel and its Scottish associates. Real boxing people despise that contamination of their sport.

That brings me back to James White, the £126 million drug dealer, because he sought legitimacy by coaching kids at a Glasgow boxing club. That same club has received money from cashback for communities, which seeks to divert youths from crime. It would be perverse if money seized from drug dealers should end up being returned to drug dealers. I therefore urge the Scottish Government to conduct an audit of where that money ends up.

Our amendment also calls for the Scottish Government to update its serious organised crime strategy. I have very little time left, but I will say that I believe that much more needs to be done to tackle the flow of laundered drugs money into society. One area of particular concern is sport—not only boxing but professional football. Just as in boxing, good people in football have no time for

the exploitation of the national game by drug dealers. Police Scotland previously issued a video, warning young players about organised criminals posing as football agents, and prominent lawyers and former players provide a veneer of respectability. It is a significant problem, and there is evidence that drugs money has seeped into the ownership and control of senior football clubs.

In football, much of that is an open secret, but it appears that no one is willing or able to talk about it publicly. In seven minutes, it is impossible to go into a sufficient level of detail, but we should all be in agreement that, in Scotland, crime should not pay. Today, that is not something that I have any confidence in saying.

I move amendment S6M-11127.2, to insert at end:

“; recognises that the money recovered from the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 does not match the vast wealth accumulated by criminals in Scotland; acknowledges that the activities of organised crime groups, including drug dealing, have a devastating impact on communities, resulting in a high number of deaths; calls, therefore, on the Scottish Government to review the effectiveness of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002, which was fully enacted in March 2004, with a view to increasing the amount of money that can be recovered, and urges the Scottish Government to update its Serious Organised Crime strategy to ensure that tackling damaging, high-level criminality remains a key priority of the justice system.”

15:45

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): I am pleased to follow Russell Findlay, who makes a powerful case for a review, and to open the debate on behalf of Scottish Labour.

We support the programme and efforts to work with young people, direct them to positive destinations and reduce reoffending. Cashback for communities is the continuation of a scheme to reinvest the proceeds of crime that was first established by Scottish Labour in Government in 2006. That, in turn, drew from the framework in the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002, which was introduced by the Labour Government of the time.

Two decades on, with the challenges of Tory austerity and the pandemic, there is absolutely no doubt that youth services in Scotland are in a sorry state. However, as we know, young people still face many challenges. The diverse activities that the minister has spoken about are a clear component of any functioning justice system, and they provide alternatives for those who might be drawn into crime. The antisocial behaviour that was on display at the weekend testifies to the fact that prevention of crime, and better outcomes for those who are at risk of involvement, must be a crucial part of addressing criminal behaviour in the first place.

There must be greater clarity on what metrics the Scottish Government is using to measure the success of the various activities that are being supported by the scheme. I note that those metrics are not set out in the latest evaluation report for 2020 to 2023, which was published on the cashback for communities website, and, as a result, I would welcome feedback from the minister on that point.

Other than assessments of positive destinations, it is not clear whether there is concrete evidence to conclude that those specific projects are reducing crime. I am also unclear as to how organisations are selected, so it would be helpful if the minister could say more on that, too.

Many of the organisations that are funded are national charities. However, I think that we will all know of schemes through which local groups in our constituencies receive valuable funding. One example is in North Ayrshire. As well as getting the benefits of having the national governing bodies for football and rugby, which have received hundreds of thousands of pounds between them, the area also has a number of local sports projects that receive support.

It would be good to know whether smaller, grass-roots organisations, such as council-run youth clubs, tend to bid for grants. The sums awarded to a relatively small number of large organisations clearly have benefit, but the fact is that almost all such projects are now delivered by the third sector. Of course, charities and not-for-profit organisations are not subject to freedom of information coverage, despite receiving public money, albeit that those funds are recovered from criminal activities rather than from taxation. Therefore, it is more important that the Scottish Government provides transparency, as it would not only be of public benefit but allow us to better guide projects and assess outcomes for the young people whom they support.

I also point out that the amount of funds that are recovered to support those projects in the first place is relatively small. I understand that £7 million was recovered in 2020-21, which was the last financial year to be measured, but the Scottish Government's assessment in 2017 was that organised crime cost the Scottish economy £2 billion a year.

Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP): The member will be aware of the cross-border nature of much of that crime, including the supply of drugs to Scotland by road and rail from England. Given that, does she agree that, if the United Kingdom Government were to take the same approach as the Scottish Government and apply the cashback for communities approach to some of the proceeds of crime in England, that could benefit the people of

Scotland? If she does agree, will she agree to write with me to the UK Government to propose such a change?

Katy Clark: I would be very happy to write to the UK Government with Keith Brown. He clearly has a huge amount of experience to draw upon and I am sure that he is absolutely correct in what he is saying.

As Russell Findlay has said, one person from an organised crime group in Scotland reportedly made more than £126 million, yet only 0.1 per cent of that money was confiscated. I am clear that organised criminal gangs do not stop at borders. The more cross-border co-operation there is, the better, and I would welcome clarity on what steps are being taken and, indeed, what dialogue ministers are having with the UK Government as well as with Police Scotland and the Crown Office to ensure that more money is being recovered in cases for potential use in supporting community projects. I would also welcome the minister outlining the work that is being done to increase the moneys being recovered.

As I have said, Russell Findlay has made a powerful case for review. I make it clear to the minister that Scottish Labour supports the cashback for communities scheme, but I hope that she will address the issues and concerns that have been raised in the debate as well as respond to the reference in Labour's amendment to restorative justice.

I move amendment S6M-11127.1, to insert at end:

“, and recognises the importance of access to restorative justice practices, not only as a measure to prevent antisocial behaviour, but also as a tool for young people who are already involved in the criminal justice system.”

15:51

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): I am pleased to speak in this debate on the cashback for communities programme.

The Scottish Liberal Democrats believe that reducing crime involves a co-ordinated approach across sectors, from tackling homelessness and offering more education and training opportunities to more outreach youth services and stronger action to help recovery from, and prevention of, drug and alcohol abuse. The cashback for communities programme supports organisations that work to help to achieve crime reduction. Money that is recovered under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 is reinvested into organisations that work to support young people who are at risk of being involved in antisocial behaviour, offending or reoffending.

As others have highlighted, the 29 partner organisations in this phase of the programme cover a range of projects across Scotland. Examples include Edinburgh Young Carers, which provides mental health support, core skills development and respite activities for children and young people who care for parents who are affected by alcohol or substance abuse in the most deprived areas of the capital. Starcatchers works with young parents in Fife who live in areas of socioeconomic deprivation in order to improve their mental health, as well as their social and emotional wellbeing.

Working with young people from across Scotland who have been impacted by adverse childhood experiences, Ocean Youth Trust Scotland develops young people's confidence, resilience and teamwork skills through outdoor education. Sail Training gives young people the opportunity for personal development through the experience of a lifetime. In my Shetland Islands constituency, cashback for communities funding has supported extracurricular programmes focused on road safety.

Those are just some examples of the positive impact that funding from cashback for communities can have by supporting projects that build the capacity, resilience and confidence of young people and reducing crime through working with communities. However, one scheme cannot be looked at in isolation. The reduction in funding of youth services threatens any good work that is undertaken through the programme. Holistic efforts to tackle crime require visible and viable youth support services with reliable funding.

If I may, I will highlight the work of a Shetland charity that I believe fits with the ethos of cashback for communities. Dogs Against Drugs works in two ways. Trained dog handlers work with drug detection dogs to seize illegal drugs and associated cash and prevent them from entering Shetland. At the same time, the charity works with local schools to deliver education that is aimed at preventing drug use. This year so far, it has reached 1,800 pupils. It also works with the moving on project, which supports vulnerable young people. In 2022, the charity seized almost £30,000 in drugs cash as proceeds of crime. To date this year, it has seized £14,000.

Despite the charity's work with young people, it was unable to apply for funding from cashback for communities in this phase due to the programme's criteria. Earlier this year, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs met me to discuss the charity—I again thank her for her time.

I stress the importance of the work that Dogs Against Drugs undertakes in Shetland in disrupting the illegal drug supply chain and delivering crucial awareness-raising courses in schools. It seems

reasonable that, as the charity seizes cash from the illegal drugs trade, it should receive some funding back for its work.

I understand that the current phase of cashback for communities runs until March 2026. I ask that, when the Scottish Government is determining possible future criteria for the programme, consideration is given to how organisations such as Dogs Against Drugs might meet any new conditions.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. We are tight for time. I call Christine Grahame, who has up to four minutes.

15:56

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): Frequently, we become so accustomed to the innovative policies that the Parliament has introduced that we forget to reflect on—and, in some circumstances, to celebrate—the impact that they have had on people for the better. Examples include the ban on smoking in public places, no prescription charges in Scotland and, of course, cashback for communities. Although the public will be aware of the smoking ban and free prescriptions, I am sure that most of the public are unaware of cashback for communities, mainly because it does not affect them overtly. However, it has an impact on their communities and on the quality of life not only of those communities but of the many individuals who benefit from the programmes.

I welcome the debate and Labour's amendment. I suggest to Russell Findlay, who made a very interesting contribution, that he should put forward solutions, if he can, to better the recovery of proceeds. We all want to see that, although I appreciate the cross-border and international aspects that my colleague Keith Brown raised.

Cashback for communities is 15 years old. In that time, it has distributed £150 million to good causes. Many of the recipients are in my Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale constituency. I was reminded of that recently when I was visiting the YMCA hub in Penicuik at the inauguration of RUTS. That is an unfortunate name—it stands for the Rural & Urban Training Scheme. The project is run in partnership with the YMCA. For 2023-26, RUTS has the target of carrying out 400 activities for young people.

In the Scottish Borders, between 2008 and 2021, a total of over £2 million was distributed, which covered more than 100,000 activities. In Midlothian in the same period, over £1.5 million was distributed for more than 46,000 activities. That is not money to be dismissed.

I go back to RUTS at the YMCA in Penicuik. The grand facilities there, which had become underused and were in financial difficulties as a consequence, have been rescued, and in the right way. I saw the boxing ring, and I had a go with the gloves on a punch bag. I will not disclose whose image I mentally projected on to it—although I will do so if I get the right donation for the YMCA.

I went on to look at the motorbikes. Young people aged 14 to 24 can learn about motorbike maintenance there, and there are other projects that they can engage with to give them some sense of direction.

Young people may self-refer there or be recommended by social work or schools, for example. Most of the young people at RUTS are, for a range of reasons, disengaged from the so-called “traditional routes” through education and so on. The project builds self-confidence and a sense of personal achievement, which can lead to apprenticeships, work or further education. Most important, it is centred on the individual.

In the Borders, Tweeddale Youth Action and TD1 Youth Hub are both recipients of funds. In Gorebridge, the guides, and in Galashiels, the Boys Brigade receive funding support.

There are many more projects, from large to modest. The purpose is always to help young people not to get back on track, but to find a track towards a fulfilling and positive life that suits them, whether by diverting them from prosecution or—we hope—intervening far earlier. It is about helping them to help themselves before that becomes out of reach. What better application could there be for the proceeds of criminal activity?

16:00

Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con):

One of the many interesting aspects of our role as MSPs is learning about incentives that bring cash back to our local communities. I welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate on a subject that I do not usually give voice to in the Parliament, which is how Governments reinvest dirty money that is obtained through organised crime.

