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Wednesday 2 October 2024

CONTENTS

	Col.
PORTFOLIO QUESTION TIME	1
RURAL AFFAIRS, LAND REFORM AND ISLANDS	1
Farmed Salmon	1
Food and Drink (Impact of Brexit).....	3
Tree Planting	5
Food and Drink Produce (Labelling).....	6
Scottish Food and Drink Produce (Supermarkets).....	7
Hunting with Dogs (Scotland) Act 2023 (Licensing Scheme).....	9
“The National Islands Plan”	10
HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE	12
Paramedics (Employment)	12
Alcohol-related Deaths (Lothian).....	13
Neurodivergent People (Support).....	16
Brain Tumours (Diagnostic Pathways)	17
Dental Treatment.....	18
NHS Ayrshire and Arran (Cost of Repairs).....	19
National Treatment Centres (Impact of Delays on Waiting Lists)	20
Mental Health Services (Locums).....	22
HOUSING EMERGENCY	24
<i>Motion moved—[Anas Sarwar].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Paul McLennan].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Miles Briggs].</i>	
Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab)	24
The Minister for Housing (Paul McLennan).....	29
Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con).....	33
Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green).....	37
Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD)	39
Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab).....	41
Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP).....	44
Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab)	46
Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)	49
Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con).....	51
Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab).....	54
Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)	57
Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con)	59
Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)	61
Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)	64
Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green)	67
Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con)	70
The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice (Shirley-Anne Somerville)	72
Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab).....	74
BUSINESS MOTIONS	78
<i>Motions moved—[Jamie Hepburn]—and agreed to.</i>	
PARLIAMENTARY BUREAU MOTIONS	81
<i>Motions moved—[Jamie Hepburn].</i>	
DECISION TIME	82
MEDICAL AESTHETICS INDUSTRY	88
<i>Motion debated—[Stuart McMillan].</i>	
Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)	88
Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP).....	91
Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con)	93
Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP).....	94
Foyso Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab).....	96
Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP).....	97

Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green)..... 98
Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con)..... 100
The Minister for Public Health and Women’s Health (Jenni Minto)..... 102

Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 2 October 2024

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

Portfolio Question Time

Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): Good afternoon. The first item of business this afternoon is portfolio question time. The first portfolio is rural affairs, land reform and islands. As ever, any member who wishes to ask a supplementary question should press their request-to-speak button during the relevant question.

Question number 1 has not been lodged.

Farmed Salmon

2. **Alex Rowley:** To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on whether any further action is required to address reported concerns around the environmental, sustainability and welfare impacts of farmed salmon. (S6O-03782)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): We have in place robust legislation, policies and operational practices to ensure that farmers are meeting statutory requirements related to the environment, sustainability and welfare, such as sea lice reporting and management, mortality reporting and listed disease surveillance.

It is important to recognise that Scotland's salmon industry is a significant contributor to our economy, particularly in rural and island communities. It produces high-quality nutritious products with a lower carbon footprint than many other sources of farmed protein.

It is also important to highlight our document "Vision for Sustainable Aquaculture", which sets out how we will support the development of our aquaculture industry to operate within environmental limits and deliver social and economic benefits for Scotland.

Alex Rowley: As the cabinet secretary is no doubt aware, there have been long-standing concerns about the welfare and environmental impact of farmed salmon. Those have included on-going reports of mass fish deaths on salmon farms, the increasing impact of sea lice on those farms and increased use of chemicals and antibiotics to combat the levels of disease. Is the Scottish Government not concerned that continual

reports of disease-ridden farms have potential to ruin the global reputation of Scottish salmon? What more could and should be done about that issue?

Mairi Gougeon: I recognise some of the concerns that Mr Rowley raises, and I completely understand wider public concern about fish health and mortality. However, to touch on one example that was used recently, misinformation was reported in relation to what happened in advance of a visit to a fish farm by members of a Parliament committee last week. That misrepresentation of some of the issues shows a lack of understanding of some operations. Notwithstanding that, Mr Rowley raises really important issues.

It is important to mention our work on the back of the Griggs review and its recommendations. Fish health and welfare is of paramount importance, and we continually strive to improve that. That is a key pillar in our "Vision for Sustainable Aquaculture", which we published last year. We want to see improvements in fish health and welfare. I know that the industry is committed to doing that and to reducing mortalities to the lowest possible levels.

We continue to engage in discussions with industry and our regulators. More widely, I chair the Scottish Aquaculture Council—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Briefly.

Mairi Gougeon: —which brings together a range of different bodies to try to address some of those issues.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I have a couple of supplementary questions from members. They will need to be brief, as will the responses.

Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): Will the cabinet secretary tell members how many jobs the finfish aquaculture industry supports in rural Scotland? Will she also set out some of the detail of the economic importance of the industry nationally and in rural and island communities?

Mairi Gougeon: It is important to recognise the significant economic contribution that our fish farming sector makes to our rural economy and Scotland's economy more widely. The overall figures show that the industry was worth £1.2 billion at farm-gate prices in 2022. It employs more than 12,000 people throughout the supply chain; it also provides well-paid jobs in some of our most rural communities and in our island communities. The industry makes a significant economic contribution.

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I remind members of my entry in the register of members' interests. I am a proprietor of

a wild salmon fishery on the east coast of Scotland, where there are no fish farms.

We heard this morning in committee that mortality in salmon farms has been around 20 to 25 per cent, but it is somewhat better this year because of colder seas. Given that the industry seems to be predicting a 2 per cent drop in mortality, how long should it be before the industry should consider whether expansion is right until it has fish mortality under control?

Mairi Gougeon: It is important to remember that a range of different issues contribute to fish mortality. I know that the industry would be committed to driving that to the lowest possible levels, as we are. We expect producers to drive it to the lowest possible levels because it is not in anyone's interests to see high mortality, whether from a fish health and welfare perspective or from an economic perspective.

I know the challenges that we are seeing. The industry invests quite a lot in research, innovation and development to tackle them. As we recognise in our "Vision for Sustainable Aquaculture", investment in innovation will be critical to our ability to address the challenges that we see in relation to climate change and other issues.

Food and Drink (Impact of Brexit)

3. Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I apologise for being late to the chamber.

To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on what assessment it has made of the impact of Brexit on Scotland's food and drink sector. (S6O-03783)

The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie): The easy answer is that it has been very bad. The food and drink sector has undoubtedly borne the brunt of Brexit, which has disrupted supply chains, created new trade barriers and driven up food prices.

The value of food imports from the European Union into Scotland fell by 13 per cent in 2023 compared with 2019. That slowdown is particularly acute for fruit and vegetable imports, which are down 51 per cent, and for fish and seafood imports, which are down 67 per cent. Many Scottish food industries are also suffering from lower exports to the EU, including a 45 per cent fall in the value of fruit and vegetable exports between 2019 and 2023.

Clare Adamson: The Association of Independent Meat Suppliers—AIMS—has warned that failures in

"veterinary oversight and inaccuracies in certification processes are leaving UK businesses 'at risk of economic loss, waste and an increasingly unmanageable burden of bureaucracy'."

We know that the way back to the full benefits of the EU is with independence, but the Tories promised fewer trade barriers, no diminution of food standards and lower costs, while Labour remained silent on Brexit.

Does the minister agree that the United Kingdom Government must seek a new deal with the EU that reflects the wishes of the people of Scotland and gives us the benefits that are enjoyed by our Northern Ireland counterparts?

Jim Fairlie: I absolutely agree, and the Scottish National Party is the only party in Scotland to advocate for rejoining the EU, not least to remove the harms from Brexit, such as the one that Clare Adamson has highlighted.

The new immigration rules have imposed a minimum salary for veterinarians, who now require skilled worker visas. That obviously adds costs and will potentially impact on recruitment.

Although we continue to work across the Government, we also continue to call for negotiation between the EU and the UK on a veterinary and sanitary and phytosanitary agreement, which would remove many Brexit barriers and, therefore, benefit our businesses and consumers. It is our view that any such agreement should be comprehensive—it should be broad and deep—because that would offer the most benefits for Scotland. Indeed, one study undertaken by Aston University estimates that such an agreement could increase agri-food exports from the UK to the EU by at least 22.5 per cent.

However, it is vital that devolved Governments are central to any negotiations. Therefore, as always, we stand ready to work collaboratively to achieve the best possible results for Scottish consumers and businesses. I hope that the UK Government is minded to do the same.

Tim Eagle (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I alert members to my entry in the register of members' interests as a small farmer.

I do not think that it is helpful to continue to talk about the negatives of Brexit when we are coming up on 10 years since the vote. Last year, a Quality Meat Scotland report revealed that red meat exports had, in fact, reached a new high of £93 million, 95 per cent of which were export revenues that were generated in the EU market. However, QMS warned in the report that those sales were being limited by reduced abattoir provision in Scotland.

Instead of talking down Brexit all the time, will the cabinet secretary and minister now take action to fix the abattoir shortage in Scotland?

Jim Fairlie: I am afraid that I am not buying that at all. Tim Eagle talks about there having been no

damage to the food and drink sector in Scotland, when it has been catastrophic.

On our ability to ensure that the Scottish abattoir sector continues to work, we are already looking at that, as the Deputy Presiding Officer knows. However, there are huge issues involved. Tim Eagle talks about abattoir provision when we cannot get vets to come here from Europe because of new, Brexit-imposed wage restrictions. I am sorry, but I do not buy his point at all.

Tree Planting

4. Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will increase funding to enable more trees of commercial species to be planted in Scotland. (S6O-03784)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): Despite the pressures on the Scottish Government's budget, nearly £40 million is available this year to support the planting of a wide range of woodland. The planting of timber-producing species is an important part of that balance and normally represents around half of the new planting in Scotland. Productive species also make up 60 per cent of the restocking that is supported by the forestry grant scheme. Although we are not able to increase funding this year for tree planting, we have introduced flexibility to adjust grant contributions so that existing funding is spread across more projects and enables the planting of more productive species.

Fergus Ewing: The cabinet secretary will know that our sawmills and panel products businesses contribute £1 billion a year to the economy and provide 25,000 jobs. They can do far more, because we import more timber than any country in the world except China. However, without a continuous, regular and guaranteed steady supply of commercial species, those businesses' future is in question.

If the minister wants to know where the money can come from to spend more on trees, I suggest that she takes it from rewilding and peatland restoration of dubious value and that she avoids throwing further millions of pounds on futile attempts to avoid the extinction of the capercaillie, which is surely already the most expensive bird in world avian history.

Mairi Gougeon: The member has made a few points that I will try to touch on. There is no getting around the fact—I have been quite transparent about this—that, with the budget that we have for tree planting this year, we are absolutely not in the place that we would want to be, especially when we have been on such a good trajectory on levels of tree planting in Scotland, with 15,000 hectares

planted in the previous year. We had a target of 18,000 hectares for this year, which, unfortunately, we will not be able to meet with the available funding. However, that is largely down to the massive cuts that we have received from the United Kingdom Government. There is a 10 per cent cut to our capital budgets overall, which means that we are restricted in what we can do.

The member touched on a lot of other areas. On peatland restoration, our peatland is responsible for about 15 per cent of our emissions, so the funding that we put into developing the industry to restore our peatlands is vitally important. It is also important that we maximise the budget that we have and get as many trees in the ground as possible with what is available.

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): Scotland's forestry sector achieved record tree planting last year, but budget cuts will limit new woodland creation to around 10,000 hectares this year. At that level, the sector advises that jobs and industry confidence will be lost and that the infrastructure for planting will shrink, consigning Scotland to years of failure. Given the sector's £1.1 billion annual contribution to Scotland's economy, will the Scottish Government provide the £10.5 million of additional funding that is needed to prevent long-term industry damage?

Mairi Gougeon: I covered that point in my opening response. If that funding is to come from the budget in-year, I would like some suggestions from the member as to where it could come from, because right now we simply do not have it. However, the important point is that teams in Scottish Forestry are undertaking work this year to maximise the tree planting that we can undertake with the resources that we have available. We are trying to be as flexible as possible within that and ensure that we make the best of the budgets that we have.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 5 is from James Dornan, who joins us remotely.

Food and Drink Produce (Labelling)

5. James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what communication it has had with the United Kingdom Government, since the general election, regarding the potential impact on Scotland's food and drink sector of the reported proposal for "not for EU" labelling on food and drink products in the UK. (S6O-03785)

The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie): Since the general election, officials have been meeting regularly with UK Government officials to discuss their plans for the proposed Great Britain-wide "not for EU" labelling. I am pleased that the Government appears to be taking

a more measured and evidence-based approach to that labelling. The cabinet secretary and I are keen to work together to develop a proportionate and workable solution to address some of the concerns around the free flow of goods into Northern Ireland.

James Dornan: I welcome the discussions that are taking place between both Governments. Labelling is a wholly devolved matter and policy decisions in that space should rest with Scotland's democratically elected Government. GB-wide labelling proposals are merely another assault on Scotland's devolved political settlement, although I obviously welcome the abandonment of the scheme. Scrapping Tory schemes aside, does the minister have any further indications that the Labour Government intends to act differently from its predecessor and respect this Parliament and Scotland's Government?

Jim Fairlie: The Scottish Government has made clear its commitment to working collaboratively with the UK Government in order to achieve better outcomes for Scotland. We are working constructively with the UK Government on areas of common ground, such as helping the economy grow and transition to net zero, in a way that respects devolution and all the powers of the Scottish Parliament.

The cabinet secretary and I were in London a few weeks ago to meet Steve Reed, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Huw Irranca-Davies from the Welsh Government, and Andrew Muir from the Northern Irish Government. We had a very positive and constructive discussion, which was based on mutual respect for devolved competencies and a much closer, more collegiate working relationship. We hope that that becomes the norm.

Scottish Food and Drink Produce (Supermarkets)

6. Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what data it holds on the availability and prominence of Scottish food and drink produce in supermarkets operating in Scotland. (S6O-03786)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): Market data suggests that, in 2023, there were sales of £541 million on Scottish brands in supermarkets, with independent consumer insights commissioned by Scotland Food & Drink highlighting that Scottish consumers want to buy more Scottish products. That is why we have committed more than £10 million over the course of 2023 to 2025 to support the delivery of Scotland's food and drink strategy, "Sustaining Scotland. Supplying the World." That strategy contains a number of actions to increase local

sourcing and get more of our quality products on supermarket shelves so that we can continue to ensure that consumers increasingly have easier access to Scottish products.

Willie Coffey: The cabinet secretary will be aware of some of the finest products that are available in my constituency and across Ayrshire, including Dunlop cheese, Darvel Dexter beef, Ayrshire Riviera cider, Lochlea whisky and, of course, the world-famous Kilmarnock pie. However, not all of those products can be found on our supermarket shelves. Aldi, which has the highest overall percentage of Scottish products at 49 per cent, and Lidl, with 100 per cent Scottish lamb, are the standouts. However, our friends at Asda, Tesco and Sainsbury's all appear to have less than 10 per cent Scottish products on their shelves.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that we should all be united in calling on supermarkets to back Scotland's food producers and buy Scotland's produce so that consumers can, in turn, do the same and enjoy our wonderful food and drink from every part of Scotland?

Mairi Gougeon: Absolutely. I could not agree more with Willie Coffey's point. Some of the facts that he mentioned relate to the important work that is undertaken by NFU Scotland and its shelf watch campaign. I believe that we are waiting on the results of the most recent iteration of the work that it has undertaken.

Retailers know that people want to buy Scottish. We are seeing more campaigns in retail settings that are providing leading positioning in store and marketing opportunities for more Scottish products than ever. I also emphasise the work that we are undertaking to make that as easy as possible for people and to increase those opportunities. We are working with the Scottish Wholesale Association and the Scottish Grocers Federation to increase sales through wholesale and convenience channels. We also host regional sourcing Scotland meet the buyer events to ensure that we link up our retailers and some of the fantastic Scottish products that we have available. That work will very much continue.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Brian Whittle. Please be brief, Mr Whittle.

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): Willie Coffey highlighted some of the fantastic small and artisan producers that we have in East Ayrshire, and we have such producers across Scotland. The cabinet secretary mentioned the amazing support from our wholesalers. However, what can the Scottish Government do to help those businesses to scale up and ensure that they have access to supermarket shelves?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please answer as briefly as possible, cabinet secretary.

Mairi Gougeon: I re-emphasise the work that I have already mentioned. I appreciate the point that Brian Whittle makes. We want to see more Scottish products on shelves in all sizes of stores across Scotland. The go local programme is about ensuring that we have local products in convenience stores. I also touched on the meet the buyer events, which are really important as they link up some of our producers with retailers. Through investing in that work and ensuring that we build those relationships, we hope to see more local produce on our shelves.

Hunting with Dogs (Scotland) Act 2023 (Licensing Scheme)

7. **Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking in response to reported concerns that the licensing scheme introduced by the Hunting with Dogs (Scotland) Act 2023 is acting as a loophole in the fox hunting ban. (S6O-03787)

The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie): The licensing scheme in the 2023 act is not a loophole. The use of more than two dogs is strictly controlled under licence for specified purposes—in particular, the protection of livestock. All licence applications are scrutinised by NatureScot and, where licences are granted, both NatureScot and Police Scotland must be notified before any activity commences. NatureScot has carried out a number of visits to ensure that any activity that is undertaken is strictly in accordance with the licence. It is currently carrying out a planned review of the licensing scheme, and we will consider the findings and take any further action as required.

Patrick Harvie: Parliament has voted repeatedly, over many years, in favour of ending fox hunting in Scotland. In the most recent legislation, which was intended to close the loopholes that have been used by those who continue to perpetrate that cruel practice, a licensing regime was introduced that was intended to be for exceptional purposes. The Scottish Government's position was that fox hunting should have no place in a modern Scotland. With 41 licences having been issued in the first hunting season since the 2023 act came into force, is it not clear that we simply do not have the rigorous enforcement of the legislation that we need? Will the Scottish Government ensure that, in the future, a great deal more rigour is applied?

Jim Fairlie: I simply disagree with Mr Harvie's characterisation of the situation. Fox hunting is absolutely against the principles of the people of Scotland, but predator control is not. Hunting with more than two dogs is licensed in specific

circumstances to make sure that farm managers and landowners can protect the livestock and the wildlife in their area.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will call a couple of members to ask supplementary questions, but they will need to be brief, as will the responses.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): Criminal activity against wildlife must be pursued, and there is a straightforward way for concerned parties to do that. However, in rural areas such as Dumfries and Galloway, it is crucial that farmers, conservationists and land managers have access to methods of species management and predator control. Does the minister agree, and will he reaffirm, that that will remain the Scottish Government's position?

Jim Fairlie: I absolutely agree that the Scottish Government's position is to allow predator control as we go forward.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): No wonder the Scottish National Party dumped its hapless coalition with the Greens. Patrick Harvie and his colleagues passed the Hunting with Dogs (Scotland) Act 2023, which ensured a licensed approach. Furthermore, NatureScot has strengthened the licensing process, making it more difficult for packs to get a licence. Will the minister confirm how many times the licence conditions have been broken?

Jim Fairlie: At this moment, to my knowledge, there have been none.

"The National Islands Plan"

8. **Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on whether the first statutory national islands plan, published in 2019, has been a success. (S6O-03788)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): The implementation of the first national islands plan has faced a succession of crises since its introduction, including the Covid-19 pandemic, the on-going cost crisis and the full effects of Brexit. However, significant policy efforts and investments have been delivered across Government to drive progress towards the strategic objectives of the plan. We know that more remains to be done to address islands' priorities and to help them to fulfil their ambitions. That is why we have announced that a new plan will be published next year, and we will continue to be guided by islanders to inform its content.

Jamie Greene: The answer to the question is no. It has not been a success. The minister has

given a litany of excuses as to why the plan has not provided better outcomes for islands. We all know the reality that life in island communities is difficult, but it has simply got worse with regard to the availability and affordability of housing; access to health, social care and education; the growth of businesses; and depopulation, and that is not to mention the F-word—the continuous chaos on our ferry network. What hope can we give islanders from this, their national Parliament, that the next national islands plan will be worth more than the paper it is written on?

Mairi Gougeon: I know that the Tories would like to brush away all the key issues that I have mentioned, some of which they were largely responsible for, let alone the massive cuts to our budgets that we have seen over previous years. That is why this Government is committed to delivering for our islands. As I set out, after a consultation last year, we committed to publishing a new national islands plan, which will be based on what our islanders see as important and will be driven by the objectives that they want to address. We will also set out how the Government will deliver across those objectives. We look forward to the process of developing that plan and working with our islanders as we do it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Again, brevity will be required for both supplementary questions.

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): My office is contacted almost daily about problems with the ferry service. For example, yesterday, a constituent phoned about a service that was diverted to Troon and about the conditions on board. Does the cabinet secretary agree that the Government's handling of the ferry crisis has undermined the strategic goals of its national islands plan?

Mairi Gougeon: I recognise that our infrastructure—whether it is our transport infrastructure, housing or other matters—is critical to our islands and the people who live on them. On the particular points about ferries, if the member would like to raise any issues, I ask her to raise them with the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, who will respond to her.

The member's question indicates why the development of the national islands plan is so important. The plan considers all the issues that matter to our islanders and sets out how the Government will address them in the coming years. We also publish how we are performing against those objectives every year. I look forward to members feeding into that process.

Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): The islands plan discusses improving the quality of life for island communities. Will the cabinet secretary give some concrete examples of

how the Scottish National Party has done that since the plan's publication? Will she also remind members of the impacts of Tory austerity and the Tory cost of living crisis on our island communities? [*Interruption.*] Tory members are complaining, but that is the legacy of the Tories in the islands.

Mairi Gougeon: Austerity has undoubtedly had a huge impact, not least with the 10 per cent cut to our capital budgets. In spite of that, we have continued to deliver an islands programme that has delivered 61 different projects across 50 different islands with more than £12 million of funding. We are set to announce shortly the outcome of the most recent applications to that programme, in which a further £3 million-worth of investment is planned.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions on rural affairs and islands. Before we move on to the next portfolio, there will be a brief pause to allow front benchers to change positions.

Health and Social Care

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next portfolio is health and social care. Any member who wishes to ask a supplementary should press their request-to-speak button during the relevant question. Brevity would be appreciated, given the number of supplementaries that have already been indicated.

Paramedics (Employment)

1. **Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what support is in place to help newly qualified paramedics find suitable employment. (S6O-03789)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Neil Gray): The Scottish Government is committed to attracting a diverse workforce into national health service employment and hugely values the role of our paramedics, who provide effective, person-centred care for the people of Scotland. We work closely with the Scottish Ambulance Service to set annual numbers for the university student intake programme for people who wish to study to become paramedics.

Overall responsibility for the recruitment of newly qualified paramedics rests with the Scottish Ambulance Service. We continue to work with SAS to explore how the role of a paramedic can be utilised more widely in the healthcare system to improve patient care in areas of high demand.

Fulton MacGregor: I have been contacted by a constituent who graduated with a distinction in their paramedical science degree. They are now a

registered paramedic and were informed that they had a job with the Scottish Ambulance Service after passing the interview. Despite that, my constituent advised that the closest job posting that they were offered would involve an unmanageable daily commute. They were then advised that, if they did not accept that remote posting, their application would be void and they would have to reapply for a position next year.

What support can the Scottish Government give to paramedics who do not receive a posting offer close to their home?

Neil Gray: I thank Fulton MacGregor for bringing that issue to the chamber. I commend his constituent on their progress and I obviously sympathise with them about their situation.

As autonomous institutions, health boards are responsible for their own recruitment activity. The Scottish Government is not directly involved in such recruitment plans and processes.

The Scottish Ambulance Service remains committed to maximising the opportunities for newly qualified paramedics to find employment. We continue to support it in that endeavour, and paramedic numbers are up by 46.9 per cent in the past 10 years. Although it is hoped that all graduates will be able to join SAS in their chosen location upon graduation, that is not always possible, as vacancies in each area can fluctuate significantly each year, depending on factors such as local retention and absence rates.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): Ambulance technicians who want to train as paramedics are unable to access training places due to a lack of funding. What steps will the cabinet secretary take to make it easier for technicians to retrain as paramedics, especially given that paramedic vacancies have been steadily increasing since 2016?

Neil Gray: I will take away Jackie Baillie's point and consider it. As I pointed out to Fulton MacGregor, the number of paramedic places has gone up by 46.9 per cent, and the number of ambulance technicians has gone up by 32.4 per cent in the same period. The Scottish Ambulance Service's resource budget also increased by 29.9 per cent in real terms between 2010-11 and 2024-25. However, I will take away the point that Jackie Baillie has raised to see whether there is more that we can do.

Alcohol-related Deaths (Lothian)

2. Lorna Slater (Lothian) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government how many alcohol-related deaths were reported in the Lothian region in the last year for which data is available. (S6O-03790)

The Minister for Public Health and Women's Health (Jenni Minto): The number of alcohol-specific deaths in 2023 was published by National Records of Scotland on 10 September 2024. In the NHS Lothian health board area, there were 163 alcohol-specific deaths in 2023—an increase of 10 deaths from the 153 deaths that were reported in 2022.

Lorna Slater: I am sure that the minister will agree that that is too many.

In the most recent Scottish budget, the Scottish Greens secured a commitment that the Scottish Government would consider the reintroduction of a public health supplement, which would be a small surcharge on the non-domestic rates for large retailers that sell alcohol and tobacco, in recognition of the harm that those products can cause and the cost to the public purse of treating those harms. Research by the Fraser of Allander Institute that was commissioned by Alcohol Focus Scotland has found that a public health levy could raise approximately £57 million of additional funding for public services. Does the minister agree that we cannot pass up the chance to invest tens of millions of pounds more in addiction services through a public health levy?