I am not the only MSP in the chamber who wants the Scottish Government to get tougher on organised crime. We have already heard from our “Crimewatch” champion, Russell Findlay, who, since his election, has made sure that tackling crime is at the forefront of discussions in the chamber.

The cashback for communities scheme has the potential to do a lot of good for young people across Scotland. The £130 million that has been

reinvested as a result of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 is not to be scoffed at, and I know that that money goes directly to young people who are at risk of turning to a life of crime.

Prevention is key when trying to protect young people from a life of crime, and I will always support incentives that are youth led and are targeted in areas where crime rates are higher. It is my understanding that the latest round of funding is for projects that aim to deliver a range of trauma-informed and person-centred services, including those for young people who are more likely to be involved in antisocial behaviour. Given the rise in antisocial behaviour in our town centres and high streets, I am sure that business owners and those who are concerned about such behaviour will be reassured that funding is being used to reduce the problem that many of us experience just now in our communities.

However, money is not just being directed at those types of incentives. The moving forward+ project, which is delivered by the National Autistic Society Scotland’s prospects team, is funded by the cashback for communities scheme. The project supports disadvantaged autistic young people on a path to becoming more engaged and happier citizens, and it reduces the chances of them becoming either the victims or the perpetrators of crime by recognising that each autistic young person has individual needs and aspirations. The project has two routes—one for children aged 10 to 15 who are not engaged with school education, and another for autistic young adults aged 16 to 25 who are not in training, employment or education. The support involves helping individuals to better understand their autism, explore their strengths and develop suitable strategies to help them to become more resilient. It is a wonderful project that benefits so many young people. I have a statistic here: since 2020, the project has supported more than 93 young autistic people.

As I said, the cashback for communities scheme has the potential to do a lot of good, but we should recognise that it is not perfect. I hope that the Government will realise that more can be done to increase the amount of cash that goes back to our communities. Crime should pay, and what better message to send to communities than that the Government backs them? As it stands, the money that has been recovered as a result of the 2002 act does not match the wealth that has been accumulated by criminals in Scotland. For example, as has been pointed out, it was reported in 2022 that £11 million of dirty money had not been paid back—that is £11 million that could be invested directly back into our communities—although I appreciate that that is subject to a review.

The Government must think about how it can recoup as much money as possible from organised crime. As Russell Findlay said, the scheme needs to be audited in order to maximise the amount of money that could be reinstated back into our communities.

Time is tight, so I will conclude. Prevention, which I mentioned earlier, is key, and investment is needed to ensure that effective programmes are rolled out, so I call on the Government to get tougher on crime and to ensure that prevention is at the heart of cashback for communities.

16:04

Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP): Scotland has committed to getting it right for every child and to creating an equal society in which every child and young person in Scotland can reach their full potential. To create an equal society, we must provide equal access to opportunity. Funding from cashback for communities allows organisations to remove barriers to access and to strengthen communities. We have heard from the minister about the £130 million that has been spent through the scheme since its inception, which has supported about 1.3 million young people.

I will provide a local example from my constituency to highlight the huge difference that even a small proportion of those funds can make at local level. Barry Hughes has told me about the impact that cashback for communities funding has for Raploch scouts. That scout group, as well as others in Stirling, including in Braehead, received cashback for communities funding through Scouts Scotland. Barry started Raploch scouts in 2019. At the beginning he had only eight beavers, but the group has been so successful that he now has more than 60.

Scouts and similar groups give so much to young people and their communities. Research has found that young people who are involved in scouting learn more skills, volunteer more often and contribute to our having a kinder and more cohesive society. Children who are in poverty face damaging stigma that erodes their confidence and their mental health, and those who live in areas of deprivation face barriers to accessing activities that could build their confidence and life skills.

Cashback for communities funding has allowed Raploch scouts to remove barriers for many who otherwise would struggle to participate, especially during the current cost of living crisis. The uniform alone is quite expensive—it is £21 for a scout shirt—but, using cashback for communities funds, Raploch scouts has provided uniforms for all its members. Many scout groups ask for parents and care givers to pay up front for a term of meetings, to book activities in advance and to purchase

materials. However, Barry told me that the £35 a term quickly adds up, especially when families have two or three children attending. Funds from cashback for communities have provided a pot of money to be used for up-front bookings and to allow Raploch scouts to operate on a pay-as-you-go basis. That small change has made a massive difference.

The money has also allowed Raploch scouts to fund camping trips. It has already taken two trips this year to Invertrossachs by Loch Venachar, which is a beautiful area in my constituency. For many of the group's members, those are the only trips away that they will get this year. The young people have gained so much from that: without the funding, many would not be able to enjoy those opportunities or to participate at all. Investment in such experiences for young people is also preventative spend for our justice system.

Scouts Scotland is only one of the many partners of cashback for communities that are making real and positive changes in my constituency. With nearly £2 million having been spent across Stirling since 2008, reinvestment of the proceeds of crime is having a transformational impact and is strengthening local communities. It is a real force for good.

I echo the minister's commendation and look forward to seeing what the future will bring for the initiative.

16:08

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Cashback for communities has reinvested the proceeds of crime in our communities, thereby supporting more than 1 million young people, including many in Mid Scotland and Fife. In Burntisland, the Shell Twilight initiative, along with Scottish Sports Futures, has delivered weekly indoor physical activity sessions alongside wellbeing and mental health advice and speakers. Scottish Sports Futures has also supported young people from Stirling and Fife on residential trips to Auchengillan Outdoor Centre, which for many of them has been their first time away from home. Barnardo's has provided the eight-week "Fit to work" employability programme, which has helped to build confidence and to support participants in securing qualifications and work placements.

As others have said, cashback for communities has been running for 15 years, with the most recent phase having received more than 150 applications, although only 29 organisations will benefit from the round of grants. Clearly, there is huge demand for Government support, especially in the current circumstances.

Although the programme for government commits to continuing to reinvest money through

cashback for communities, does that have to mean more of the same, or is this an opportunity to evaluate and expand the process, and to look at how well it is delivering its aims? Of course, we welcome the hard work of the partner organisations, but that does not mean that there is no room for improvement. It is welcome that some organisations are new to the current phase, including Starcatchers Productions, which will work with Fife Gingerbread to deliver creative play opportunities for families through the cashback for young parents programme.

However, many of the funded organisations are national bodies, some of which are receiving significant proportions of the available finance. We need to be confident that the funding is delivering an impact locally in communities across the whole of Scotland, and that there is not the unintended consequence of bids from more specialised local organisations missing out. Perhaps the key to that is to increase the overall funding, but I am also interested to find out more about how the programme is being evaluated and how it could be improved.

Although there are employment and early intervention programmes—I recognise the need for those—there should be greater prioritisation of diversionary schemes and activities to engage those who are most at risk of offending.

For a number of years, Kingdom Offroad Motorcycle Club has been working to reduce illegal and antisocial motorcycling in Fife communities, including through the club's "Through the Gears" youth initiative, which is targeted at those who are furthest from mainstream education and are most at risk of committing antisocial behaviour. Fife Council recently agreed funding for the project, which has been unable to attract money from the cashback for communities programme fund this year. I have worked with Kingdom Offroad for a number of years and have seen how its activity has grown and how it can have a meaningful impact.

On a recent visit, during which I even got on an offroad bike—I will not tell more of that story—we discussed how the proceeds of crime, other than cash, can be used to benefit such programmes. For example, could we consider systematic ways to ensure that bikes that are confiscated by the police can be utilised by organisations such as Kingdom Offroad, rather than being auctioned or destroyed?

Although the cashback for communities programme is said to be unique to Scotland, there are similar schemes elsewhere. Merseyside Police has a community cashback fund that is used to prevent crime and antisocial behaviour, and offers diversion from criminal gangs. Essex Police works with a local community foundation to provide

grants to charities and voluntary organisations. Since 1998, the North Wales Police and Community Trust has supported initiatives across the region that improve people's quality of life by reducing crime and fear of crime, using cash that has been seized from criminals and recycled for the public good. Therefore, there are opportunities to share knowledge and good practice across the UK, so I encourage the minister to engage in such discussions.

16:12

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): I remind members of my entry in the register of members' interests. I am an ambassador for Ocean Youth Trust Scotland.

I am pleased to speak in the debate because I believe that the Parliament should be very proud of the cashback for communities programme. Now in its 15th year, the programme is unique to Scotland and demonstrates the Scottish Government's commitment to supporting our young people to live full and healthy lives and to addressing some of the underlying causes of crime.

As the motion says, the cashback for communities programme invests money that is recovered through the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 in positive activity that supports young people's wellbeing and helps to build their confidence and skills.

Since its inception, the programme has committed £130 million to support around 1.3 million young people across Scotland, including in my Greenock and Inverclyde constituency. The cashback for communities programme delivers many things for young people, including diversionary activities and community-led opportunities.

I want to touch on two projects in particular in my Greenock and Inverclyde constituency: the Greenock Morton Community Trust and Ocean Youth Trust Scotland. I thank Beatrice Wishart for her comments on OYT Scotland. I am hugely proud of both organisations and the outstanding work that they do. They engage with a wide range of young people, including those requiring diversionary activities, carers, and younger people and younger children who are getting active—to name just three examples. Inverclyde is extremely fortunate to have both those organisations, which enrich my community. I have sponsored events for them both in the Parliament in order that more people realise what they do, and their excellence remains high.

As the cashback for communities programme has shown, diversionary work does actually help to reduce antisocial behaviour by focusing on

prevention, early intervention and improving the life chances of young people. Sadly, children and young people from deprived backgrounds are at greater risk of being involved in antisocial behaviour. However, that does not preclude such behaviour occurring in affluent neighbourhoods or the involvement of children and young people from more privileged backgrounds. That highlights the flexibility of the approach of the cashback for communities programme.

However, especially in areas of deprivation, it is important that projects that are funded by the programme focus on delivering a range of trauma-informed and person-centred services and activities. That demonstrates why the programme is so valuable, in providing our vulnerable and disadvantaged young people with access to opportunities to help them to achieve their potential. Many of the activities are things that those young people would never before have dreamed of doing. Those opportunities are sometimes not afforded elsewhere, either.

That is where OYT Scotland, in particular, excels. It supports young people from across Scotland to take part in life-changing residential voyages, with the aims of helping them to develop new skills and moving them on to positive destinations. As I touched on earlier, the OYT has been in Parliament before. In 2018, the event was about celebrating its on course with cashback programme, which involved cashback for communities groups embarking on sailing voyages, including pupils from Inverclyde academy and young people from Port Glasgow's i youth zone. It was a pleasure and a privilege to invite the charity, its partners and some of the young people who have been involved in the programmes to the Scottish Parliament to showcase the wonderful work of OYT Scotland.

OYT Scotland has been a cashback for communities partner for three phases of funding. I am delighted that, from 2023-2026, it will receive £475,000 for its on board with cashback project, which expects to work with 248 young people over that period.

I could go on, but I know that time is short and that I am about to close. The cashback for communities programme certainly helps to change lives for many people across the country.

16:16

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): I welcome the motion and share its commendation of the cashback for communities programme. Over its 15-year history, it has developed to become more sensitive to the needs of young people, families and communities across Scotland, including those in the north-east. It

acknowledges that there are not two watertight compartments of people—criminals and victims. Injustices, inequalities and experiences of trauma impact on individuals in ways that can leave them harmed, harming or often both. It recognises that crime of all kinds has the most devastating effects on the most marginalised communities, on people living in poverty and in areas of multiple deprivation, and it realises that intergenerational trauma and adverse childhood experiences have a huge impact on who is most vulnerable to the behaviours and situations that we commonly describe as crime.

Some of the most inspiring projects are those that share the creative arts to build young people's confidence, imagination, communication and other skills. They include cashback for change, which is delivered by YDance in Angus and Dundee, and the move forward project that is delivered by Station House Media Unit—or SHMU—in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire, which develops skills in radio, film and music.

Other activities support young people to develop skills that may help them find employment, including projects such as Barnardo's fit for work, which operates in Aberdeen and Dundee and now also in Moray. Although many of those projects focus on those who are at risk of being brought into the criminal justice system, others address the needs of those who are already caught within its structures. That means supporting young people who have been incarcerated and helping them to build their wellbeing and develop essential skills in preparation for their release. The passport cashback project, working in Polmont, has helped young people with readiness for their lives after incarceration. The keeping families together project, delivered by the Cyrenians in Montrose, helps young people in secure care to rebuild relationships and return to their family homes.

Although much of the work is delivered by large, well-known partners, it is equally important that the fund also supports smaller grass-roots initiatives. I was pleased to see that the youth work fund redistributed through YouthLink Scotland has benefited local providers including the Kirrie youth project, RockSolid Dundee and Aberdeen Foyer, as well as enabling the give us a break partnership pilot project in Dundee. I hope that that local aspect can be expanded in the years to come, especially in supporting projects that are led or co-produced by young people themselves.

Cashback for communities is an encouraging example of what Scotland can do well within our devolved powers, but it is not a complete answer to the deep-rooted problems that it tackles. It works, as it should, with individual young people, their families and communities. However, that work needs to be complemented by policies that

address the structural causes of adverse childhood experiences and intergenerational trauma—causes that include child poverty, inequality, and service and resource shortfalls. It also needs to be underpinned by robust and enforceable children’s rights, as well as continued reform of a criminal justice system that too often punishes young people for their economic and social situations.

Finally, I note that the funding source of cashback for communities sanctions certain kinds of crime but does nothing to redress some of the most damaging harms: environmental, corporate and institutional injustices that destroy health, happiness and hope. I commend the programme, but I urge us to look further and deeper to a shared future where, as well as giving back to communities, we can better protect them all, including the young people, in the first place.

16:20

Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP): I thank Siobhian Brown—who is no relation—for bringing the motion to the chamber for debate. I commend the work of cashback for communities, which uses money collected from the proceeds of crime to fund projects to support young people. The motion rightly recognises the positive work of the organisation, as have many of the speeches in the debate, but I will address the underlying rationale behind the creation of cashback for communities. It is one of a raft of Scottish Government measures that take a preventative approach to crime by seeking to address its root causes—in this case, issues such as social isolation, loneliness and peer pressure among young people.

That point is particularly pertinent given the scenes of irresponsible fireworks use that we saw across Scotland over the past week. I urge all members, when we address such incidents, to think about not only the rules and regulations on the sale of fireworks—many of which lie with Westminster—but the underlying social factors that cause such behaviour in the first place. I do not disagree with some of the points that Maggie Chapman made, but the greater harms that she talked about have to be addressed in the context of the austerity years that we are going through.

Cashback for communities has spent £130 million supporting around 1.3 million young people across Scotland since its creation, 15 years ago—not least in my constituency, where the funding has supported organisations such as Play Alloa and Lornshill academy’s school of football. It has also worked closely with local groups such as Connect Alloa and Ochil Youths Community Improvement to deliver homelessness awareness

projects, art sessions, sessions on alcohol and drugs awareness and anti-vandalism projects over that 15-year period. Last year, I opened one of cashback for communities’ outreach events at Hawkhill Community Association in Alloa, which was an opportunity to celebrate what the programme offers our young people: an opportunity to come together and learn from each other in a young person-led environment.

Of course, as the chief officer of Clackmannanshire Third Sector Interface, Anthea Coulter, often states, Clackmannanshire could always benefit from further support from the programme to address local challenges that arise, as could Dunblane and Bridge of Allan. I know that she would welcome the opportunity to meet the minister along with me to discuss our local context. I will write to the minister about that.

It would be wrong to highlight the success that cashback for communities has had in achieving its dual goals of financial investment in our communities and preventing crime before it happens without highlighting the significant challenges that both of those goals face. I refer again to the 14 years of Westminster austerity, which has changed our communities beyond all recognition. I suggest that that austerity has been a significant contributor to the loneliness, isolation and peer pressure among young people, despite the immense work of the organisations that cashback for communities supports, which work hard to support our charities, social enterprises and voluntary groups as they support our young people. Although cashback for communities has made a significant difference to our society—not least in my constituency—much of that hard work, from the viewpoint of financial investment and of addressing the root causes of crime, is under threat by the unwanted Westminster austerity that is being forced on Scotland.

I am grateful to Katy Clark for agreeing to write to the UK Government with me on this point. The scope of cashback for communities could be substantially expanded, as could its effect on families and communities in Scotland if Westminster were to follow the same approach by bringing back some of the proceeds of crime to help communities, including those in Scotland that are affected by, for example, the drug trade coming through road and rail routes from England and the rest of the UK to Scotland.

Notwithstanding that point, I agree that there should be a review and that people should satisfy themselves that the right criteria are being used for the awards. I am well aware that there is limited scope for ministers to direct the awards, but there is no harm in having a review.

I support the motion in the name of Siobhian Brown.

16:24

Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I add my support for the cashback for communities programme and for the Scottish Conservative amendment. I commend the scheme and recognise that, since 2008, it has managed to reinvest in community projects up to £130 million of the money that has been obtained through the proceeds of crime legislation.

I also want to highlight that, in the most recent round of cashback funding, which was in March, it was pledged that £20 million would be invested in projects that support young people into employment. I note that that funding aims to deliver a range of trauma-informed and person-centric services, with the cashback for communities website stating that services and activities will be delivered for young people who are at risk of being involved in antisocial behaviour and young people who have been impacted by adverse childhood experiences, for young people's health, including their mental health, and to support communities that have been affected by crime.

My colleague Meghan Gallacher highlighted the moving forward+ programme, which is delivered by the National Autistic Society, but it is worth repeating that that programme supports disadvantaged autistic young people on the path to becoming more engaged citizens, which, in turn, reduces their chances of becoming victims or perpetrators of crime.

It will come as no surprise to anyone that I applaud the focus of the most recent round of funding, and I will be very interested in any information on the outcomes of phase 6 of the programme.

I ask members to imagine what could be done if the full amount of confiscation orders was collected and if we could remove more dirty money from organised crime gangs. According to the latest data from the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service, more than £1.5 million-worth of confiscation orders are currently in arrears. Of the £19 million-worth of orders that have been imposed over the past five years, £14 million has been paid off, which leaves a staggering £5 million outstanding and uncollected. In 2022, it was reported that more than £11 million of dirty money had not been paid back. When we consider the good that such money could do and the fact that it has been obtained through criminal processes, it is imperative that we ensure that the orders that are imposed are paid in full.

It is also necessary that the confiscation orders are robust and fitting, given the amount that was earned from the crime committed. I was shocked to hear of a case in which a person, after selling

fake luxury items such as watches, sunglasses, clothing and aftershave totalling more than £1 million, was requested to repay only £31,000. That is utterly ridiculous. I was also shocked to hear that the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service had "no issue" with reducing the amount to be repaid after an appeal. Unfortunately, that narrative makes a mockery of the system and only perpetuates a soft-touch approach to people who break the law and swindle people out of their hard-earned money, and it seems to underscore the message that crime does pay, when it should not.

Surely it would be sensible to review the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 so that we can look to recover more cash from organised crime gangs and cunning petty swindlers. Too many times, organised crime makes substantial sums, but authorities are unable to recover those ill-gotten gains or they simply do not have the resources to fulfil the task. More powers should be afforded so that our justice system can go after the criminal gangs, apply appropriate penalties and force payment in full.

I will always stand up for trauma-experienced children and young people, and if there is a way in which we can redistribute funds to actively support positive change in the lives of our young people and help them to thrive and go on to achieve their potential, it will have my full support. Let us review the 2002 act, update the serious organised crime strategy and properly fund the programme to put cash back into our communities.

16:29

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): It is right that consensus has been found in the chamber today, in so far as it has been recognised that the cashback for communities programme has been beneficial to our communities and that it must be continued in years to come to allow that impact to be felt and seen in our communities.

The Proceeds of Crime Act 2002, which was delivered by a Labour Government, paved the way for the introduction of initiatives such as the cashback for communities programme, and it is heartening to hear from members about the impacts that it has had. Those funds are aimed at delivering positive futures for our young people, which is a legacy of a Labour Government. It is appropriate that the scheme continues to deliver for young people and seeks to ensure positive destinations for young people.

However, it is important that we note the role of restorative justice in the debate. Although the funds that have been collected are reinvested in initiatives that tackle antisocial behaviour, sporting activities and other positive programmes that we have heard about, it should be highlighted that

access to restorative justice practices can prevent crime and antisocial behaviour as well as reducing reoffending. I hope that the Scottish Government will support Labour's amendment at decision time, because it makes an important addition to a motion that rightly recognises the success of the programme.

Communities tell us of their fear that young people turn to crime if investment, opportunity and activity are lacking. I am sure that many members who are in the chamber have discussed that worry with parents, carers and the wider community. I have attended countless community councils and surgeries with local councillors where that issue has been brought to my attention.

The programme has had success and, as other members have said, we should dig deeper into it, because anything additional that we could do with the fund would be helpful. We need further investment in our communities in order to act on the real and serious concerns of those in our communities in the south of Scotland and beyond.

In preparing for the debate, like others, I noted several initiatives in my region that provide support to locally established groups such as the scouts and the girl guides, helping with digital work, badges and general sport and culture activities. Those things can seem small, but, as other members have said, those resources are scarce for some families. Those trips, away days and activities can be very impactful. For our small Ayrshire communities, which can be isolated, those small steps can be a big help in encouraging young people to participate in groups and clubs and engaging with the wider community.

We are all aware that communities, particularly rural and isolated communities, talk about the lack of activities and facilities for young people in villages and how that is linked to antisocial behaviour. Strengthening already existing groups in those communities can be helpful. Members across the chamber mentioned such community groups, and perhaps we could look at how they could be supported. I am sure that the minister would be able to comment on that. I note with interest that organisations such as Aberlour have received some of the funding. Those groups work at grass-roots level and will receive funds in phase 6, which I am pleased about.

There is local interest in supporting our young people and preventing crime. The benefits of the programme are clear, but it needs to be matched with strong funding for local services to ensure that our communities work for those who are most at risk of being caught up in the criminal justice system, which others have mentioned.

More needs to be done on organised crime. People involved in organised crime can take

millions of pounds in cash and assets, and we need to ensure that that cash can be seized and moved. Other members have spoken clearly about that.

The Presiding Officer: I need to ask you to conclude.

Carol Mochan: To conclude, I support this reinvestment in our communities.