Jenni Minto: I agree with Lorna Slater that one death due to alcohol is one too many, and I send my sincerest heartfelt apologies to the families who have been impacted by those deaths.

A public health levy is still under consideration by the Scottish Government, and I point out that the minimum unit price of alcohol has increased this week.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: A number of members would like to ask supplementary questions. I will try to get in as many as I can, but brevity will be required.

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): Will the minister provide further information on the implementation of the minimum unit price increase and how it is anticipated that it will help to reduce alcohol harm?

Jenni Minto: The Scottish Government has engaged broadly with key business associations and retailer groups to ensure maximum awareness of the minimum unit price of alcohol increasing to 65p from 30 September. We have collaborated with trade bodies and industry representatives to produce a variety of materials for retailers to use in their stores to inform customers and raise awareness of the price increase. We have also co-funded guidance for retailers that has been produced by the Scottish Grocers Federation.

Our business and regulatory impact assessment, which was published earlier this year

and was based on modelling that was undertaken by the University of Sheffield, set out that, in the first year of the policy, the number of deaths from all causes was estimated to reduce by 60, compared with the control group with the MUP continuing at the same level in real terms when adjusted for inflation.

Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con): The decision to close NHS Lothian's life-saving alcohol-related brain damage unit has been paused while options are assessed. There is no other specific ARBD residential rehab unit in Scotland, and evidence shows that the treatment for people with ARBD in non-specialist units is often unsatisfactory.

On 4 July, the Scottish Government requested clarification on the function of the service to allow it to be reclassified as a specialist rehabilitation unit. That information has been provided—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question.

Sue Webber: —but no response has been received. Minister, do you agree that the reclassification is crucial for funding, and will you seek to determine what is preventing the life-saving service from being assessed as a rehabilitation unit?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Speak through the chair.

Jenni Minto: Sue Webber asked me a question on that issue a couple of weeks ago. I recognise that we are still waiting for a response, so I am very happy to engage with officials to understand the delays before getting back to her.

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): The minister will know that people in the most deprived areas are seven times more likely to end up in hospital due to alcohol-related conditions and that certain hospitals serve a disproportionate number of such areas. Is anything being done to provide extra support for those hospitals, specifically for accident and emergency departments, which are reportedly dealing with an increase in the number of people presenting who are at risk from serious alcohol harms?

Jenni Minto: I thank Carol Mochan for the question. I do not have specific information on that, but I remind the member that alcohol and drug partnerships have had record levels of funding this year. I will respond to the member's question in writing.

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): Everyone cares about alcohol deaths, and given the significant work of organisations such as the Portman Group and Community Alcohol Partnerships, which support local partnerships that reduce alcohol harm, particularly among children and young people, will the minister and the Government commit to listening carefully to the

real concerns of the industry as it consults on new measures to restrict alcohol marketing and sponsorship?

Jenni Minto: As part of any consultation process, the Government is clear that we need to consult and engage with business as well as stakeholders, and that will be being done with regard to the issue.

Neurodivergent People (Support)

3. **Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to support neurodivergent people, in light of reports of people waiting years for diagnosis, and subsequent access to support and treatment, which is seriously impacting their lives. (S6O-03791)

The Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport (Maree Todd): There have been significant increases in the number of neurodivergent people seeking a diagnosis and requiring support. Although that creates challenges for a range of services, we also recognise how important a diagnosis and support can be.

We are working closely with national health service health boards and local authorities to improve services and support for neurodivergent people. In 2021, we published a national neurodevelopmental specification, which sets out the standards that all children's services should follow to ensure that access to support is effective and consistent across Scotland, supported by funding including £1 million for tests of change.

Neurodivergent children and young people also benefit from the £15 million per annum that is provided to local authorities for community-based supports and the £120 million that is provided to NHS boards under the enhanced mental health outcomes framework.

Karen Adam: I thank the minister for that answer. There have been reports that some people are waiting for more than four years for diagnosis of autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and many of those who are undiagnosed or are waiting for treatment are struggling with school and employment. Has the Scottish Government considered providing a fast-track to diagnosis and access to treatment following diagnosis? Can the Scottish Government also please give an update on pauses to treatment as a result of medicine shortages?

Maree Todd: We want patients to get the help that they need when they need it, and we understand how important a timely ADHD or autism diagnosis is for individuals. We also recognise the pressure that services face, given the rapid but welcome gains in awareness. That is

why we continue to fund and work with the national autism implementation team, to support health and social care partnerships and to consider best practice and improved service in the redesigning of neurodevelopmental diagnostic services.

We would expect employers or schools to explore with individuals what adjustments are appropriate, as formal diagnosis is not required for educational adjustments or for disabled people to receive support through the access to work programme.

The supply of medicines is reserved to the United Kingdom Government. Information that has been provided by the UK Government indicates that some of the ADHD medicine supply issues will continue into winter 2024. The shortages are caused by a combination of manufacturing issues and an increase in demand. Anyone who is affected should speak directly to their clinical team.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): There is information on things such as diet, exercise and sleep that can help, whether or not people get a diagnosis. What information can be extended to people so that they can wait well?

Maree Todd: The member is absolutely correct. We regularly talk about the fact that support and adjustments should be possible without a diagnosis. The whole improvement that is possible in the individual does not require a diagnosis to be in place. We invest a great deal in community support to make sure that those adjustments are easily accessible to people who suspect that they have a neurodivergent diagnosis. A diagnosis is not needed to access healthcare in Scotland.

Brain Tumours (Diagnostic Pathways)

4. Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to ensure that diagnostic pathways in Scotland are appropriate for those affected by brain tumours. (S6O-03792)

The Minister for Public Health and Women's Health (Jenni Minto): We know that diagnosing brain cancer can be challenging, as symptoms are wide ranging and often vague. We continue to work with primary care to ensure that it has direct access to diagnostic tests and quality education sources. A clinical review of the Scottish referral guidelines for suspected cancer is under way and a new national headache referral pathway has been published to ensure that the right patient is on the right pathway at the right time.

We are opening another rapid cancer diagnostic service in 2024-25, bringing our national total to six. These services are ruling cancer in or out

faster for those with non-specific symptoms, supporting our early cancer diagnosis vision.

Alexander Stewart: I thank the minister for that response. What steps is the Scottish Government taking to ensure general practitioners' access to imaging—specifically computed tomography head imaging for those with non-specific symptoms that are suspected to be symptoms of cancer, such as a brain tumour? Are those steps being regularly monitored to ensure that the pathway is utilised efficiently and effectively?

Jenni Minto: That is exactly the reason why the rapid cancer diagnostic services have been set up, and that is exactly the pathway that I expect to be followed.

Foyso Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): In March, I hosted a members' business debate to mark brain tumour awareness month. Many members highlighted the need for greater research to improve the outcomes for those living with brain tumours. I welcomed the announcement of the establishment of the Scottish Brain Tumour Research centre of excellence in July. Has the Scottish Government engaged with the centre since its launch, and how does it plan to support the research into the most aggressive form of brain cancer?

Jenni Minto: Yes, the Scottish Government engages regularly with the Brain Tumour Research centre. I, too, met Brain Tumour Research in September, and it was agreed that it would send to the chief scientist office a funding proposal to support brain tumour research in Scotland. I am looking forward to that. I believe that we have the inaugural meeting of the cross-party group on brain tumours next week, and I hope to see Mr Choudhury at that meeting.

Dental Treatment

5. Sharon Dowe (South Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what compensation is available for any families that are paying for private urgent dental treatment due to delays in accessing national health service treatment. (S6O-03793)

The Minister for Public Health and Women's Health (Jenni Minto): In primary care dental services, when a patient is registered for NHS dental services and has an urgent dental problem, they should be seen as soon as possible by their NHS dental practice and treated in line with their clinical priority. Unregistered patients are able to access urgent and emergency care via public dental service clinics.

In common with the whole of NHS care provision, there is no compensation available when patients choose to seek healthcare privately.

Sharon Dowe: I thank the minister for that answer. A constituent in my region was told that her daughter had a severe dental condition that required urgent orthodontic treatment in hospital. There, they were told that there would be an 18-month wait, as there was no consultant available to carry out treatment. They were left with no choice but to seek treatment privately because there was a risk that her daughter could, if left untreated, lose all her front teeth, which would have a lifelong impact.

The treatment would normally be funded through the NHS but, because there was no consultant available, a private route had to be sought. What steps is the Government taking to address consultant shortages in NHS dental services, particularly in Ayrshire and Arran?

Jenni Minto: This summer, I visited the dental hospital in Glasgow and had exactly that conversation with people there. The Scottish Government is supporting NHS boards to drive improvements in secondary care waiting times, and we are targeting resources to ensure that people who are waiting the longest are treated as soon as possible.

We are also driving improvements in children's oral health, through our flagship childsmile programme. I recognise that that programme is on the prevention side and that that is not directly what Sharon Dowe asked about. However, we are working closely with NHS boards to ensure that they are making the most efficient use of their surgeries and clinical time to reduce waiting lists in order to improve the dental care that young families are getting.

NHS Ayrshire and Arran (Cost of Repairs)

6. **Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what support it can provide to NHS Ayrshire and Arran, in light of reports that the health board requires over £85 million to cover the cost of backdated repairs. (S6O-03794)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Neil Gray): The Scottish Government is working with all health boards to develop a whole-system infrastructure plan. In the context of a very challenging financial position, that is a positive and practical approach that will support the continued safe operation of existing facilities as well as the determination of longer-term investment priorities.

Katy Clark: Arran war memorial hospital requires more than £1.2 million of repairs; for Ayrshire central hospital, the figure is more than £6 million; for University hospital Crosshouse, it is more than £32 million; for Ailsa hospital, it is more than £10 million; for University hospital Ayr, it is

more than £16 million; and, for Townhead surgery, it is almost £700,000. The list goes on.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that the deteriorating state of national health service buildings has a negative impact on quality of care?

Neil Gray: I would like to see an improved situation in the capital position for the NHS and investment in our infrastructure, partly for the reasons that Katy Clark outlined. She will be well aware of the infrastructure investment review that is going on across Government, and I am doing what I can within my portfolio to ensure prioritisation of capital investment. That would be much easier if we had capital investment coming from the United Kingdom Government as well, rather than what we have at the moment, which is a proposal for a near 9 per cent cut in our capital provision—£1.3 billion less—which will not help us to fix our NHS estate.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Brian Whittle has a very brief supplementary question.

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): One of the biggest problems in the NHS in relation to capital projects is that we still do not have a basic technology platform that enables countrywide adoption of artificial intelligence and technology.

What is the Scottish Government doing to enable swift adoption of technology and to give healthcare professionals the tools that they need to tackle the backlog?

Neil Gray: That was very gracious of you, Presiding Officer.

We are embarking on work. With regard to the reform and improvement work that needs to be done across the NHS, it is a priority of mine that we apply innovation better to our health service. That is how we will see continued improvement. The chief scientist office is leading on that, including the accelerated national innovation adoption—ANIA—pathway, which is about having once-for-Scotland adoption of good innovation practice. I would be happy to refer Mr Whittle to that work.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I commend your adaptability, Mr Gray.

National Treatment Centres (Impact of Delays on Waiting Lists)

7. **Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will publish revised modelling to show any impact of delays to the opening of the remaining national treatment centres on bringing down waiting lists, as outlined in its national health service recovery plan. (S6O-03795)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Neil Gray): The national treatment centres that are in operation—at Highland, Fife, the national eye centre and the new surgical centre at NHS Golden Jubilee, and NTC Forth Valley, which will begin treating patients this month—will provide around 20,000 additional procedures a year.

I have acknowledged that that is less than the full NTC programme that was set out in the NHS recovery plan. New health capital projects are currently subject to review, including the five planned NTCs that are not currently in construction.

Therefore, we are investing the resources that are available to us now to deliver additional activity. This year's £30 million additional investment in waiting times is projected to deliver more than 60,000 additional appointments and procedures, with significant additional activity already under way.

Mark Griffin: In 2021, the then First Minister promised Cumbernauld a new national treatment centre, but there has been no sign of it since. The cabinet secretary will know that waiting lists for in-patient and day cases stand at 11,500 in NHS Lanarkshire, with 2,500 of those people having been waiting more than a year. When will the Government make good on its promise for a national treatment centre for Cumbernauld and Lanarkshire?

Neil Gray: I am pleased to report that, as part of our investment in waiting times finance, the latest figures show that NHS in-patient and day-case activity has increased: in-patient and day-case activity for quarter 2 was the highest since the start of the pandemic. That was the 10th quarterly increase in a row, with 65,106 patients being seen in quarter 2, which is up by 1.6 per cent on the previous quarter and by 9.9 per cent on quarter 2 last year.