16:33

Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): Over the past 15 years, the cashback for communities programme has played a crucial role in the lives of countless young people and communities across Scotland. I welcome the fact that, over the next three years, phase 6 of the programme is expected to reach around 34,000 young people. In East Dunbartonshire, which part of my constituency is in, more than £1 million has been spent on more than 40,000 activities from 2008 until now. In West Dunbartonshire, approximately £2.5 million has been spent on 44,000 activities.

One of the organisations that received funding was Includem, which is a Scottish charity that works with young people and families. In 2020, it was granted cashback funding for a three-year project to provide an early intervention service in West Dunbartonshire for children and young people who were felt to be at risk of offending. A recent report by Matter of Focus discussed its findings after three years. Some of the figures that were reported by the young people speak for themselves. The report said that 91 per cent of children and young people moving on from the project reported increased confidence, 94 per cent said that they felt more resilient and 89 per cent felt that they had maintained or improved their attendance in school.

That is valuable in helping us to understand the impact, but to add to that, here is a rather powerful statement from a police representative from year 1 of the programme. They stated:

"The majority of young people who have been referred are no longer coming to my attention for negative things. That is where the pattern of behaviour that they were displaying previously, in my professional experience, would have suggested the risk of escalation."

As an MSP covering part of West Dunbartonshire, I know that fire setting continues to be an on-going issue.

The issue was brought to the attention of Includem, and to tackle it the charity set up meetings between young people, their Includem worker and the fire service. The young people gained a new understanding of the potential seriousness of fire raising, the consequences of their actions and what that could mean for their

future. The workers observed that those involved in the work appeared to stop fire setting, which is hugely significant and very welcome.

The impact of cashback extends well beyond the individuals that it supports; it extends to their families, too. Evidence from the project in West Dunbartonshire has helped parents and carers to be in a better place for supporting children in their care. However, it does not stop there; it also extends to the wider community. One of the most compelling aspects of cashback is that it allows communities to get involved in the change that they want to see. Includem's fire-setting project was a key example of responding to something that local residents were concerned about. For the families of young people who have been involved in fire raising, that will contribute to reduced pressure and worry, and, overall, it contributes to a safer community in West Dunbartonshire. That is just one case study among the vast amount of positive work that is being done, but it illustrates the success of the programme.

The Scottish Government's cashback programme shows the power of effective governance, and it understands the importance of investing in our vulnerable young people. It underlines the Scottish Government's commitment to support young people to live full, healthy lives and to address some of the underlying causes of crime. Young people are the future of our country, so cashback is not only an investment in our local community but an investment in our future.

16:37

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): I welcome this debate. It is some time since the Parliament discussed the cashback for communities programme.

It is important to start off with Russell Findlay's amendment, because the source of the cashback is money that is recouped from criminals. We are doing something useful with that for communities.

An observation that I will make is that we used to get an almost annual report from the former Scottish Crime and Drug Enforcement Agency, but it has been some time since we had such a report. Those reports used to talk about what the SCDEA had captured, but since it was amalgamated into the Gartcosh campus, the visibility of that capture has almost disappeared. I make a plea to ministers that we should ask Police Scotland to think about producing those reports again. I have no idea how successful Police Scotland has been in that regard—it was much clearer five or six years ago.

I agree with all members that the cashback for communities programme is a brilliant concept. It was introduced by a Labour Government, as Carol

Mochan pointed out, and has been continued by the current Scottish Government, and it is unique to Scotland. We should all be proud of returning money gained through criminal activity back to communities through targeted investment for the purpose of preventing antisocial behaviour. Doing so supports wellbeing, builds confidence and skills for young people and helps with restorative justice programmes, which we all agree have been beneficial to communities. Marie McNair addressed how important those can be.

I agree with Claire Baker that perhaps it is time to refocus on where the money is going and to evaluate that. Some of the figures that I will quote, as others have done, sound like a lot of investment, but I am not really sure what the work is achieving overall. I know that it is achieving a lot, but it is really important to get some evaluation of that.

We know that the programme has provided 2.5 million activities for people since its inception and that 75 per cent of young people involved in those are from the most deprived communities. In my Glasgow region, there have been more than a quarter of a million activities since 2008 and, in 2022 to 2023 alone, £1.5 million has been provided for 4,500 activities. The programme brings invaluable opportunities and part of its aim is to bring benefits to children and young people, their families and communities. However, although the programme's positive impact is undeniable, it should be evaluated.

With phase 6 of the programme under way—it will continue to March 2026—we must ensure that the greatest amount of revenue from criminal activity that is seized is reinvested. The minister said in her opening statement that we will not see the details of phase 5 until the end of the year. I wonder whether we should have had this debate after we had had the chance to see that information. Perhaps there can be a focus on that when it is available.

We need a justice system that ensures the prevention of crime and better outcomes for those at risk of involvement and that addresses criminal behaviour. With that in mind, I stress the need for making sure that some of the money goes into youth offending services.

The Dick Stewart service, which works across Scotland, has had its funding threatened recently. Even though it has a tremendous record of supporting young male offenders leaving prison and has received top marks from the Care Inspectorate, we might see its closure. That is one example of where investment might need to be broadened to ensure that we do not lose existing services.

The Venture Trust, which is a new grant recipient for phase 6, is a prime example of the work in which we should be investing. Last year, 47 per cent of the trust's 688 participants were involved in the Scottish justice system. Its living wild programme supports men and women on community payback, while its inspiring young futures programme supports young people struggling with unemployment who are involved in antisocial behaviour among other offences.

Through activities that aim to build aspiration and self-confidence, develop employability skills and improve health and wellbeing, a quarter of the participants have reported at least one positive outcome in their life. Whether the outcome is an educational achievement, getting voluntary or work experience, referral to another service, or even something more personal such as gaining access to their own children, our ultimate aim is to reduce their risk of antisocial and criminal behaviour. For young women, in particular, strong relationships, self-confidence and financial security are all key to avoiding taking part in antisocial and criminal behaviour.

Also receiving funds this year is Strengthening Communities for Race Equality Scotland, which works with ethnic minority young people aged from 11 to 24. A significant number of its activities centre on reducing antisocial and criminal behaviour. One activity has seen around 450 young people working with Police Scotland to establish trust between communities and law enforcement.

In my concluding 30 seconds, I highlight that, when Roz McCall was speaking earlier, it struck me that a review of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2020 might be in order. Some of the quoted figures lead to questions. I understand that what cannot be proved is a matter of evidence, but we should not be complacent about such an important piece of legislation. We must ensure that prosecutors have the necessary tools in law to get the maximum amount from people who break the law and to ensure that the return on it relates to the amount of money that was stolen in the first place.

16:43

Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con): Today's debate has been interesting and worth while. This Parliament does not spend enough time debating the justice system or how to tackle the crime that is rife in so many communities, so I welcome any opportunity that we get to focus on those important issues.

Today's motion raises the positives of the cashback for communities scheme. I would like to use this opportunity to discuss some issues with

the scheme and the wider justice system, which have also been highlighted in some of the contributions that we have heard today.

We agree with the motion. The Scottish Conservatives want to thank all those involved in the cashback for communities scheme for their commitment and hard work. It is a successful programme that delivers benefits for many young people and families across the country, as we have heard in many of the speeches this afternoon.

We firmly believe that the money that criminals gain by inflicting pain on communities and on vulnerable people should be reinvested into communities, so that it can finally do some good. We welcome the fact that £130 million has been reinvested from the proceeds of crime so far, and we believe that the vast majority of that funding has gone towards great projects and causes that help those communities that are most affected by crime.

However, while we all support the principle behind the scheme, we would do communities a disservice if we did not look at improving it, and it is clear that the scheme could be stronger. We would support a review of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002—as Roz McCall mentioned—so that more dirty money can be recovered from organised crime gangs. The law needs more teeth in order to go after illegally obtained money, in particular given that nearly £5 million that has been ordered to be confiscated over the past five years is still outstanding.

Keith Brown: Given what Sharon Dowey has said about trying to increase the amount of money that is taken in from the proceeds of crime, would she be willing to write, along with me and Katy Clark, to the UK Government to say that, for crimes that are perpetrated down south but have an impact in Scotland, it could usefully introduce the same cashback for communities initiative? That would raise money for communities in Scotland. Would she support such a letter?

Sharon Dowey: Mr Brown and Ms Clark have been in the justice section for a lot longer than I have, so I would want to see more detail on that. At present, all the moneys from the proceeds of crime in Scotland do come back to Scotland, so I would want to look at the matter in more detail first.

Organised crime gangs have managed to hold on to a great deal of the money that they have accumulated while committing crimes. They exploit loopholes in the system and hide money effectively. Most of us could point to examples in our communities of where a crime gang continues to control major businesses, even after the police have got convictions.

Experts on crime, especially front-line officers, can point out large homes and expensive properties that are owned by individuals who have clear connections to organised crime. We believe that Scotland's police force needs more resources so that it can target operations at the worst gangsters who reap the rewards of their offences. Front-line officers want to go after those criminals but, as things stand, they simply do not have the funding and support from the Government to do so.

The Scottish National Party's planned cuts to Police Scotland will undoubtedly make the situation worse. It is unacceptable for the Government to come to the chamber today and speak about the benefits of organised crime while not mentioning police cuts.

Marie McNair: Will the member take an intervention?

Sharon Dowey: I will make some more progress, because I want to get through a lot of contributions from members.

Crime gangs have already been emboldened by weaknesses in the SNP's justice system, which so often puts the rights of criminals before those of victims. If the SNP continues with its plans to cut more of police budgets, criminals will get away with even more, the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 will recoup less money, the cashback for communities programme will not be as successful as it has been, and more young vulnerable people will be preyed on by criminals. It is a vicious circle that the SNP Government can prevent. Our police force needs investment.

To go even further, this Government needs to give organised crime the attention that it deserves. At present, the Government spends too much time and resources on its own political priorities and not enough on the issues that really matter to working people, such as how we stop the damage that is caused to communities by drug dealers and criminals, and how we prevent disgusting attacks on emergency workers such as those that we saw this week in Edinburgh. Officers have made it clear that, although those attacks were carried out by young people, police believe that they were encouraged by adults with a violent history.

The Government talks the talk on organised crime. The foreword to its most recent "Serious Organised Crime Strategy" says:

"Organised crime remains a serious threat to us all and we pay for it every day, either directly as victims or indirectly by paying for the services—such as police, prosecution, the health services—that are required to respond to it."

We, in the Scottish Conservatives, could not agree more, but the SNP does not back up those words

with action. Its weak approach to justice lets criminals away with crimes.

I will touch on some of the contributions from members. Russell Findlay highlighted the case of a single drug dealer who made nearly the same amount as the entire 15-year spend on cashback for communities. I reiterate that we need to look at the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 to see how we can get more money from the people who are committing those crimes.

Roz McCall also touched on that. Meghan Gallacher spoke about how the National Autistic Society's moving forward+ project is helping people to get on a path and making them more resilient.

Katy Clark mentioned the need for greater clarity on the matrix for evaluating the scheme. It is unclear how organisations are chosen for the scheme, and we all want better outcomes for young people. I agree with Katy Clark that more support and clarity on how the scheme is measured would be welcome.

There have been lots of good contributions from other members, but I am afraid that I am going to run out of time to mention them all.