I say to Mark Griffin, as I did to Katy Clark, that it will be much easier for us to invest in capital projects in the health service and across the rest of Government if, in the budget at the end of October, there is investment in capital, in our public services, in our people and in our economy, rather than what we see in newspaper reports, which is the Treasury asking Whitehall departments for capital savings. That continued austerity will harm our health service.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will take a supplementary question, if it is brief and the response is likewise.

Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP): I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests: I hold an NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde bank-nurse contract.

The national treatment centres are playing a key role in bringing down waiting lists in Scotland, but it is of considerable concern that the opening of new centres has been delayed as a result of the United Kingdom Government's cut to Scotland's capital budget. Will the cabinet secretary join me in calling on Labour members in the chamber to join us and press their colleagues at Westminster to reverse that cut as a priority, so that that work can be progressed?

Neil Gray: I thank Clare Haughey for her question, and yes—I will join her.

She is absolutely right that the national treatment centres that are in operation are making a difference, as is the investment that we are making in waiting times. However, the capital funding position is extremely challenging. There is to be an expected 8.7 per cent real-terms cut to our UK capital budget in the medium term, which is because the Labour Party at Westminster is following Tory spending plans. That is a cumulative loss of more than £1.3 billion.

Ahead of the budget this month, I urge the UK Government to reflect on Lord Darzi's findings and the previous calls from this Government, and organisations including the International Monetary Fund, to prioritise investment in infrastructure and public services. We need that to happen.

Mental Health Services (Locums)

8. Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the use of locums in local mental health services. (S6O-03796)

The Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport (Maree Todd): The use of temporary staff in an organisation as large and complex as NHS Scotland will always be required to ensure vital service provision during times of unplanned absence, sickness and increased unforeseen activity.

It is critical that we seek to secure the best value whenever we deliver mental health services within NHS Scotland, allowing us to maximise the impact that our investment has on the quality and availability of patient care. We are working with colleagues across NHS Scotland to explore how we can reduce our reliance on agency staffing for nursing and medical staff.

Rachael Hamilton: I thank Maree Todd for that answer, but a freedom of information request revealed that the cost of agency locums in the Borders has tripled in the past three years and reached more than £7 million in 2022-23. Furthermore, locums make up up to a third of the consultant psychiatrist workforce in the Borders, with 75 per cent not holding their certificate of

completion of training. That is concerning and precarious. Why has the Scottish National Party Government chosen to decimate mental health services for my Borders constituents?

Maree Todd: The context is that there is a global shortage of psychiatrists. I recognise that although things are improving in many areas of Scotland, there are challenges in recruiting to particular areas. My area in Highland is being impacted in the same way as the Borders.

It is undoubtedly more difficult to recruit to particular geographical areas and to particular specialties in psychiatry—for example, learning disability psychiatrists are fewer and farther between. We have in place the medical locum engagement task and finish group, which is co-chaired by the NHS Fife chief executive and the Scottish Government's director of health workforce. That has been established to ensure appropriate locum usage across NHS Scotland. That task and finish group is exploring the case for a set of identified interventions.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Very briefly, we will hear Paul Sweeney.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): Health boards in Scotland spent £30 million on locum psychiatrists in 2022. Will the minister confirm whether she thinks that expenditure is best value for money, and say how much was spent on locum psychiatrists in the past financial year?

Maree Todd: I would need to get back in writing to the member on the second part of that question.

As I said at the beginning of my answer, there is no doubt that, in an organisation as large and complex as NHS Scotland, it is appropriate to hire temporary staff at times. Hiring temporary staff is a better outcome than having the service delivery fail entirely. We need to work towards having more locum psychiatrists employed in permanent full-time posts. I hear time and again from people who are accessing mental health care that they would like continuity of care, so I assure the member that we are working towards that in Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions on health and social care.

Housing Emergency

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-14719, in the name of Anas Sarwar, on the housing emergency. I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak button.

14:55

Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): Scotland is in the midst of a housing crisis the likes of which we have never seen before. After repeated calls, for months, for a housing emergency to be declared, the Government was finally shamed into declaring one on 15 May, in a debate that was brought to the chamber by Scottish Labour.

The declaration of a housing emergency after 17 years of the Scottish National Party Government was a significant moment, and it signalled our collective understanding of the need to act to tackle the crisis. However, the simple fact is that words are cheap. What really matters is what the Government does to tackle the housing crisis, not what it says in the chamber.

The sad reality is that the Government's track record on tackling the housing emergency is woeful. This afternoon, people on the Labour and Government benches will trade numbers and statistics, but we should never forget in the heat of the debate what those numbers represent. They are young mothers raising their families in temporary accommodation without a promise of a home. They are Scotland's most vulnerable people, who have nothing but a sleeping bag to their name and who are exposed to the cold nights of winter and the dangers of life on the street. They are young children who have no home to call their own and who are spending their childhood moving from hostel to bed and breakfast. We should never forget that.

Let us look at the facts of the Government's record on housing and homelessness. On the Government's watch, we have had more than 40,000 applications for homelessness support made in the past year; that is the highest number in a decade. Shamefully, we now have record numbers of children in temporary accommodation, without a home to call their own. That is more than 10,000 children who are left homeless on the Scottish National Party Government's watch.

At the same time, the number of young people living in bed and breakfasts has soared by more than 900 per cent in only the past three years. That is shameful. There have been 704,000 breaches of the Homeless Persons (Unsuitable Accommodation) (Scotland) Order in 2023-24. That number has almost doubled during the past

year. There have been 7,915 instances where households requiring temporary accommodation have not been offered temporary accommodation by local authorities. That is 17 times higher than last year—17 times higher in a single year.

The SNP's record on house building is arguably even worse. House building has fallen off a cliff, with the worst yearly number of starts on record. There were 19,293 homes completed in the year to end June 2024, which is a decrease of 4,003—or 17 per cent—compared with the previous year. In the year to the end of June 2024, the number of completions and starts as part of the affordable housing supply programme was down by 14 per cent and 10 per cent, respectively, compared with the year before.

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

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Anas Sarwar: Yes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: From which member is Mr Sarwar taking an intervention?

Anas Sarwar: Keith Brown.

Christine Grahame: Oh!

Keith Brown: Good choice. Mr Sarwar will understand that part of what constitutes affordability—as well as rent and mortgage costs—is energy costs, which increased by 10 per cent as a result of Labour's decision yesterday. However, Labour also has figures that say that around 400 people will die in the UK from the decision to withdraw winter fuel allowance. How many of those deaths will happen in Scotland as a result of Labour's decision?

Anas Sarwar: I remind Mr Brown that the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets sets energy pricing in the country. That is why we have to reform our energy market, and that is what the Labour Government is getting to grips with.

What I would say to Mr Brown is this: is he counting the number of people who are dying on our streets because of homelessness? All they have is a sleeping bag. Is he counting the number of people who are dying in temporary accommodation without a home to call their own? Instead, there is always somebody else to blame. Instead, the SNP is always pointing fingers somewhere else rather than taking responsibility for its own record.

To demonstrate that Ms Grahame will have a more sensible question than Mr Brown, I will take the intervention from Ms Grahame.

Christine Grahame: I certainly hope so. Does the member agree with me that the impact of Brexit on construction costs and on the availability of construction workers has had an impact on house building throughout the United Kingdom?

Anas Sarwar: Absolutely. That is why we have to reset the relationship with the European Union and fix the mess that is Brexit, which was left by the previous Tory Government. However, that does not explain why we have had 17 years of failure and levels of home building that are the lowest since Margaret Thatcher.

I will go back to what I was saying about the social sector. The social sector built 5,053 homes in the year ending June 2024, which is down 25 per cent on the previous year. The number of completions for all sectors was the lowest since June 2018 and the number of starts was the lowest since June 2013, in both the social and the private sectors.

Under the SNP Government, housing association new-build numbers are at the lowest levels since Margaret Thatcher, and the Government is miles off track from meeting its own affordable house building target. Under the SNP Government, fewer homes are being built, targets are being missed on a yearly basis and homelessness is on the rise. Every number is a human being in need of help and every missed target is the breaking of dreams, hopes and aspirations. However, when the full extent of the housing and homelessness crisis in Scotland was revealed, housing minister Paul McLennan told STV News that the SNP Government has “a good track record” on preventing homelessness. Really? Is that the best that we can do? Frankly, that response was inept and shameful.

Yesterday, Mr McLennan stated that the SNP Government was pulling out all the stops on the issue—that is the same SNP Government that cut £196 million from the housing budget, cheered on by every member on the SNP benches. It is simply wrong for him to attempt to spin that away or, as per usual, not think about the human cost of the SNP's decisions. Fellow Scots are sleeping rough with nowhere to go—some families in housing and more in hostels and B and Bs—but that is symptomatic of an SNP Government that is completely out of touch with reality. This is a Government that never faces up to its own record and instead tries to deflect blame on to others.

When Scotland is revealed to be in a housing and homelessness emergency, the minister says that Government has “a good track record”. When one in six Scots is revealed to be on national health service waiting lists and accident and emergency is revealed to be in disarray, the health secretary says that there is no crisis and that the Government has a good track record. When

alcohol and drug deaths are on the rise, what does the minister say? Nothing to see here—the Government has a good track record and the plan is working. When our education system was plunged into chaos and Scotland slid down the international league tables, what did the minister say? Scotland’s education system was never that good anyway, the SNP Government has a good track record and its plan is working.

Scotland deserves so much better than this out-of-touch SNP Government that is failing Scotland day after day after day. Frankly, its ministers are embarrassing, its performance is inept and the Government’s record is nothing but shameful and woeful. From housing to the economy, from the NHS to our schools, this SNP Government is taking Scotland in the wrong direction. Housing is entirely devolved.

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice (Shirley-Anne Somerville): I would like to clarify something with Anas Sarwar—would he agree with me that the £90 million that we currently spend as a Government to mitigate the effect of the bedroom tax would be better used to deliver the 700 new-build homes that it could otherwise be spent on? Would he join me in agreeing that the bedroom tax should be scrapped?

Anas Sarwar: First, I will need to educate the cabinet secretary on the difference between revenue and capital, because she clearly does not understand that. Secondly, we wanted the devolution of powers around welfare because we wanted the ability to make different decisions here in Scotland. That is what we argued for and that is what we got.

Housing is entirely devolved, and the responsibility for this crisis lies squarely with this SNP Government, this SNP cabinet secretary and this SNP housing minister. There is nowhere to hide and no one else to blame. This is the price that the people of Scotland are paying for an SNP Government that John Swinney himself admitted has been focused on what it cannot do rather than on what it can do.

That is why it is time for a new approach and a new direction—

The Minister for Employment and Investment (Tom Arthur): Will the member take an intervention?

Anas Sarwar: I have taken three or four interventions already.

Accepting that the housing emergency exists is only the first step in ending the crisis. We need new ideas and new leadership. We need an approach that promotes investment and makes Scotland an attractive place to invest in housing. We need to ensure that legislation that is designed

to protect renters and home owners does not inadvertently chase away new investment. We need a new partnership and an understanding between the Scottish Government, local authorities, housing associations, the private sector and the third sector. We need joined-up working to deliver the new affordable and social homes that Scotland so desperately needs.

We need action to retrofit existing homes to make them fit for the future and to fix up derelict homes so that they can be safe for families to thrive in. We need an end to the idea that a housing policy that works for Edinburgh will automatically work for the Highlands, the Borders, Dumfries and Galloway or the Western Isles. Local communities know best about how to tackle the housing crisis in their own areas and they should not be overlooked.

We need an end to the politics of the press release and the meaningless target. Instead, it is time for politics that is about outcomes, not empty promises; a politics of delivery, not delusion, as we see from members on the SNP benches; and a politics that puts the needs of the country before the needs of the ruling party.

Everyone in the chamber has a solemn duty to work day and night to look after the most vulnerable in our society. On this vital issue, we cannot let issues of personal or party loyalty cloud our judgment. That is why this is not a debate about the constitution, and it should not even be a debate about party politics: the debate should be about the young man who will walk the dark streets of Glasgow tonight in search of a warm doorway in which to try to sleep, hoping that the mere and meagre possessions that he still has will be there when he wakes up. It is about the young mother living with her children in temporary accommodation who has to tell her children every night that they will have their own home one day. It is about the child who will do their homework tonight not in a home of their own but on a small desk in a hostel bedroom. We can, and we must, do better than that.

The right to housing is a fundamental human right, as recognised by the United Nations. In 2024 in Scotland, that fundamental human right is unavailable to thousands of our most vulnerable people. The crisis is not inevitable: it is the direct result of Government action and its inaction. To allow the situation to persist would be to bury our heads in the sand and allow some of our most vulnerable to weather the storm alone. It does not have to be that way. Scots should not have to wait a single day more for the Government to wake up to the housing crisis, change course and act to help those in need.

In closing, we have a chance to put the needs of the people of Scotland front and centre; to stand

up for all those who find themselves without a home to call their own; and to stand up for all those for whom the dream of home ownership is currently just that—a dream. The Government has failed to act to tackle the housing emergency. That is not good enough. The failure must end. Scotland deserves better.

I move,

That the Parliament believes that the Scottish Government has failed to respond adequately to the housing emergency that the Parliament declared in May 2024.

15:08

The Minister for Housing (Paul McLennan): I welcome the debate. First, I will address one of Mr Sarwar's main points. He talked about new ideas, but he did not have any new ideas whatsoever, and he did not talk about how to pay for them, which is fundamental. If the member is going to talk about new ideas, he should bring them forward, as well as ideas for how we should pay for them in the budget. I am happy to have discussions with the member or Mr Griffin on that point.

There has been a great deal of activity since the previous debate on housing in May, in recognition of the challenges that our housing sector faces. I continue to take full responsibility for the Government's response and I will not shy away from that. That is why I was pleased to update the Parliament on some of the activity in my statement yesterday, including the announcement of new investment of £22 million for affordable housing. I do not doubt in any way, shape or form that the challenges that we face are significant, but we are responding with a clear and urgent plan across three pillars: first, the need for high quality, permanent homes; secondly, ensuring that we have the right homes in the right places; and thirdly, addressing homelessness.

I will talk about the delivery of affordable housing. Of course, the cornerstone of our efforts is our commitment to deliver 110,000 affordable homes by 2032, with 70 per cent of those for social rent. That is a direct response to the growing demand for secure and affordable housing.

Achieving the target was made more difficult by rising inflation and by Brexit, which has been mentioned. I know that the member is talking about a reset for Brexit, but we need to rejoin the European Union to make sure that we get those benefits. Labour will not do that—it has already come out and said that. A reset will not be enough.

That has driven up the cost of materials. If the member speaks to developers, they will tell him that. They are still facing the same problems, but

those problems are getting worse, and Brexit has an impact on that.

Although I recognise that Opposition members might prefer us not to draw attention to the impact of Tory or Labour UK Government decisions, there is an area that the UK Government must take responsibility for, which I will come on to in a little second.

There is no hiding the serious impact that those aspects are having on housing and homelessness levels not just in Scotland but across the UK. Some of the biggest issues in that regard are Brexit, the cost of living and inflation. In fact, Barratt Developments, which is the biggest home builder in the UK, said that Brexit and the cost of living were the main reasons why its home starts and completions had dropped.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): The minister and I have been in the same meetings. Is he seriously telling me that the industry is not naming the Housing (Scotland) Bill as the single biggest impediment to getting investment? That is what it is telling me, and I bet that it is what it is telling him, too.

Paul McLennan: First, I have been in a number of meetings with Daniel Johnson. One of the key things that we have said is that we would introduce amendments to the bill, and Mr Johnson knows that.

Secondly, that was a direct quote from Barratt on what is having the biggest impact across the UK. Inflation and interest rates are the biggest barriers that it faces at the moment.

Despite those challenges, by the end of June 2024, we have still delivered 22,743 homes towards our target. Seventy-six per cent of those are for social rent. It is estimated that 3,000 households with children were helped into affordable housing in the year to June, and half—

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): Will the minister will take an intervention?

Paul McLennan: I will.

Craig Hoy: The minister said that he is taking the issue seriously and that he is making progress, yet, in his constituency, 353 people were in temporary accommodation and nearly 800 people applied for homelessness last year, which is an increase of 13 per cent on the previous year. It was his Government that slashed the housing budget last year. Will the minister tell Parliament what happened when he was told that his housing budget was going to be slashed? Did he oppose it, did he threaten to resign, or did he simply capitulate so that he could keep taking his pay cheque when people in his constituency were searching to put a roof over their heads?

Paul McLennan: I am not going to take any lessons in financial management from the member. The biggest cut that we had last year was a 9 per cent capital cut from the UK Government. I never heard anything from Tory members, including Mr Hoy, about that.

The biggest cut that we suffered in our budget was a 62 per cent cut to our financial transactions budget. As Mr Hoy knows, I meet local authorities, including East Lothian Council, to talk about that issue.

As I was saying, on the homes that we delivered, more than 3,000 households with children were helped into affordable housing this year into June, and half of Scotland's local authorities have reduced the number of children in temporary accommodation in the past year.

The biggest challenges that we face are in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Fife, South Lanarkshire and West Lothian. That is why we targeted funding, and I will come on to that.

Mr Sarwar mentioned affordable homes in rural areas. Between 2017 and 2023, we have delivered more than 10,000 affordable homes. The challenge that we need to face is not just in urban parts of Scotland but in rural parts of Scotland. We recognise that we need to do more.

We are taking radical action to address the acute challenge of building homes and the significant gap in Scotland's capital budget. We are taking action to bring investment into housing through the housing investment task force, which was established in April, which is before the housing emergency was declared.

The Scottish Government has committed £100 million as a basis to grow that, with institutional investment, to at least £500 million to support the construction of around 2,800 mid-market-rent homes. Yesterday, I announced a further investment of £22 million in affordable housing through our charitable bond programme. The programme enabled an additional investment of £71 million into our programme last year, supporting the delivery of more than 600 social rented homes.

I come back to Mr Hoy's point. Despite Westminster cutting financial transactions funding by 62 per cent since 2022, that is an example of how we can make a real difference in people's lives when we have the necessary levers.

It comes back to sharing responsibility, Mr Sarwar. *[Interruption.]* It is about taking responsibility. The UK Government has an opportunity in three or four weeks to reinstitute the funding that has been cut by 62 per cent. That would make a massive difference in terms of what we are trying to do. Labour should be taking on

the responsibility of speaking to its Chancellor of the Exchequer.

On planning, in June we issued a call for action on the housing emergency to planning authorities. The Government expects an emergency-led focus in decision making on plans and applications. Our national planning framework has minimum housing figures, and I look for them to be exceeded in plans as they come forward locally. The Minister for Public Finance and the chief planner have also made it clear that developments by small and medium-sized enterprise house builders are part of the solution to the emergency, particularly in rural areas and on brownfield sites.

Following the consultation earlier this year, we will bring forward a series of actions to increase resources and capacity in planning services. I am delighted that we have now established Scotland's first-ever planning hub, which is an innovative way for planning authorities to access additional resources to make faster decisions.

Having a warm, safe place to call home is a foundation of family life and a direct contributor to tackling poverty. We know that the best way to end homelessness is to prevent it. The proposed homelessness duties in the Housing (Scotland) Bill will support the transition to a system that is based on shared public responsibility, early intervention and, of course, more choice and control.

It is really important that in this debate we do not forget about the prevention duties. I urge people to talk about that. The Government remains committed to delivering a robust system of rent controls and tenants protections throughout that bill. Those measures, coupled with homelessness prevention duties, will ensure the affordability of housing costs and improve tenants' rights.

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

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): Will the minister give way?

Paul McLennan: I have already taken a number of interventions, so I am struggling for time.

The Government's actions on homelessness are consistently undermined when we are forced to spend precious resources by diverting £90 million to mitigate the impact of the UK Government's welfare cuts, including the bedroom tax. That is money that could otherwise be used to build new homes.

The Government understands the urgency of the crisis, and we are using all our powers to address it. However, it should be acknowledged that Westminster's policies have left us grappling with an emergency that requires systemic change and investment at UK-wide level. I once again call on the Labour UK Government to use its

upcoming budget to scrap the bedroom tax, reverse the 9 per cent capital cut to Scotland's budget and permanently uplift local housing allowance.

I move amendment S6M-14719.4, to leave out from "believes" to end and insert:

"agrees that Scotland is in a housing emergency; notes the Scottish Government's ongoing work with partners, including COSLA and the Housing to 2040 Board, on priorities in tackling the housing emergency; highlights the Scottish Government's commitment to provide £80 million across 2024-25 and 2025-26 to support acquisitions and bring empty social homes back into use, bringing the Affordable Housing Supply Programme investment to almost £600 million this year, and its commitment to £100 million for 2,800 mid-market rent homes; welcomes the investment of £22 million in affordable housing through charitable bonds and the launch of a planning hub to improve capacity and skills; notes the Housing (Scotland) Bill, which includes key measures on preventing homelessness, including action through rent controls, and calls on the UK Government to reverse the 9% capital budget cut, to permanently uprate local housing allowance to the 30th percentile of local rents, and to scrap the so-called bedroom tax in its Autumn Budget."

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, minister. I call Miles Briggs to speak to and move amendment S6M-14719.2.

15:16

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): I thank the Labour Party for using its debating time to debate the motion on the housing emergency. I also thank the organisations that have provided helpful briefings ahead of the debate.

At the election in 2021, every party in this chamber signed up to work to end rough sleeping in Scotland by the end of this parliamentary session. However, that goal is now further away than ever, with the latest statistics showing a significant increase. In 2022-23, there were 450 incidences in which local authorities were unable to offer temporary accommodation. In the space of the past year, that has soared to 7,915 occasions. Indeed, the Salvation Army has questioned the accuracy of those reported numbers—it thinks that the total is higher and that the situation is much worse on the ground.

However, these are not just statistics. As Anas Sarwar said, these are our friends, our neighbours and, in some cases, our family members.

On Monday evening, I walked along Princes Street here in the capital and witnessed people setting up tents for the night in shop doorways. As a Lothian MSP, I know from trying to assist constituents and from the organisations that work with people who are experiencing homelessness that the situation is getting worse, but solutions are also becoming more limited. Where I live in Edinburgh, I have witnessed people setting up

tents in graveyards. The capital is at the epicentre of the housing emergency in Scotland. We need a new approach, and we need the situation to be treated as an emergency by ministers now.

Paul McLennan: Will the member take an intervention?

Miles Briggs: I will if I can get some time back.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There is no time in hand. It is up to the member whether he takes an intervention.

Miles Briggs: I will if it is very brief.

Paul McLennan: Will the member acknowledge his Government's decision to cut the capital budget by 9 per cent, to cut the financial transactions budget by 62 per cent and to freeze local housing allowance? Will he also acknowledge that the way in which it dealt with asylum-seeker dispersal has made an impact in Edinburgh and other parts of Scotland?

Miles Briggs: This debate is about the Scottish Government taking responsibility. The fact that ministers were dragged to the chamber to do that at the previous debate on this topic tells us everything that we need to know about the Scottish Government's record on the matter.

As Anas Sarwar said, we have just heard words from the Government—we have not seen action. The Scottish Government might have declared a housing emergency, but we have not seen an emergency response from the Scottish Government. I do not think that even the Scottish Government's greatest cheerleaders would say that what we have seen from ministers to date is anywhere close to the response that we need. Instead, we have a situation that is getting worse. It is clear that, without action, homelessness levels across our country will increase further.

Since 2019, the Scottish Government has set up 10 homelessness working groups: the homelessness prevention and strategy group, the homelessness ministerial oversight group, the homelessness temporary accommodation standards framework working group, the temporary accommodation task and finish group, the homelessness prevention task and finish group, the measuring progress—ironically—task and finish group, the rapid rehousing transition plans sub-group, the Scotland prevention review group, the homelessness and rough sleeping action group and the youth homelessness prevention pathway. I do not question ministers' hopes that those groups would deliver, but they have not. Ministers need to be honest that they have failed and that things are getting worse on their watch.

Fundamentally, that is because local authorities are not delivering and cannot deliver their statutory

duties. Ministers say that local authorities must play their role, but that entirely misses the point. Local authorities have no options left. There are no more former B and Bs and guest houses—they are all now full. We need a plan, and we need ministers to lead on delivering it. I welcome the fact that the sector has made some really important emergency response proposals to the Government. The minister should be driving forward those actions now.

Every empty council home and social housing property should have been audited and a return-to-use plan should have been developed by now. There are 3,000 empty properties here in the capital alone. We need to urgently build the homes that Scotland needs. The data on home completions points to a fundamental collapse in the housing sector, and we need that to be turned around. Homes for Scotland says that the housing and homelessness figures underline the collapse in house building, and that that is having devastating consequences. Speak to any home builder and they will tell you that the planning and consenting processes are the biggest inhibitor of housing delivery in all tenures.

We need an urgent review of national planning framework 4 and council planning policy. Ministers have ignored the concerns that have been expressed about land supply. It was simply not good enough for the minister to say yesterday that planning responsibilities sit with Ivan McKee. In March, the former UK Conservative Government started work on proposals to introduce a new accelerated planning service. We need that in Scotland, as well.

Paul Sweeney: Does the member agree that the 10-year wait for compulsory sale orders is completely unacceptable?

Miles Briggs: I do, and we have not seen any progress from ministers on that, either.

The minister has an opportunity to lead by example and demonstrate that he can actually make things happen. If I was in the minister's shoes, I would undertake an urgent review of planning policy during the October recess and return to the Parliament in November with Scottish statutory instruments that can help to address those concerns.

Ministers need to accept that they have been responsible for creating many of the problems that we face today. Their only answer to the ever-growing housing and homelessness emergency now appears to be the wholly misguided rent cap and proposed rent control policy, which have resulted in much-needed housing developments being put on hold as well as inflicting eye-watering rent increases on tenants and resulting in new tenants being completely priced out of the market.