Finally, although we do not always agree on the Government's overall approach to justice, I thank the minister for bringing forward the debate, so that we can look at how to improve the system. I hope that she will keep an open mind about improvements. If we want the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 to continue taking money from criminals and we want the cashback for communities programme to continue to help good local projects, the justice system must be tougher.

16:51

Siobhian Brown: I thank everyone who has taken part in today's debate and shared their positive experiences of the cashback for communities programme's 15 years of benefiting young people, families and communities. As I said at the start, the programme is unique to Scotland and demonstrates innovation, partnership and the importance of why we must invest in our young people.

We should acknowledge that most young people are not involved in antisocial behaviour or the justice system. However, we should also recognise that, sadly, some young people do not get the opportunities for the good start in life that we want them to have. The cashback programme helps to address their inequality by making high-value early interventions to provide a wide range of support activities and opportunities for children and young people, all of whom should be given the same chances to thrive.

I will address quite a few of the comments that have come up; there is quite a bit to cover. On Russell Findlay's contribution, I think that every person across the chamber wants to see an increase in the crime funds that go into initiatives such as cashback. I do not think that anyone would disagree with that.

The 2002 act provides for criminal confiscation and civil recovery of the financial benefit that is derived from criminal activity, but it also contains the principal money laundering legislation for the UK, which is a reserved matter. The 2002 act is a complex mix of reserved and devolved matters, and we will not be able to resolve that today. The Scottish Government has responsibility for leading on legislative matters in relation to proceeds of crime, but this is a complex area of reserved and devolved competences. We will continue to monitor the need to strengthen the legislation to further detect, defer and disrupt organised crime, so that we can increase the criminal funds that go into initiatives such as cashback.

I go back to Russell Findlay's question about serious organised crime. Disrupting organised crime and diverting individuals from organised crime remains a priority for the Scottish Government. A refreshed serious organised crime strategy was published in February 2022. Although the aims and objectives remain broadly the same, the options for change have focused on strengthening links between intelligence and tasking, making better use of data and supporting efforts to improve collaboration across all sectors, in order to combat the constantly evolving challenges that serious crime organisations pose. The serious organised crime task force progress report is due to be published later this month.

I move to Katy Clark's contribution. Carol Mochan also brought up restorative justice. We remain committed to having restorative justice services available throughout Scotland. The needs and voices of harmed persons must be central to the process, and services must be safe, consistent, evidence led, trauma informed and of a high standard.

Obviously, the pandemic slowed progress. Initial development work identified the complexities, which we need to explore further. We are committed to taking the time to resolve the issues and develop a safe and robust system, and work is under way with partners across the justice system to do that.

Katy Clark asked about the criteria for phase 6. There were four main aims—diversion away from antisocial behaviour; provision for positive activity; support for wellbeing; and building confidence and skills. I know that there was an exceptionally high number of applicants, with 157 bids seeking more than £80 million in funding. Those bids were

subject to a robust panel assessment process and, in the end, only 29 partner organisations were successful.

On evaluation, which I think that Claire Baker, Pauline McNeill and Katy Clark raised, as I said in my opening speech, the full evaluation of phase 5 is due this year, and it will be for members to look at that.

Christine Grahame: May I be so bold as to ask the minister to make her own personal evaluation of the RUTS programme at Penicuik YMCA, which I referred to?

Siobhian Brown: I would be happy to.

The cashback for communities programme also provides opportunities for young people who have engaged with the justice system to develop the skills that they need to make a more positive life choice and turn their lives around. In 2018, the Scottish Government's justice analytical services published an evidence-based report on understanding childhood adversity resilience and crime that cited building resilience in children and young people, their families and communities as being crucial to reducing crime and victimisation. Direct feedback from cashback participants has shown that one-to-one support and guidance from trusted and experienced mentors and staff who work in cashback projects is highly valued. Young people have told us that that approach has helped them to make better life choices that have changed their lives and changed all their relationships.

The targeted approach that cashback projects take to improve outcomes for young people who have experienced poverty and disadvantage has endured the test of time. The programme has contributed to supporting and growing the evidence base on resilience and protective interventions. The programme continues to support young people to develop prosocial behaviour and good social skills; be positive about the future; develop good self-esteem; develop positive engagement with learning and with school; improve and develop positive connections with their peers; be involved with positive organisations, activities and sport; build positive attachments; and recognise role models.

It has been a truly remarkable 15 years of progress. Since 2008, the programme has supported more than 1.3 million young people in Scotland, and no one could have foreseen the intense challenges of the pandemic and how that would interrupt our young people's lives. Despite all that, the phase 5 cashback partners were able to overcome the multiple challenges to continue to support young people during some really dark days. I commend and thank them for that and for

their continued dedication to supporting the young people in their projects.

Since the programme started 15 years ago, it has gone from strength to strength. Phase 6 has a stronger evidence-based focus on providing targeted support and helping to address underlying causes of antisocial behaviour and crime. The evidence continues to show the correlation between areas of deprivation, adverse childhood experiences, unhappy experiences of school and poor mental health and to show that they are reasons why children and young people may fail to reach their full potential. Our learnings from phase 5 show that poor mental health among children and young people has been exacerbated by the pandemic and that demand for support through the cashback programmes has increased.

Our cashback partners have taken steps to ensure that they have the trauma-informed workforce that is needed to deal with the often extremely complex needs of the young people whom they seek to support. That is why phase 6 has a stronger focus on helping participants to improve their health, mental health and wellbeing and is why phase 6 offers provision of trauma-informed and person-centred support for children, young people and their families.

Cross-cutting policies are needed to identify and support children and their families who are at risk of early adversity at the earliest stage possible, and I look forward to seeing how we can better make such connections. The programme directly supports one of the First Minister's key missions, which is tackling poverty and protecting people from harm. Young people and their families who live and have grown up in poverty are the main target group for cashback projects. Phase 6 projects are also asked to identify families who might need further support and link them with local support services, such as those for assessment for social security benefits, free school meals, school clothing grants or food banks.

Our vision for justice remains to deliver a just, safe and resilient Scotland, and it commits to working with our partners to ensure that people—especially those from deprived communities—are less likely to be victims of crime. That involves community-based project work with young people to prevent harmful behaviour.

Earlier this week, we published a three-year delivery plan that sets out the key areas of work in the justice sector, aligned to the aims that are set out in the vision for justice, which includes the work on cashback that I have talked about today.

I hope that members will join me in congratulating all the phase 5 partners whose work is reflected in the 2022-23 impact report.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):
That concludes the debate on cashback for communities.

Business Motions

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-11143, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme. I call George Adam to move the motion.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 14 November 2023

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Ministerial Statement: Ferguson Marine

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Building a New Scotland: Migration to Scotland after Independence

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 15 November 2023

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
Constitution, External Affairs and Culture;
Justice and Home Affairs

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 16 November 2023

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
Education and Skills

followed by Ministerial Statement: Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Service Contract

followed by Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee Debate: Culture in Communities: The Challenges and

Opportunities in Delivering a Place-based Approach

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 21 November 2023

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Health, Social Care and Sport Committee Debate: Female Participation in Sport and Physical Activity

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 22 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 Labour 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 23 November 2023

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.15 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.15 pm Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body Questions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:
Transport, Net Zero and Just Transition

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Disabled Children and Young People (Transitions to Adulthood) (Scotland) Bill

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 13 November 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]

The Presiding Officer: I call Russell Findlay to speak to and move amendment S6M-11143.2.

17:01

Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con): The Scottish Government has spent more than £80,000 on papers about breaking up the United Kingdom. It has just wasted more taxpayers' money on publishing its latest instalment of propaganda, which it now wants to debate in Parliament. Even Humza Yousaf admits that those papers sit on a website and nobody reads them.

Policing is one of the many public services for which the Scottish Government has full responsibility. The outlook is dire for our hard-working police officers, who protect the public. In recent months, we have heard a series of shocking announcements about Police Scotland. One senior officer described Scottish National Party cuts as a "slash and burn". The Criminal Justice Committee has been told that more than 2,000 police officers could be taken off our streets. The police say that they will no longer be able to investigate every crime in the north-east of Scotland. The Scottish Police Federation put it in the starkest possible terms when it said that "people may die".

We are seeing a rise in recorded crime, and that is just what is being reported. The former chief constable said that policing is

"not one of the priorities"

of the Scottish National Party Government. Yet, during the current parliamentary session, the SNP Government has not dedicated a single debate solely to Scotland's police force, although we have already had multiple debates to argue endlessly about independence.

My business motion amendment proposes ditching the SNP's planned debate on independence and replacing it with a much-needed, long-awaited discussion on the future of Scotland's police. I am giving SNP members the opportunity to make it clear where their priorities lie. Do they lie with the police and giving them the resources that they need to keep the public safe or with their own political obsession with independence? I know that my party and I will be backing the police, and I urge all members to do the same. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear Mr Findlay.

Russell Findlay: I move amendment S6M-11143.2, to leave out "followed by Scottish Government Debate: Building a New Scotland: Migration to Scotland after Independence" and insert:

"followed by Scottish Government Debate: Reversing the Decline in the Number of Officers in

Police Scotland".

The Presiding Officer: I call Martin Whitfield to speak to and move amendment S6M-11143.1.

17:03

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): My amendment seeks to change a debate from one that the Scottish Government wishes to have with one that the Scottish people wish to have.

The other amendment that has just been moved—which, unfortunately, because of pre-emption, we will be unable to support—shows that, across this chamber, there are priorities. My amendment would allow the Scottish Government to talk about the homelessness crisis that we have here, in Scotland. The crisis is not unique to Scotland, but our constituents suffer differently, whether they live in a city such as Edinburgh, which has just declared a housing emergency, or in the country. I think, in particular, of constituents across the south of Scotland, as well as of the homelessness crisis among our students.

Kate Forbes (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): As I understand it, members on both sides are keen to ditch the debate on immigration and the fact that immigration powers should be in the hands of the Scottish Parliament. This week alone, we learned that 7,500 children are stuck in the asylum system that is being run by the United Kingdom Government. Is that not something that we should be debating?

Martin Whitfield: I am grateful for the intervention. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Members, let us hear Mr Whitfield.

Martin Whitfield: It will be interesting to see how the motion on migration is framed and whether, indeed, it talks about the individuals that the member has mentioned in her intervention, because there is no indication in the title that has been offered that indicates that the debate would address those issues.

However, in the amendment that is being proposed by the members of the Conservative Party as well as the amendment that I will move, we speak specifically about challenges that we and our constituents are facing in Scotland. That particularly applies to homelessness and comes soon after the Trussell Trust's recent report on a horrendous increase in the number of emergency food parcels that have had to be handed out and provided for. We are living at a time when there are crises in our communities, and, as we have heard from members across the chamber, those crises are many and varied. However, I urge consideration of one particular crisis, which is homelessness. During Covid, we showed that we

could deal with that situation. Now, we have abandoned those people.

I move amendment S6M-11143.1, to leave out

“followed by Scottish Government Debate: Building a New Scotland: Migration to Scotland after Independence”

and insert:

“followed by Scottish Government Debate: Homeless Crisis in Cities and Rural Areas”.