Ministers want to take forward rent controls in the Housing (Scotland) Bill, when we know that investors will continue to be put off investing in Scotland while that policy remains in place. The Deputy First Minister has been told that rent controls do not work, but ministers will press ahead with them regardless.

The Housing (Scotland) Bill has the potential to address some of the drivers of homelessness, such as those highlighted by Marie Curie in its briefing for the debate. There is little political disagreement on those but, fundamentally, we have a Housing (Scotland) Bill that does not contain any plans to build more houses. We simply cannot continue like this. We need leadership and a fresh approach. After 17 years in office, I know that it is difficult for ministers to say that they have failed but, in many cases, their policy decisions have negatively contributed to the situation that we now face in Scotland.

Ben Macpherson: Will Miles Briggs give way?

Miles Briggs: I am in my final 10 seconds.

Ministers have 18 months left to try to turn the situation around. They should take responsibility and address this national emergency. There are ideas across the chamber. It is time for ministers to understand that they have failed and to help to turn the emergency around.

I move amendment S6M-14719.2, to insert at end:

“, following repeated calls from charities and local authorities to take urgent action to alleviate rising cases of homelessness and to tackle Scotland's affordable housing shortage; notes that homelessness in Scotland has climbed to its worst level in more than a decade, with over 40,000 applications, and that, out of the 33,619 households assessed as homeless, there were over 15,000 children recorded; recognises that housing is a wholly devolved issue that the Scottish National Party (SNP) administration has mismanaged and exacerbated through rent controls and financial mismanagement, such as cutting £200 million from the housing budget; believes that by working together with developers, local authorities and landlords, more houses could be made available to buy and rent across Scotland; acknowledges that the SNP administration's cladding remediation scheme has yet to complete work on any affected properties in Scotland and has only spent £9 million of the £97 million given by the UK Government to fix unsafe cladding; understands that the Scottish Government has failed to provide financial support for residents living in properties built with reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) that are at risk; notes that the SNP administration has presided over a collapse in the housebuilding sector, with a 17% decrease in all sector starts and completions in 2023-24; echoes the concerns expressed around land supply and the planning system, and that the Scottish Government has failed to produce a clear plan setting out how it will properly fund and implement the policies contained within the fourth National Planning Framework (NPF4), and calls on the Scottish Government to take responsibility by addressing this national emergency.”

15:24

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): Let us begin by remembering what a housing emergency means to people in Scotland. It is the lived experience of people being evicted from their homes because they cannot afford their rent. It is the collapse of rural and island communities because they cannot provide housing for families who want to live and contribute there. It is people making their bed on the side of the road.

In my region, I have been working with a family that has been stuck in temporary housing for two years because there is nothing suitable for their family's special needs; a teacher who has a job but cannot find a home nearby and will have a lengthy daily commute; and a family that is urgently seeking suitable housing to accommodate the required care for one of their members, to allow them to be discharged from hospital and the family to be reunited.

Scottish Greens agree with the principle of declaring a housing emergency, but declaring a housing emergency is not enough. As I said five months ago, declaring a housing emergency must lead to collective action and shared responsibility to tackle the crisis, using all the means that are at our disposal.

It is therefore frustrating that Scottish Labour has once again brought to the chamber a debate using the rhetoric of a housing emergency without proposing any solutions. It is clear that at the root of this country's housing emergency is the financialisation of our housing market. For too long, our economy has prioritised housing as investments to make money from, rather than homes for people and the bedrock of our communities. Calling a housing emergency while not proposing any changes to how we tax housing or fund public house building is disingenuous and plays politics with people's lives.

During our time in government, the Scottish Greens raised the level of the additional dwelling supplement so that wealthy people buying second homes or extra investment properties would pay more tax to contribute to public services.

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

Ariane Burgess: Raising the rate of ADS further would raise important additional funding, which could go directly into building more affordable homes. I urge the minister to seriously consider that as part of the upcoming Scottish budget.

Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con): Will the member take an intervention?

Ariane Burgess: I do not have a lot of time, so I need to press on.

We recognise that that alone will not be enough to raise the substantial investment that is required to build more affordable publicly owned homes in communities up and down Scotland—homes that are vital to addressing the housing emergency.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention—an extremely helpful one?

Ariane Burgess: Scotland's capital budget was gutted by the previous Tory Government through wilful cuts and the gradual erosion that has been caused by record-high inflation rates. We are now £1.6 billion worse off than we were five years ago. That is seriously limiting our ability to build good-quality housing, as well as replace our schools and hospitals and invest in public transport.

If Scottish Labour is serious about tackling the housing emergency, it must commit here today to ensuring that the UK Labour Government fully restores our capital spend at the upcoming UK budget and commits to it rising in line with inflation in future years.

For months now, I have been working with stakeholders on a range of immediate solutions. We must have proper investment in the retrofitting and refurbishment of existing buildings to provide additional affordable housing.

Paul McLennan: Will the member take an intervention on that point?

Ariane Burgess: I will take an intervention from the minister. [*Interruption.*]

Paul McLennan: I thank the member for taking an intervention. I welcome her contribution. I put on record my thanks to the Greens for stating in their amendment their suggestions and ideas in relation to the motion. I confirm that the Government is looking at the recommendations to see what is possible within the current financial settlement. I will work with all members who want to deliver for the people of Scotland. Again, I thank Ariane Burgess for her suggestions on how we tackle the situation.

Ariane Burgess: I thank the minister for his intervention.

As I said, there must be proper investment in the retrofitting and refurbishment of existing buildings, which will help us with not only the housing crisis but climate emissions reduction, by providing safe, cosy homes for people.

For the price of one new build, we can bring three empty properties back into use. I would like the minister to consider that in the upcoming budget. It will mean properly resourcing councils and communities to do that. We do not have to

reinvent the wheel; we have a tremendous track record. In Campbeltown in Argyll, a once dilapidated town centre has been transformed by the council into a thriving place. In Dumfries, the community has taken the lead in turning empty buildings into homes in the town centre.

A key part of making that work will be to properly fund empty homes officers in all local authorities, so that bringing back empty properties can happen at pace. We must also recognise that empty flats above commercial properties could be homes, which could help to bring life back to the heart of our towns.

The other part of accomplishing the retrofitting of our towns and villages is the development of traditional building skills across the country. If we are to do that properly, we must take the training closer to communities through the provision of a mobile training unit. Rural and island communities must continue to be supported in their leadership by maintaining the rural and island housing fund and the Scottish land fund, which have been game changers in making it possible for communities to provide critical housing.

However, the cost of building housing in rural areas is three times the cost in other parts of Scotland. For island communities, it is even more. That is why I propose piloting a microhousing building standard to explore the possibility of building more homes for single people who desperately need homes. Microhousing offers an affordable way to meet that housing need quickly and affordably.

Along with those actions, to address the housing emergency, we must also have a robust system of tenant protections.

15:30

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I hope that no homeless people were watching the minister's contribution earlier. I know that he is not listening to me, but he should listen to people who are homeless and desperate for a house. His speech was just one excuse after another. It was another explanation of why other people are to blame for this, even though his party has been in power for 17 years.

Paul McLennan: I say to Mr Rennie that, of course, I listen to homeless people. One of the key issues for me is shared responsibility. The Scottish Government can do what it needs to do, but the financial context is an important part of that. I hope that, when it comes to the budget, Mr Rennie and his Liberal Democrat colleagues ask the UK Government to reverse the 9 per cent capital budget cut and the 62 per cent cut to financial transactions—and to look at local housing allowance, which has an impact on homelessness

in Scotland. I hope that he will do that, because this is about shared responsibility.

Willie Rennie: Does the minister say that to his constituents who come to him desperate for a house? Does he go on about percentages? Does he go on about how other people are to blame—how Brexit this, how the UK Government that, and how even Wales is responsible somehow?

The minister needs to understand that this is a housing emergency. Since the Government agreed to declare the housing emergency, the situation has got even worse and the figures are even more depressing. The number of new starts has plummeted. The number of children in temporary accommodation is now more than 10,000, which is the highest that it has been since the minister's party came to power. He should be ashamed of his Government's record, but instead he invests more time in hunting for excuses as to why his Government has failed and why it is somebody else's problem. That is the impression that I get, and I know that it is the impression of many people across the country.

It is heartbreaking. I have never seen the housing situation as bad as it is now. I have been in politics since 2006, and I initially represented Dunfermline. I thought that it could not get any worse than it was in Dunfermline at that point, but it is even worse now. Housing officers hold up their hands and admit that they cannot do anything—they have no options. How can that be the case? Imagine someone who is homeless and desperate for a house hearing that there is no hope of their getting a home and that they will be at the back of the queue if they have fewer than 100 points. That is embarrassing. This country should be much better than that. This Government should be much better than that. It should be open about its challenges and live up to its responsibilities, because it has contributed significantly to the problem.

Let us take the cladding investment point. We have a £97 million budget and the Government has spent £9 million. If we have the money, we should at least be getting on with that. The affordable housing budget has been cut by 37 per cent—it is down by £200 million. New starts for social housing are down, completions are down by 25 per cent, and new starts for all housing are down 17 per cent. We know the reason for that, but the minister does not want to admit it: it is the cumulative impact of his policies. It is not the individual policies themselves—we could argue the merits of each individual policy—but the cumulative impact, culminating in the Housing (Scotland) Bill, which is driving away investors.

The minister knows that, because he has been told. He has had meetings with the sector and he has been told that it has decided to invest

elsewhere—in England, in Wales and in other parts of the world. The sector is investing there rather than here because of the rhetoric—it is “us and them”—and because of rent controls. Those factors are driving investment away, as are the national planning framework—it takes 62 weeks to get a major housing development through the process—the limitations in land supply and the new and proposed regulations, which it is estimated will cost an additional £30,000.

There is also the fact that the Government is considering going to the super-high standard of the Passivhaus. The minister knows that, as we have seen in East Dunbartonshire—it was reported just today—the cost of producing each of those individual houses is getting on for £500,000. Such houses are brilliant, but what about all the other houses that we could have built with that extra finance?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Will the member give way?

Willie Rennie: Not just now. I am into my flow.

Of course, we should go for really good standards, but why on earth does the Government have to show off and go for super-high standards when we have to produce volume and get factory-built facilities? That is the effort that we should go for.

The minister might not have noticed, but there is a housing emergency. Lots of people are desperate for homes. I want the minister to respond significantly in his concluding remarks and address what is in his gift—the things that he could do right now. I want him to send a message to the private sector and private landlords that we cannot address the crisis without them.

We need the Government and private providers to work in partnership. Instead of having an us-and-them attitude, let us create a proper partnership to build the houses that we need, to a good standard, to make a difference and deal with the housing emergency so that I do not have to tell my constituents that I have absolutely nothing for them because the Government has failed to respond with the powers that it has.

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

15:36

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests in relation to a small share that I have in a family home.

The whole of Scotland faces a housing crisis, but it can have a much wider impact on the community in rural areas, and not only on the

people who are affected, because it leads to depopulation and communities disappearing. It also leads to economic decline. Employers are doing well and are crying out for staff, but young people have left those areas, so they no longer work in those businesses, and employers cannot import the labour that they need because of the lack of houses. We are going back to more tied houses, which is not good for any worker or community.

There is a lack of key workers in such areas. There is a lack of rural general practitioners. Hospitals are closing wards because of a lack of staff. We have seen that in Skye, which was in the headlines recently. I have been told by NHS Highland that it has no difficulty in recruiting people to Skye—who would not want to live there? However, none of the people it recruits can find a home there.

The Gaelic language is also being lost. Because people who speak Gaelic in their communities cannot find homes or jobs there and are forced out, the language is diluted.

In rural areas, waiting lists look smaller because the population is sparse and, therefore, numbers are smaller, but the situation is just as damaging. In Argyll and Bute, 3,290 people were on the housing waiting list as of November last year. There was a 28 per cent increase in homelessness, but the average house price in the area was seven times the average income. That is a common issue throughout the Highlands and Islands. The housing market is way beyond the means of the local population, and people are being forced out.

Highland Council requires 24,000 homes to be built in the next 10 years, because of the green freeport as well as the issues that I have outlined, but its historic debt means that 42 per cent of its revenue from council housing is just paying loan charges. That leaves little for keeping the housing stock in a fit state and far less for building the houses that we need.

The Scottish Government claims to have built more than 10,000 rural houses since 2016, but the response to a freedom of information request shows that it has delivered only 3,219 affordable rural homes in the Highlands and Islands region since 2017. The majority of those homes were built in the Highland Council area, including many homes within the city of Inverness, which is not rural. Argyll and Bute got 351 affordable rural homes, Orkney got 160 and Shetland got 147.