17:06

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (George Adam): It has been a while since we have had one of these discussions at decision time. As always, I try to work constructively with other business bureau managers, and I will continue to do so in the future. Martin Whitfield’s proposed amendment is valid and of merit, and I have no doubt that we will discuss it at future bureau meetings. However, it is my belief that Scotland’s Parliament must discuss Scotland’s future. Mr Whitfield and I might disagree about what that future holds for us, but it is my belief that Scottish independence would provide us with the necessary tools to deal with the issues and the challenges such as that which Mr Whitfield wishes to discuss, which demonstrates the need for the “Building a New Scotland” series of papers.

With regard to parliamentary process, nothing in standing orders prevents us from discussing matters that are beyond the powers of the Parliament. It is not unusual for the Scottish Parliament to debate and vote on motions in areas that are reserved. The proposed debate on “Building a new Scotland: migration to Scotland after independence” is not new or novel in that sense. We have had numerous debates in the Parliament on reserved matters, and they have allowed the Parliament to take a position or to send a message to those who are responsible for such decisions. In fact, nuclear weapons were the subject of a members’ business debate just last week.

On 4 October, the Government lodged a debate on the UK Government’s two-child benefit cap. Members of the Scottish Labour Party and the Scottish Conservative Party took part in that debate without raising any issues about the reserved nature of the topic. Some members of the Labour Party even criticised us for being too narrow when focusing the debate on the two-child benefit cap instead of on the wider issues with the UK Government’s universal credit system.

It is important for us to discuss migration in the Parliament. In April this year, the Scottish Government led a debate on the UK Government’s Illegal Migration Bill and Labour members supported the Government’s motion,

albeit with an amendment. They proposed no such opposition to the relevance of that debate. Scotland’s population is projected to begin to fall within the next decade. The opportunity to discuss the role that migration can play in addressing Scotland’s distinct demographic challenges should be welcomed by all elected members.

I turn to Mr Findlay’s points. He made another exciting and riveting presentation. However, at the end of the day, as of 30 September 2023, there were 379 more police officers than in 2007, with Police Scotland recruiting almost 600 officers this year alone and starting around 1,480 new recruits since the beginning of 2022.

Once again, there is a difference between the reality and what Mr Findlay talks about. Scotland has more police officers per capita than England and Wales, higher pay ranges—*[Interruption.]*—for officers of all ranks—

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear the minister.

George Adam: —and high levels of investment over the past decade, with 30 officers per 10,000 of the population compared with 25 in England and Wales. The recently agreed pay deal is for a 12 per cent increase over two years for the police workforce, and our police officers remain the best paid in the UK.

We will take no lectures and listen to no scenario from the Conservatives that we are not dealing with the police. We have made sure that Scotland’s crime has been at an all-time low since the 1970s. Mr Findlay might as well sit down, because there is no point in his boring us any more. *[Interruption.]*

With that, I would like to say that I have made my arguments—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Members!

George Adam: I have put my arguments forward, and I believe that Scotland must discuss Scotland’s future.

The Presiding Officer: I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Russell Findlay is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Martin Whitfield will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S6M-11143.2, in the name of Russell Findlay, which seeks to amend motion S6M-11143, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

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

17:11

Meeting suspended.

17:13

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Russell Findlay is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Martin Whitfield will fall.

The question is, that amendment S6M-11143.2, in the name of Russell Findlay, which seeks to amend motion S6M-11143, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme, be agreed to. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is closed.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I could not connect to the platform, but I would have voted no.

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

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)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (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)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)

Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)

Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley)
 (SNP)

Abstentions

Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 29, Against 81, Abstentions 1.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-11143.1, in the name of Martin Whitfield, which seeks to amend motion S6M-11143, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (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)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire)
 (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)

White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, 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)
 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)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and
 Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse)
 (SNP)
 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)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 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

Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 49, Against 63, Abstentions 1.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-11143, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (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)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 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)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 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)
 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)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (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)

Abstentions

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 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 is: For 64, Against 30, Abstentions 19.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 14 November 2023

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Ministerial Statement: Ferguson Marine

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Building a New Scotland: Migration to Scotland after Independence

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 15 November 2023

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Constitution, External Affairs and Culture; Justice and Home Affairs

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 16 November 2023

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Education and Skills

followed by Ministerial Statement: Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Service Contract

followed by Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee Debate: Culture in Communities: The Challenges and Opportunities in Delivering a Place-based Approach

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 21 November 2023

2.00 pm

followed by

followed by

followed by

followed by

followed by

followed by

5.00 pm

followed by

Wednesday 22 November 2023

2.00 pm

2.00 pm

followed by

followed by

followed by

followed by

5.10 pm

followed by

Thursday 23 November 2023

11.40 am

11.40 am

12.00 pm

followed by

2.15 pm

2.15 pm

2.30 pm

followed by

followed by

followed by

5.00 pm

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 13 November 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.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motions S6M-11144, on a stage 1 timetable, and S6M-11145, on a stage 1 extension. I call George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move the motions.

Motions moved,

Time for Reflection

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

Topical Questions (if selected)

Health, Social Care and Sport Committee Debate: Female Participation in Sport and Physical Activity

Committee Announcements

Business Motions

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

Decision Time

Members' Business

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

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

Scottish Labour Party Business

Business Motions

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

Approval of SSIs (if required)

Decision Time

Members' Business

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

General Questions

First Minister's Questions

Members' Business

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body Questions

Portfolio Questions: Transport, Net Zero and Just Transition

Stage 1 Debate: Disabled Children and Young People (Transitions to Adulthood) (Scotland) Bill

Business Motions

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

Decision Time

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Abortion Services (Safe Access Zones) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be completed by 3 May 2024.

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Bankruptcy and Diligence (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be extended to 23 February 2024.—[George Adam]

Motions agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:19

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-11146, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument; S6M-11147 and S6M-11148, on designations of lead committees; S6M-11149, on committee membership; and S6M-11150, on the office of the clerk.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Disability Assistance (Miscellaneous Amendment) (Scotland) Regulations 2023 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Housing (Cladding Remediation) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

That the Parliament agrees that the Social Justice and Social Security Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Social Security (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

That the Parliament agrees that the following changes to committee membership will apply from close of business on Thursday 9 November 2023—

Evelyn Tweed be appointed as a member of the Economy and Fair Work Committee;

Bob Doris be appointed as a member of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee; and

Ruth Maguire be appointed to replace Evelyn Tweed as a member of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee

That the Parliament agrees that the Office of the Clerk be closed on Wednesday 27, Thursday 28 and Friday 29 December 2023.—[George Adam]

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

Decision Time

17:20

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

There are four questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S6M-11127.2, in the name of Russell Findlay, which seeks to amend motion S6M-11127, in the name of Siobhian Brown, on cashback for communities, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

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

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, 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)
 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)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 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)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 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

Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-11127.2, in the name of Russell Findlay, is: For 49, Against 63, Abstentions 1.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-11127.1, in the name of Katy Clark, which seeks to amend motion S6M-11127, in the name of Siobhian Brown, on cashback for communities, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-11127, in the name of Siobhian Brown, on cashback for communities, as amended, be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

That the Parliament commends the CashBack for Communities programme, which is now in its 15th year and sixth phase; understands that the programme is unique to Scotland and reinvests money recovered under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002; acknowledges that the aims of the programme are diversion from antisocial behaviour, provision of positive activity, support for wellbeing, and building confidence and skills for young people; notes that, since its inception, the programme has committed £130 million to supporting around 1.3 million young people; understands that, over the next three years, phase six of the programme is expected to reach around 34,000 young people; welcomes and thanks the CashBack for Communities-funded partner organisations for their dedication, passion and hard work; recognises the opportunities and benefits that the programme brings to children, young people, families and communities; applauds the achievements of the many thousands of CashBack for Communities participants, and recognises the importance of access to restorative justice practices, not only as a measure to prevent antisocial behaviour, but also as a tool for young people who are already involved in the criminal justice system.

The Presiding Officer: I propose to ask a single question on five Parliamentary Bureau motions. Does any member object?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: The question is, that motions S6M-11146, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument; S6M-11147 and S6M-11148, on designations of lead committee; S6M-11149, on committee membership; and S6M-11150, on the office of the clerk, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the Disability Assistance (Miscellaneous Amendment) (Scotland) Regulations 2023 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Housing (Cladding Remediation) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

That the Parliament agrees that the Social Justice and Social Security Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Social Security (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

That the Parliament agrees that the following changes to committee membership will apply from close of business on Thursday 9 November 2023—

Evelyn Tweed be appointed as a member of the Economy and Fair Work Committee;

Bob Doris be appointed as a member of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee; and

Ruth Maguire be appointed to replace Evelyn Tweed as a member of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee

That the Parliament agrees that the Office of the Clerk be closed on Wednesday 27, Thursday 28 and Friday 29 December 2023.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Point of Order

17:23

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance (Shona Robison): On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

Further to the point of order that was made by Douglas Ross last week, the United Kingdom Covid inquiry has asked us to set out in more detail the full timetable of requests for information of the Scottish Government, further to my statement last week. Today, the Scottish Government has therefore answered a Government-inspired question on that matter, setting out the timetable as requested, and I wish to bring that to the attention of the Parliament.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Thank you, Deputy First Minister. That is not a point of order, but Parliament is now aware of the existence of the Government-initiated question.

Scottish Convenience Store Sector

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-10747, in the name of Gordon MacDonald, on the contribution of the Scottish convenience store sector. The debate will be concluded without any question being put, and I ask members who wish to speak in the debate to please press their request-to-speak buttons.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises what it sees as the vital importance of the Scottish convenience sector; understands that there are 5,171 convenience stores in Scotland, providing over 49,000 local jobs, which includes 95% of staff employed on a permanent contract and 42% choosing to walk to work; commends the sector for the key services that local shops provide for communities the length and breadth of the country, such as those in the Edinburgh Pentlands constituency, including, it understands, 83% offering mobile phone top-ups, 76% offering bill payment services, 47% offering free-to-use ATMs, and 27% with Post Offices; welcomes the fact that many Scottish stores also now offer online and home delivery options for customers; notes that the vast majority of shops are open seven days a week, and, in some cases, are open 24 hours a day; understands that colleagues in the UK convenience sector worked a combined total of 12.1 million hours per week between 2022 and 2023; further understands that Scottish convenience retailers have invested £62 million in their stores over the last year, and that, at a UK level, the convenience sector contributed over £10.6 billion in gross value added (GVA) and over £9.1 billion in taxes over the same period, and congratulates the Scottish Grocers' Federation on promoting responsible community retailing among its membership, the sector generally on what it sees as its ability to thrive, and convenience stores on continuing to be, it believes, important local community assets.

17:25

Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I thank those members who supported my motion so that this debate could take place, and I also welcome to the gallery members of the Scottish Grocers Federation, who, back in 2017, were instrumental in support of my steps to establish the cross-party group on independent convenience stores.

The most recent Scottish local shop report—"The Scottish Local Shop Report 2023"—was produced by the Scottish Grocers Federation and the Association of Convenience Stores, and it has been distributed to all members in the past couple of weeks. That annual report highlights not only the contribution of the sector to the Scottish economy but, more important, the essential contribution that convenience stores make to the communities that they serve.

Across Scotland, there are 5,171 convenience stores, many of which are open 24/7. They are an important source of employment, providing more than 49,000 local jobs for local people, from a first job for a young person to a route back into employment for someone balancing family or caring commitments, given the flexible hours that they offer. Our economy also benefits, because those retailers not only provide jobs in their own businesses but support employment across the town or city in which they are located through their use of local tradesmen, produce suppliers, shopfitters, garages and local legal and accountancy firms.

In the past year, convenience stores have invested £62 million in their businesses, purchasing refrigeration equipment, shelving, signage, lighting and new technology, again supporting employment in the wider economy. A survey by Scotland's Towns Partnership found that 91 per cent of Scots recognised that choosing local businesses supported local jobs and employment opportunities. In addition, choosing local keeps money circulating in the local community for longer, reduces unnecessary journeys and helps to tackle the climate crisis.

Why shop local? In my constituency of Edinburgh Pentlands and across the country, 83 per cent of convenience stores offer mobile top-ups; 76 per cent offer bill payment services; 47 per cent have free ATMs; and 27 per cent have post offices. Others offer online shopping with home delivery included. The data also highlights that 36 per cent of convenience stores are in rural areas, with another 27 per cent in outlying parts of our cities and towns. Those stores provide a focal point for communities, as they are often the only retailer in the area.

The stores carry a wide range of products, and the Scottish local shop report highlights that, in an average independent convenience store, 4,735 individual products are stocked during the course of a year, including staple items such as bread, milk, toiletries and pet food. Those stores become a meeting place for locals and are therefore more than just places to shop; they are vital community hubs, with services such as post offices, parcel collection and bill payment facilities. They also provide cashback services and free-to-use ATMs, which customers might use to make purchases in other businesses nearby, thereby supporting the growth of the local economy.

The Scottish Government's policy is to encourage local living and the development of 20-minute neighbourhoods where people can meet most of their daily needs within a reasonable distance of their home. Convenience stores are, by their very nature, at the heart of that policy, given that 51 per cent of store customers live

within a quarter of a mile of their nearest retailer and 59 per cent of those customers travel to their local store by foot or bike. Because those stores are at the heart of their communities, the average customer visits their convenience store nearly three times per week. Indeed, according to the report, 36 per cent know the people who run and work in their local shop very well or quite well.

As a result of the close connection with local residents, 81 per cent of retailers have been engaged in some form of community activity in the past year. That takes many forms, including collecting for charities, providing funding for local events or sponsoring local sports teams. That close relationship between store owners and customers is highlighted in one example from my constituency. Linda and Dennis Williams have run the Oxfangs Premier store for 40 years, and now run it along with their daughter Sophie. During the pandemic, they realised that many of their customers were struggling to put food on the table, so they decided to set up a coronavirus hardship fund, using their own money to help the most vulnerable members of the local community, and asked the community to match the fund with the aim of raising a total of £500.

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): As the daughter of a grocer, I am utterly loyal to local convenience stores and am very much enjoying the debate.

I know that he has just started to describe this, but does Gordon MacDonald agree that local stores also have a health and wellbeing benefit? For example, if Mrs Smith who is usually in three times a week has not been appearing, staff in a store will recognise that. There is an extended benefit in that respect.

Gordon MacDonald: I absolutely agree. In addition, as some stores deliver to homes where people are housebound or have caring responsibilities, they can keep an eye on the most vulnerable in society. I thank Audrey Nicoll for that intervention—the only issue is that I have forgotten where I am in my speech now.

To the Williams's surprise, they hit their initial target in the space of 24 hours, with the support of the local community. However, as more people became aware of the much-needed initiative to help those struggling during the pandemic, they continued to receive money and eventually raised more than £10,000.

The hardship fund was handed out in small amounts, with no questions asked, to ensure that the money was used to help as many people as possible, whether to pay for food or household bills. Their efforts made a huge difference to many in the community and they rightly received wide recognition, winning a number of awards. Those

included, last month, the Raj Aggarwal trophy from the Association of Convenience Stores, which is awarded to retailers who have demonstrated exceptional commitment to community retailing over the past year, supporting their colleagues, customers and fellow retailers and representing the very best of community retailing.

The convenience store sector has faced many hardships in recent years, from the financial crash of 2008 to the pandemic, Brexit food shortages and now inflationary pressure on overheads. Earlier this year, the Scottish Government offered support by funding the go local project, offering a match-funded grant worth up to £5,500 per store for convenience shop owners to provide dedicated long-term display space for locally sourced, fresh and healthy Scottish products. Stores that took part in the initial pilot saw a 40 per cent increase in sales of local products and delivered additional local economic benefits in excess of £159,000 per store. The initiative also enabled stores to support Scottish producers and give those businesses a vital route to market, helping with recovery and regrowth from Covid-19.

At a time when households and businesses are bearing the brunt of Westminster's cost of living crisis, it is right that we celebrate the hard work and resilience of Scotland's convenience store sector.

17:34

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): I thank my colleague Gordon MacDonald for highlighting the crucial role that Scotland's convenience stores play in all of our communities the length and breadth of the country. He has been a dedicated supporter of the sector for many years and it is right to recognise his commitment.

"The Scottish Local Shop Report 2023" is packed full of helpful facts and figures that give us a flavour of the incredible diversity of the sector and its importance to the local communities that it serves. Gordon MacDonald has shared a range of those facts to give us a sense of that, but there are a few others that stand out for me, the first of which is that the convenience store sector's sales turnover in the UK is about £49 billion per year and is predicted to hit £50 billion by 2026. That is an impressive figure. The value and extent of the business to the wider Scottish economy certainly surprised me.

The secret is in the name, of course—it is all about convenience. As we know, the origins of convenience stores are rooted in an era when few people had cars and the supermarket model, drawing thousands of shoppers at a time to out-of-town locations, was only just emerging. Their continuing success comes from their being located

where people need them—in the heart of the communities that they serve.

The report also tells us that roughly two out of every three customers who use their local convenience stores still walk to them every day. That is a remarkable success story that we often take for granted, and it is probably no surprise that, given the size and success of the sector, the supermarkets are doing their best to mirror the convenience store model and grab a slice of that business through their own multiple small shops, which seem to be ever expanding.

Gordon MacDonald also highlighted the increasing diversity of products and services that our local shops now offer in the modern era. They include things such as wi-fi, click and collect, bill paying and cashback services, as well as postal facilities, home deliveries, the facility to pick up prescriptions and key cutting. Some of those services provided a vital lifeline for many families during the Covid emergency and have, thankfully, remained in place. I do not recall any of them being available when I was a youngster getting sent to the shop every day by my mother for odds and ends, so it is a testament to how convenience stores have adapted to fast-changing needs and demands within their communities.

All of us know a local convenience store to which we turn for those essentials. One of my local stores is W & D Minto, which has operated on Dean Street in Kilmarnock since 1953—that is, for 70 years. Every day that I pass by, Dougie Minto can be seen in the shop, bringing in all the goods that we have been talking about. However, it is much more than that; Dougie, his shop and his staff are a community focal point, too. He knows everyone in the area—he knows who needs help, and he is much more of a community champion than anyone I have ever known. Long may he and his shop continue.

Dougie says that the biggest change in his time is the plummeting sales of newspapers. Technology has played a huge part in that, but so, too, I suspect, has the editorial style and content of many of today's newspapers, which seem to be ever more extreme and out of touch with the ordinary people of Scotland.

Our convenience shops are much more than their name suggests. In many ways, they are the cornerstone of our communities, providing us with vital goods and services nearest to where we live. I hope that they will continue to offer those services far into the future.

I thank my colleague Gordon MacDonald once again for bringing the success of our convenience stores to the Parliament's attention.

17:38

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I congratulate Gordon MacDonald on securing the debate. I associate myself with his motion, which I was happy to sign, and I acknowledge the work that he does as convener of the cross-party group on independent convenience stores, of which I am happy to be a member and supporter.

In his opening speech, Gordon MacDonald referred to “The Scottish Local Shop Report 2023”, which was published recently. I think that he quoted every statistic from it, so I will not repeat every one of them but will give a few highlights.

In Scotland, there are 49,000 jobs in the sector, which is a significant employment footprint. The sector pays £9.1 billion in taxes across the UK, which is a significant economic and fiscal contribution. There are 5,171 convenience stores in Scotland, and 70 per cent of those are independently owned. The sector is made up of small, often family, businesses—people, as we have heard in the debate, who work extremely hard, work long hours and provide a vital service to their local communities.

The key point about convenience stores is that they are convenient for local people. They are convenient in that they are often at the end of the street. If, as a society, we are concerned about meeting net zero targets, we want to have convenient services available to people, so having shops that people can buy their groceries in within walking or cycling distance of their homes makes a lot of sense.

As Gordon MacDonald said, convenience stores often provide a range of other services, such as mobile phone top-ups, post office services and bill payment and cashback facilities. Convenience stores mean that a range of other activities are available in local neighbourhoods, which are all very welcome.

I was very pleased to attend, as a guest, the Scottish Grocers Federation’s conference in Glasgow last month. I think that I might have been the only MSP who was there. I very much enjoyed being part of that event, hearing about the success stories and celebrating a lot of the good news in the sector, which we have already heard about.

However, during the conference, the sector raised a number of challenges, one of which was to do with business rates. Many convenience stores will be beneath the threshold for paying business rates because of the small business bonus scheme, but some of them will not—some of them will be larger and will pay business rates. A concern that was raised with me was the fact that, although retail businesses south of the border have a 75 per cent rates relief in the current financial year, that was not passed on by the

Scottish Government to shops in Scotland. That has caused concern to people who are involved in businesses here.

Concern was also raised about the shambolic deposit return scheme, which I am pleased to see has been shelved for the time being. Businesses in the sector are concerned about the fact that, in due course, that scheme might come back, and about what that would mean for them and what costs would be involved.

In addition, concerns were expressed about what might come down the track in terms of restrictions on the marketing of alcohol products, because alcohol forms an important part of the range of products on offer in many convenience stores. If there were overly restrictive rules on the promotion of alcohol, as was originally suggested, that could have a really negative impact on the sector. That is another issue that we need to be careful about.

However, the biggest concern in the sector is about the rise in crime and the violence against shop workers, which has been growing. Daniel Johnson, who is not with us tonight, introduced a member’s bill on the issue to make it an enhanced offence to attack a shop worker. That was very welcome, but there are still too many attacks on shop workers.

There has also been a dramatic increase in the number of reports of shoplifting. Rather than being due to increases in the cost of living and people being in poverty, that shoplifting is being arranged by organised crime gangs that are targeting particular products and local shops. There is real concern that that is happening and that there is a lack of a deterrent. We do not have enough police around to deter such crimes, it is very difficult to catch people when they commit them and, when they are caught, the penalties that they receive are not sufficient to act as a deterrent. We definitely need to have a more effective police presence, and we need to have a justice system that properly punishes people who are caught shoplifting.

That is what people in the sector are calling for. If we support the sector, we should endorse those calls and support them in their efforts to provide more protection for people who are trying to earn a living in what can often be a difficult business.

17:43

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): I, too, compliment Gordon MacDonald on securing this most important debate. It is a pleasure to follow Murdo Fraser, although I fear that he might have been looking at my speech. I am not sure how—he must have done it through the magic of the far bench.

I welcome the publication of “The Scottish Local Shop Report 2023”, because it rightly shines a light on an incredibly important element of our communities. Once upon a time, we used to talk about the banks, the police stations and the other services that were there. We used to talk about the cornerstones of our communities. Communities need to have cornerstones in order to build resilience, knowledge and understanding, and to build networks. Sadly, on so many levels, it is our convenience stores that provide all four corners to ensure that our communities can survive.