The Scottish Government's definition of rural, for house building purposes, includes areas beside the Edinburgh and Aberdeen city bypasses and areas close to the centre of Inverness, as well as commuter towns just outside Edinburgh and

Glasgow. For example, since 2017, 152 affordable so-called rural homes have been built in the city of Edinburgh, which is more than have been built in Shetland and is level pegging with Orkney. That is simply not right. There is, of course, a housing crisis in our cities, but rural areas cannot compete with the cost of building in cities, so already fewer rural homes are being built.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I am listening very carefully to Ms Grant. The Government, Ms Grant and other MSPs who represent rural areas could encourage organisations, public bodies and others to take advantage of the affordable homes for key workers fund and the rural and islands housing fund, which provide support and have demand-led budgets. We can genuinely work together with NHS boards, private developers and landowners to see how we can address some of those challenges, because I take very seriously the point that Ms Grant has raised.

Rhoda Grant: Of course—I am doing that with local authorities in my area. The point that I am making is that it is simply deceptive for the Government to include city areas in rural house building targets and then pat itself on the back for building so-called rural homes in cities. That is simply not right.

The Scottish Government has promised that 11,000 homes will be built in rural areas. That represents 10 per cent of its house building target, but 17 per cent of the population live in rural Scotland. Again, rural Scotland is losing out in relation not only to the targets but to the areas that are designated as rural.

Paul McLennan: The target is 10 per cent, but it is a demand-led programme, as the cabinet secretary touched on. Ten per cent is the minimum, and the cabinet secretary has offered to discuss the issue with the member.

Rhoda Grant: If the minimum of 10 per cent includes houses in urban areas, houses will be built in urban areas—of course—because it is cheaper.

In addition, planning legislation is designed for urban areas. It is almost impossible to build in rural areas, because pavements and other infrastructure must be built. That is simply not required in urban areas. Rural areas also face challenges with holiday homes and second homes, but the Government's guarantee will ensure that houses are not built in rural areas.

The national housing crisis requires to be addressed, but the Scottish Government also needs to look at its policy framework. Its solution needs to be island proofed and must not disadvantage rural areas. The cost of building in rural areas is huge, so it is little wonder that the houses are being built in urban areas. There are

no economies of scale in rural areas, because, in reality, a rural community will need only one or two homes in a village to meet local need. Highland Council estimates that the cost of building in rural areas is £400,000 per unit, but it can cost at least a quarter more just to ship the materials across to our islands on Government-owned ferries. Procurement regulations add to the cost, too.

Ironically, the Scottish Government's rural and islands housing action plan includes a section called "Delivering the Right Homes in The Right Places". The Government's definition of rural does not align with that or, indeed, with any ordinary person's definition of rural.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Grant, you need to wind up.

Rhoda Grant: That is why the policy is working against rural areas and adding to depopulation. The Government needs to provide a degree of parity for rural areas and must reform its classification of rural housing. That will help to provide homes in rural areas.

16:44

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): I strongly believe that the quantity, quality, cost and affordability of housing is the social issue of our time. The statistics that we have heard make that clear and, as the representative of the most urban and densely populated part of Scotland, I have housing issues in our communities as part of my and my team's daily work.

The impact on other public policy areas is also clear. I welcome the minister's engagement on the challenges that we face in Edinburgh since he has come into post and the actions that he has taken.

Of course, whether it is Edinburgh, which has the most acute housing crisis in Scotland, or the rural parts of the country, or other parts of the United Kingdom and beyond, it is important to remember that the housing crisis—it is a crisis—has been decades in the making and will be extremely complex to change. Because of the impact of international finance, the issue goes well beyond even the borders of the UK.

For some context to where we are, I will quote John Burn-Murdoch of the *Financial Times*, who wrote in January:

"Aside from the occasional blip, average house prices were roughly four times average earnings in the UK for 80 years between the 1910s and 1990s. This was a fixed characteristic of British society. Knuckle down, save for a few years and buy in your late twenties: simple. Then the ratio doubled",

or increased by 100 per cent,

"in the space of a decade."

That was in the 1990s. The last time the jump in prices was that high,

“cars had not yet been invented, Queen Victoria was on the throne and home ownership was the preserve of a wealthy minority.”

I quote that because all the issues that colleagues have rightly emphasised today stem from the challenge of how unaffordable it has become over the decades for people to purchase their own home.

We will all make our party-political points, but it has been disappointing to hear some of the remarks that have been made today. We need to share more of the responsibility. The Government is quite openly saying that it has done things that have made a positive contribution but it wants to do more, and here are the other things that it wants to do. For other parties to suggest that they have not been complicit in the crisis is just not correct. While some aspects of housing policy are devolved, the financial aspects are, of course, reserved.

The Truss impact is being felt in the cost. Brexit is a factor, as others have mentioned. The pandemic and the war in Ukraine are external factors, but they have made an impact on the ability to buy and the ability to build. There have been links to earnings and social security.

Miles Briggs: The fundamental question for the two of us, who represent the city of Edinburgh is: why is the Scottish Government not asking why Manchester is seeing a huge increase in house building and Edinburgh is seeing it collapse? That is fundamentally the question that ministers and SNP members should be asking themselves today.

Ben Macpherson: I regularly ask myself that important question, but there is also a context. As I was about to say, the issue is about more than just supply and demand in this whole scenario. I think that the question that Miles Briggs has raised is about how we increase the supply, particularly of build-to-rent properties. The Labour Party, which lodged the motion, was once upon a time enthusiastic about rent controls—in fact, it tried to compete with our Green colleagues to be the most enthusiastic about rent controls—and now it is arguing against them. *[Interruption.]* The problem with all of this is the party politics and the petty, sticking-plaster politics. Can we confront this really serious issue for our constituents with solutions and constructive dialogue? *[Interruption.]* The impact of the ability to buy on homelessness and on the cost of rents affects all our constituencies.

I have a briefing in front of me—others will mention it—about the things that Labour could have done. Labour has been in power in Edinburgh for 35 of my 40 years. I am sure that

others will talk about the housing capacity that was sold off by the Labour and Liberal Democrat Scottish Executive. We could go into all of that, but what we need to do, more importantly, is think about the way forward.

I thought that the members who made points about solutions were the most helpful, and I am going to end with a few things that I want to emphasise as solutions to make a positive difference. First, in urban Scotland, we really need to think about the cost of land—others have mentioned it. The cost of land in urban Scotland is one of the primary factors behind why purchasing a home is so difficult.

As a Parliament, as we go into the next 25 years and enter this next chapter of devolution—perhaps we will not have 25 years of devolution because we might, of course, become an independent country in that time—

Rhoda Grant: Will the member take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is bringing his remarks to a close.

Ben Macpherson:—the ability to borrow will benefit any Scottish Government. We need more capital borrowing powers, particularly if we are going to see cuts to capital budgets for the Scottish Government.

Lastly, for my constituents—the Scottish Government is continuing to consider this—if the project in Granton, with its potential to provide affordable housing in Edinburgh, can be realised, that will make a massive difference. I urge ministers to please deliver the affordable houses that my constituents need in Granton.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: When a member has the floor, it is that member who has the floor and not any other member who is sitting at the time. I wanted to clarify that rule in case it had escaped members' attention.

15:51

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): It was interesting to be shouted at by Ben Macpherson, but it is always a pleasure to follow him.

I quote:

“The ache for home lives in all of us. The safe place where we can go as we are and not be questioned.”

Those are the very powerful words of Maya Angelou in “All God’s Children Need Traveling Shoes”.

“The ache for home lives in all of us”,

but today, in this country, we face a situation that is nothing less than a national disgrace—a

housing emergency that the SNP Government has allowed to spiral completely out of control. Let us be absolutely clear that this is not just a housing emergency; it is becoming a housing crisis. We have heard about the homeless and those who live on the streets.

Given that a housing emergency was declared on 15 May—I say with respect that the Government did that only because it was backed into a corner—it is surely reasonable to expect the Government to provide an immediate adaptive response. It is not just the case that the Government has failed to do that; the situation has got worse. There is no excuse and no explanation, particularly for the number of children who are living in temporary accommodation under this—I quote this carefully—incompetent SNP Government.

Let us look at the situation for children and young people. In doing that, I remind those on the Scottish Government benches of the Government's obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and of the consequences of failing to live up to them.

Families across Scotland, including those in East Lothian, are being forced to live in temporary accommodation for an average of 342 days. That is almost a year of instability in the short life of a child—a year of uncertainty. Some 10,000 children in Scotland are trapped in temporary accommodation, which is only slightly less than the combined capacity of all the primary schools in East Lothian, Midlothian and West Lothian. Imagine that—10,000 children without a secure home. That is the ache for a home that lives in all of us. Those 10,000 children are stuck in bed and breakfast accommodation.

Keith Brown: I thank Martin Whitfield for taking an intervention. If he does not want to acknowledge the Truss budget, the cost of living, the cuts to the capital budget and the cuts to financial transactions, will he at least admit the backlog that was caused by the fact that the Labour Administration—along with the Liberal Democrats—built only six council houses in eight years? You started this problem.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Speak through the chair. I call Martin Whitfield.

Martin Whitfield: I am grateful for that intervention. Not one—not one—of the 10,000 children who are now living in temporary accommodation was even born at that time, and I would hazard a guess that those children were not yet even hoped for by any of the families who live there now.

The SNP's record on housing is, frankly, one of abject failure. The most vulnerable people in Scotland are paying the price for the

incompetence. These children and families do not have the luxury of waiting for the SNP to get its act together. They need action, and they need it now.

Those children are completing their homework on a desk or on their knee on a bed that gives under their weight. Those children worry about having to be out of a room by 9 am on a Saturday because they are in temporary accommodation. That is the life that they face day in, day out. It is the ache for a home that lives in all of us.

The Government has admitted that there is a housing emergency but, rather than acting with urgency, its policies have fuelled the crisis.

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): Will Martin Whitfield give way?

Martin Whitfield: I am more than happy to give way to Kevin Stewart.

Kevin Stewart: As a former housing minister—and probably the housing minister who delivered more affordable homes than any other during the course of devolution, and who would have delivered more had it not been for Covid—I had great co-operation with housing ministers in Wales, who felt that they had the same impediment to delivery as I did, which was capital expenditure from the UK Government.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): Briefly, Mr Stewart.

Kevin Stewart: Does Mr Whitfield support increased capital expenditure to build more housing?

Martin Whitfield: I am grateful for Mr Stewart's contribution and I look forward to his speech.

In 2022-23, in East Lothian, 572 applications were assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness. That is 116 per 10,000 of population. Of the 947 people who were associated with those applications, 661 were adults and 286 were children, some of whom were babes in arms.

In 2022-23, there were 393 households in temporary accommodation in East Lothian—that is 80 per 10,000 of population, which is higher than the national average. Edinburgh, West Lothian, East Lothian and Midlothian have the first, fourth, sixth and seventh-highest homelessness rates in Scotland. Of those 393 households, 100 were households with children or pregnant women, and 150 children were in temporary accommodation.

I realise that time is short, and I am disappointed that I took so many contributions rather than interventions, so let me finish by saying that the people of East Lothian, the people of South Scotland and the people of Scotland deserve better. They deserve a Government that

cares, acts and delivers real, affordable homes for those who are in most need.

Maya Angelou talked of the “ache for home” that “lives in all of us”,

and tonight’s vote will confirm or refute that view across the chamber.

15:57

Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I always welcome the opportunity to talk about housing, so I start by thanking Labour for bringing this debate to the chamber. I agree with much of Labour’s position and we often ask for the same things, but it is a shame that there has not been an awful lot of nuance from the members on the Labour benches so far. Of course, the funding that is available to the Scottish Government to build homes affects how many homes can be built. Cuts to the capital budget and the availability of loans will have an impact.

Paul McLennan was right when he said that Scotland has a good record on preventing homelessness. However, that is not the same as saying that this is the best that we can do, and I do not hear the Scottish Government claiming that this is the best that we can do. The Housing (Scotland) Bill, which contains measures to prevent homelessness, is on its way, and we would not have introduced it if we believed that all preventable homelessness was being prevented.

Miles Briggs: I agree with Emma Roddick that the Housing (Scotland) Bill contains some good policies, but those policies already exist. People should not be in temporary accommodation for more than two weeks but, in many cases in Edinburgh, they are in such accommodation for two years. The Government is failing, and the Housing (Scotland) bill is sweeping all that failure into a new bill.

Emma Roddick: I do not agree that the bill is sweeping anything; it is opening up a place for us to have a discussion like this one. However, Miles Briggs has a point in that there is a lot to be said about implementation, as well as targets and records.

It is a shame that Mr Sarwar cannot take his own advice on sticking to the issue and finding consensus, rather than getting personal or party political. Perhaps he does not understand the difference.

We cannot tackle poverty without tackling homelessness. Apart from anything else, homelessness is extremely expensive to go through, and I speak from experience on that. People do not appreciate the cost of temporary accommodation and service charges, the cost of

living without a place to store your things, the cost of travelling and of missing work or the cost of interest on overdrafts and pay-day loans. Homelessness pushes people into poverty and it keeps them there.