I will add two fascinating aspects to the plethora of data that has been submitted. The first relates to the location of convenience stores: 36 per cent are in our rural communities, 37 per cent are in our urban communities and 27 per cent are in our suburban communities. What other economic units can claim to have such coverage across Scotland? They sit at the heart of our communities.

We can look at the sort of communities that convenience stores serve: 39 per cent of them are isolated stores that are frequently the only option for families, 27 per cent sit on small parades, 10 per cent sit on large parades and 24 per cent are on the main streets of our cities. That shows that our convenience stores are not just part of the fabric of our communities but an essential piece of the jigsaw. That is certainly reflected in the knowledge that I have of the community in which I live and communities across the south of Scotland from stories that have been shared with me by convenience store operators and owners and by individuals.

I look back to the beginning of Covid, when people did not know where to turn or where to look. Many people went first to the shop that they go in nearly every day of their lives, and, almost to the end, they were greeted, supported and welcomed. I am aware of shopkeepers who put their hands in their own pockets for people and assisted with food provision. I am aware of shops that went above and beyond by delivering to people who could not come out of their houses, which they have imaginatively and entrepreneurially continued to do, and, quite frankly, they do it better than a lot of the large delivery services.

I trust my local convenience store to take a package from those delivery services, because I know that it will be safe, that I can pick it up from someone I know and that it will be there when they say it is there. We cannot overstate the value of our convenience stores, and we should pay tribute to every one of them and to the staff who sometimes struggle because of the challenges that I will come to shortly. The fact that they are

there when our people and communities need them is a great tribute to them, and we have a responsibility to allow those economic vehicles to continue.

That allows me to turn to some of the challenges that Murdo Fraser raised, including business rates, energy bills—many convenience stores run refrigerated units and were suddenly thrown when their bills came up for renewal—and the deposit return scheme, which might well come back.

I will spend a small part of my time on violence and theft—because that is what shoplifting is—from such premises. I find myself in slight disagreement with Murdo Fraser as to the reasons behind that, but I am not sure that there would be value in going into that in this debate. Shopkeepers have said to me, “I let that person take that thing because I knew that they didn’t have it and they needed it.” I am also aware of shopkeepers who, having gone to the police with closed-circuit television footage and the name and address of the person who has taken stuff from the shop, have received little or no support. We are talking about small shops that cannot survive if they continue to be exposed to that sort of theft.

On a sad note, I mention the violence that those shops and the people who work in them face. In part, it is due to the pressures that exist in society and, in part, it is to do with a change in attitude. I am aware of situations that have started in shops and had the most horrible consequences, and I am aware of people who have given up working in shops because of the violence that they faced.

As I said at the beginning of my contribution, convenience stores are a crucial part of our communities, and if we want to serve them in the way that they have served us for generations, we need to find a way to support the workers and the owners.

17:49

Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con): I am honoured to take part in today’s debate on the contribution of the Scottish convenience store sector, and I thank Gordon MacDonald for securing it. Although the member’s motion talks in great detail about the sector’s contribution to the economy, I would like to spend some time discussing the importance of Scottish convenience stores to our cultural and social fabric.

I am the proud daughter of a former shopkeeper. Many members seated here today will undoubtedly have an image in their mind of their neighbourhood convenience stores—the welcoming faces, the familiarity, the dependability and the constancy. Convenience stores are like little life savers when we are in a hurry or just need

a quick fix but, as the daughter of a shopkeeper, I know that they are much more than that, too.

Convenience stores are the staple of communities. For many, going to one can be a light-hearted outing to pick up goods, socialise or discuss neighbourhood drama, but for some it is a sanctuary. As many members are aware, I frequently bring up the comfort, safety and open ear that my mum provided to victims of domestic abuse. It was in my family's store on Argyle Street in Glasgow that she did that, and I know that she will not be the only shopkeeper to have done it.

The relationship that is forged over decades between customers and shopkeepers, particularly in the UK, is something to be celebrated, and I think that community bonds are the reason why Scottish convenience stores are so successful. As well as that, they are champions of the local community, with 65 per cent collecting money for a local or national charity, 33 per cent donating to a food bank and 17 per cent providing funding or in-kind support to a community event. They also provide around 49,000 secure local jobs. It is without question that Scottish convenience stores are socially and economically invaluable, but the question is whether the Parliament is doing all that it can to ensure that the industry reaches its full potential.

Before I conclude, I will mention Scottish retail crime, which my colleague Murdo Fraser touched on. The amount of retail crime that the convenience industry is currently dealing with is astounding, and our legal system is doing very little to help. Our courts and police personnel are in disarray. These days, organised crime groups and criminals think that they are untouchable. Last week, at the UK retail breakfast round-table event held in the Scottish Parliament, we heard that thugs routinely go into stores, take what they like and leave. Some shopkeepers do not even bother reporting the crime any more, due to fear of retribution and the fact that the police will not attend or will arrive too late.

I acknowledge that that is not directly the fault of our police service but is a result of chronic underfunding of Police Scotland, a lack of resources and workforce shortages. Nonetheless, it is a huge problem, and the Scottish Government must urgently address the situation. Small businesses cannot sustain continued losses. We heard from Martin Whitfield that the businesses are very little and every penny counts in their profit margin. We need to do much more to help micro and small businesses.

Scottish convenience stores are vital to the country's economy and to society. They are evidence of relationships that have grown over decades between store owners and their patrons. Although the future of the Scottish convenience

sector seems promising, the SNP needs to recognise that our retail sector is beginning to exhibit signs of a deficient justice system. A combination of fewer officers and a soft-touch justice system is allowing criminals free rein. The SNP must act urgently to address that. Today's motion has been an opportunity to be up front about the challenges that the Scottish convenience sector faces. I hope that real actions will be taken to support the sector following this debate.

17:54

The Minister for Local Government Empowerment and Planning (Joe FitzPatrick):

I thank Gordon MacDonald for bringing the motion to Parliament and members for their contributions highlighting the importance of the retail convenience store sector to Scotland. These debates are always enlightening. I certainly was not aware that the Parliament had at least two daughters of grocers: Audrey Nicoll and Pam Gosal. It is always useful to hear more about people's experiences, and I am sure that Pam and Audrey will have many stories to tell.

Without doubt, our local retailers and convenience stores provide vital local accessible services and flexible employment opportunities. As Gordon MacDonald and others have said, they contribute so much to their communities, often acting as the only local hub in towns, villages and neighbourhoods.

Willie Coffey highlighted how they have taken on many of the traditional roles that we would have seen elsewhere on the high street, as society has adapted to changing trends and the digital age, whether that be postal and banking services or energy and communication needs, which is in addition to their food and drink offer. It was useful to hear about the pilots for the go local project.

Convenience stores are crucial to community resilience, building social interaction, fostering a positive sense of community and supporting active and vibrant local economies. It was good to hear several members mention the contribution of grocers across Scotland during the pandemic.

I think that we all want our town and neighbourhood centres to be diverse, sustainable and thriving places where communities can enjoy living and working. We want our towns and town centres to be vibrant, creative, enterprising and accessible, and to be places where people can meet most of their daily needs within a reasonable distance of their home, enabling them to live better, healthier lives and to support our net zero ambitions. In relation to reaching net zero, Murdo Fraser mentioned that convenience stores are

within walking, cycling and wheeling distance of most of our population.

Martin Whitfield: One of the statistics that I mentioned is that 39 per cent of convenience stores are located in isolated areas, where they are literally the only available store for people. How will the minister support such stores to reach net zero while ensuring their basic survival?

Joe FitzPatrick: We all have a role in supporting our local stores, particularly if they are the only hub in an area and provide a range of services. I will come on to talk a little about some of the work that we are doing. It is important to be clear that this is not—it never is—a party-political issue. I work closely with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities spokesperson Councillor Gail Macgregor, who is a member of Mr Fraser's party, on this issue. We all realise that the sector is of huge importance to our economy but is of even greater importance to our local communities.

Clearly, local convenience shops and retailers play a key role in ensuring that people can live well locally, ensuring access to food and the plethora of services that we have highlighted. Members have also mentioned the really important services that many of those stores provide for people who have ability or disability issues, who are infirm or who lack access to transport.

As Gordon MacDonald said, convenience stores are massively important to local jobs. In many cases, they offer a range of flexible hours. They can also offer skills development and flexible and successful careers from a first job in a local shop to the potential of distribution, supply chain businesses, large stores, ownership or management. Those are real opportunities for people in local communities.

To return to Mr Whitfield's point, convenience stores can continue only if we support them. That is why the Scotland Loves Local scheme is so important. I encourage people to consider the fact that, if they spend money locally, they are supporting not only the local shop but their friends, family and neighbours, which is important.

I am mindful that I am taking a bit of time, so I will touch on one or two of the challenges that members rightly raised. Murdo Fraser and Martin Whitfield both talked about non-domestic rates. We obviously have to go through the budget process, but it is important to remember that, in last year's budget, the big ask of the Scottish Government was freezing the poundage rate. Scotland managed to freeze the poundage, so we now have the lowest poundage in the UK for the fifth year in a row, with a package of reliefs that is worth an estimated £749 million.

I contend that we provide the best support across these islands to retail business, in

particular those at the smaller end of the spectrum. However, I recognise the challenges that have been raised, which is why the new deal for business group has established a consultative sub-group to advise on non-domestic rates. Those discussions are being taken forward by the Minister for Community Wealth and Public Finance, and decisions clearly have to be made in time for the budget.

Several members raised the issue of crime. Murdo Fraser and Pam Gosal talked in particular about the challenges around organised crime. That is, without question, a serious issue—it seems to be developing, and we need to work together on tackling it. The Scottish Government and its partners in the serious organised crime task force are fully committed to tackling serious crime in all its guises, and reducing the harm that it causes to our communities. Partners in that task force will use every means at their disposal to disrupt the activities of organised crime groups and hold them to account for the harm that they cause to communities and businesses, and, in particular, to the most vulnerable in our society.

However, I tend to agree with Martin Whitfield that there are other factors at play. Last month, the First Minister cited Dr Sinéad Furey, a senior lecturer in consumer management and food innovation at Ulster University, who was very clear that "stealing to eat" has taken place

"in previous times of ... economic downturn".

While there is no suggestion that that is the only driver, there are clear concerns right now about the impact of the cost of living crisis. Of course, that is never an excuse.

Mr Whitfield mentioned violence against retail workers, in particular, which can never, ever be acceptable. The Parliament voted to pass the Protection of Workers (Retail and Age-restricted Goods and Services) (Scotland) Act, which came into force in August 2021. Statistics on that are just coming through, but the statistics from August 2021 to August 2022, which were published just last week, showed that 27 individuals were prosecuted under that legislation, 26 of whom were convicted—a conviction rate of 96 per cent. It is important to note that 50 per cent of those who were convicted received a custodial sentence, which highlights the serious nature of the offence. As the minister with responsibility for retail, I take that area really seriously, and the retail industry leadership group will look at doing a deep dive to see what more we can do collectively to deal with that challenge.

I see that time is upon us, so I conclude with a huge thank you to our convenience sector for the vital services that it provides to our communities across Scotland. I also extend my thanks, in

particular, to the Scottish Grocers Federation for promoting responsible community retailing among its membership.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate.

Meeting closed at 18:04.

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