The briefing that Crisis shared ahead of this debate says that homelessness and the trauma and indignity that it causes are the worst outcomes of our housing emergency, and that is absolutely correct. Experience of homelessness changes people’s physical and mental health and it permanently affects their life chances.

I was grateful to the minister for agreeing back in June to meet me regarding the homelessness emergency. I have chased that up with his office and I hope that he will be able to find time in his extremely busy diary for that meeting soon, as I agree that an emergency response is needed.

Homelessness is traumatic and life changing. To stop the deep harm that it causes, we have to prevent it from happening. I appreciate that duties to prevent homelessness are expected in the Housing (Scotland) Bill, and I look forward to scrutinising them and the plans to implement them very soon. I particularly welcome the forthcoming changes to define people who are at risk of homelessness, which is a type of homelessness that requires intervention.

I said that we cannot tackle poverty without tackling homelessness, but I also note that we cannot eradicate homelessness without eradicating poverty. Punitive measures such as the bedroom tax, the two-child cap and the Tory cuts to universal credit—all upheld by Labour—have an impact on people’s ability to pay for their housing. We know that most families who rent from a private landlord rely on financial support to do so, yet many of them are not getting all that they should, and in the meantime Labour is keeping the two-child cap in place. The rising cost of private renting is a huge concern and it contributes to homelessness, which tells me that rent controls can play a huge part in preventing homelessness.

I hope that the Scottish Government will take this opportunity to be bold and prioritise ending homelessness, ending poverty and ending unfair housing costs over lining the pockets of landlords, and to implement proper rent controls wherever they are needed. I understand that Government gets lobbied extensively by landlords, and I also get the correspondence about pension pots, investments and interest rates. However, when we are in an emergency, we must prioritise. There is no excuse for prioritising anything but a roof over people’s heads and the provision of two of our most fundamental needs—safety and security.

I hope that the minister is ready to make some tough decisions, which might not be popular with some landlords, when the evidence that the Housing (Scotland) Bill will require to be collected shows that rent controls are needed in a particular area. The local context must be taken into account, and I absolutely echo others' comments that councils know their areas best and that different approaches are needed in the Highlands, Edinburgh and the islands, but it is a reality that evidence does not always win the argument.

It is social housing that most needs to be expanded. As is the case for all my colleagues, housing lists in my region are huge. I welcome every new home that is built in Scotland, but I hope—I say this in response to Rhoda Grant's points—that there will be space to discuss a clearer target for homes to be built in rural and island areas that includes only rural and island areas. There is no point in having a rural target that includes Invernesian or central belt suburbs. I made that point when I was in Government and had responsibility for population, and it is really good that it is being heard again today.

We also need homes that meet the needs of minority groups and women. We know that there is inequality in the housing system. If someone is disabled, from a racialised minority, LGBTQ or a woman, they are more likely to suffer. LGBTQ people are more likely to experience homelessness; people from racialised minorities tend to spend longer in the homelessness system; and disabled people struggle to find homes that meet their needs. We have an ageing population and we already struggle to provide accessible housing. There needs to be a concerted effort to provide such accommodation across the country. Nobody should have to leave their community, however rural it is or however much water lies between it and the mainland, because they become disabled or their needs change.

Many have said, and it is true, that an emergency needs an emergency response. Urgency on the part of Government right now will be reassuring to young people, people in insecure accommodation and the organisations that support them.

16:03

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests, where I declare that I am the owner of long-term tenanted houses in Moray.

I am very interested in the debate and I thank the Labour Party for bringing it to the chamber. Opposition debates always seem to be more interesting than Government ones, because they

generate some excitement and enthusiasm, and I am glad that the minister is now paying attention.

I want to concentrate on and drill down into some issues in the Highlands. I did a bit of work on the houses that Highland Council rents out, because that is one way of solving housing problems, but the responses to two FOI requests brought out different figures on how many council houses there are in the Highlands. One suggested that there are 14,494 and the other suggested that there are 15,127. That means that 633 houses have been lost. I am not sure what the council has done with them, but I am sure that it will find them.

Paul McLennan: Will the member take an intervention?

Edward Mountain: I will take an intervention on that point.

Paul McLennan: How many council houses were lost because of the right-to-buy legislation that the Tories supported?

Edward Mountain: The minister was listening. I was only questioning how many council houses it is thought that there are in the Highlands region. The council gave two different figures. That is the truth of it. They are not lost, but the council could not find them and it did not know how many it has. That suggests that the management is not great.

More than half of the houses that the council has do not reach the energy performance certificate standard that it seems will be required in 2028. The estimated cost to Highland Council of bringing those houses up to the EPC standard will perhaps be more than £300 million.

Kevin Stewart: Will the member take an intervention?

Edward Mountain: I will take an intervention in a moment, but not now.

The council needs to get those houses in order. I went on to ask it about the houses that it has sitting empty, which it needs to resolve, and I found that 356 houses across the Highlands are sitting empty. It may be said that that is a small number, but 112 single-bedroom houses, 132 two-bedroom houses, 90 three-bedroom houses, 12 four-bedroom houses and one five-bedroom house are all sitting empty. If we add up all the beds, there are 700-odd beds in the Highlands in properties that are unused by Highland Council.

I will give way now, if it still appeals to the member to intervene.

Kevin Stewart: I agree with Mr Mountain's point about the importance of ensuring that there is investment in energy efficiency to bring homes up to standard. Does he agree that one of the best ways to do that and allow more resources to come

into play is to remove VAT from the refurbishment and repair of existing properties?

Edward Mountain: This will probably be the end of my political career, but I certainly agree with the member. I will come on to say that there should be reductions in VAT, input costs and perhaps even taxation when householders carry out improvements to their homes.

The Highland Council has estimated that it needs £618,000 to get the 356 houses that are sitting empty into a fit standard for occupation. Otherwise, they will continue to sit empty. The problem is that I am not sure how the council will work out the economics of that, because the loss of rent could amount to half a million pounds each year. I also found out that it is paying council tax for empty properties to the tune of £168,000 a year, with that money going from its housing department to another part of the council.

Those are examples of simple things that councils could do to get themselves and the houses in their stock sorted out. I am sure that that is relevant to the whole of Scotland.

I turn to the way that the Government has dealt with private landlords—of which I am one, as I clearly declared. The number of houses that are available for private rent has dropped from 360,000 to 300,000. People do not want to get involved in the sector because the Government is putting them off. It cannot be said that it is not, because it is. There is no stability in the letting laws. The Government seems to change them every time it wants to. I do not believe in rent controls, because evidence has proved that, when rent controls come off, rent prices rocket up. There is also no clarity on the EPC requirement by 2028. Landlords need more clarity on that.

My third answer is to encourage people and builders to build across Scotland. As I said to the Parliament yesterday, 10 developers have moved south because they no longer want to build houses in Scotland. I say well done to the Government on that, as it is definitely going to solve our housing crisis. The Government needs to address that.

My fourth answer—Mr Stewart stole a bit of this—is that we need to get affordable housing and housing in general back into the rented sector by making it easier for people to develop houses and make them warmer. There is a VAT reduction on a house if it has been empty for a set period of time, but there are still uninhabited homes across Scotland. With a little help in that regard from the UK Government—I understand that it is not the Scottish Government—we could bring more houses back into use.

I have made those four suggestions as things for us to talk about in this Parliament instead of

blaming everyone else. I have come up with some ideas. Let us see whether anyone runs with them.

16:10

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): I am pleased to speak in this Labour Party debate because, everywhere we turn, we can see the human tragedy of this housing emergency.

In Glasgow, people are sleeping in the streets; waiting lists for social housing are through the roof; half-finished housing developments sit wasting and incomplete; queues for hot food at homelessness projects circle the streets; thousands of children are without a permanent place to call home; there is a chronic shortage of accessible homes, with mums carrying their grown-up children upstairs and people trapped in their homes several storeys up; and heartbreaking numbers of people are dying because they are homeless.

All that, and still the Government says that it has “a good track record” and continues to fail to respond to the housing emergency. Rather than unblock planning, release building opportunities, empower the construction of affordable homes or support families to buy homes, this Government has allowed homelessness to rise, failed to meet building targets, failed to update key guidelines, left children in temporary accommodation and cut the affordable housing budget by 22 per cent in real terms—a cut that the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations has called

“an absolute hammer blow for tackling homelessness and poverty across Scotland”.

At a time when more than 10,000 children are stuck in temporary accommodation, with 42 children becoming homeless every day and a household becoming homeless every 16 minutes, reducing the affordable homes budget should have been unthinkable—but not for this failing Government. To make matters worse, it cut that budget at a time when house building is down by 17 per cent and new starts, including affordable housing starts, are at an 11-year low.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: If the member thinks that that cut should not have been made to the housing budget—and I just sat through the end of health questions, where Labour and Conservative members were asking for more money to spend on NHS capital—where should the money have come from? The money is finite and it needs to come from somewhere, so can the member suggest what budget should have been cut?

Pam Duncan-Glancy: First, I would remind the cabinet secretary that she is in government. Secondly, with a 9 per cent cut to capital spending, how does the cabinet secretary explain the 22 per cent cut to affordable housing? It does

not add up. Those are this Government's choices and it should stop running away from them.

In Glasgow alone, the SNP council's actions—or inactions—have meant that there have been 300 fewer builds than were planned. That is 300 fewer homes available for people in Glasgow on the SNP council's watch. Homelessness in Glasgow is up 15 per cent and rough sleeping has doubled. We need more houses, not fewer.

While the SNP misses its targets, my constituents miss security, a roof over their heads and a home to call their own. That is not just inept—it is shameful. The Government is failing every single family and person without a place to call a home in Glasgow and across Scotland and the minister says that that is “a good track record”. Well, I would hate to see a bad track record.

Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Pam Duncan-Glancy: I will in a moment.

On bad track records, let me turn to the Government's record on accessible housing. Like members across the chamber, my inbox and surgeries are full of people trapped in inaccessible properties and living in misery: a woman who washes, uses the loo and eats in the same room because the rest of her home is not accessible; a mum who carries her son upstairs—up the outside stairs—then goes back out for the shopping and the wheelchair; and a daughter who is sharing a bedroom with two children so that her dad can move in, as his own house is not accessible. That is no life for anyone in 2024 and it is happening on this Government's watch.

I believe that a member was seeking to intervene.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Gordon MacDonald—briefly.

Gordon MacDonald: Between 1999 and 2007, the Labour Party sold 132,000 social housing units. Would the member agree that not selling them would have helped the issue of people looking for a home that she just highlighted? In the past 25 years in Wales, house building has dropped by 45 per cent, which is why 139,000 people in Wales are looking for a social house.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Briefly, Mr MacDonald.

Gordon MacDonald: Who is to blame for that? Is it UK Labour or Welsh Labour?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before I call Pam Duncan-Glancy to respond, I encourage members who are making an intervention to be brief, rather than make a contribution. I will give Pam Duncan-Glancy some of the time back.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: I remind the member that we are in Scotland and that, when we were in government, we built 5,000 more houses per year than this Government has done.

Shelter Scotland set out perfectly in its briefing the experiences of people who face discrimination and marginalisation. It said that discrimination and marginalisation deepen due to the

“unequal nature of our housing system”.

The examples that I gave a moment ago illustrate that.

Tens of thousands of disabled people are languishing on housing waiting lists. With the Government's woeful record on house building and existing stock being inaccessible, they have little prospect of getting a home that fits. In Glasgow, as I am sure is the case in many in other places, a lot of properties were built many years ago, before accessibility was a thing—if I can say that. Many disabled people therefore need adaptations in order to keep their homes.

There is some great practice by housing associations and developers on that, some of which I heard about at first hand at the accessible housing summit in Dundee last week. Rather than harnessing that good practice, the Government is working against them by cutting the stage 3 adaptations budget by 25 per cent, and not even telling councils what their allocation will be for this year. Following his statement yesterday, I asked the minister about that and I did not get an answer, so I will ask that, in closing, he confirms what assessment the Government has made of that cut and how it thinks that it will affect our constituents' ability to have a suitable place to call home.

As well as making the most of what we have, we have to build more houses to resolve the emergency for disabled people—just as we have to do with housing in general—including owner-occupiers and tenants. Let us not make the same mistakes of the past and build more homes that we need to spend cash to adapt in the future; let us get it right the first time. There is no excuse this time: accessibility is a thing now, and if the Government forgets about that, I am here to remind it.

As we have heard, not only is development too slow, but the Government is using a 25-year-old design system. I would be grateful if the Government could move apace to address that and bring forward accessible design standards sooner rather than later.

The Parliament has declared an emergency, councils have declared an emergency and families are living in an emergency, but the Government and, I am afraid, the minister are content to sit

tight, list working groups and blame someone else. Not us, Presiding Officer, because that is not good enough. The minister has had his chance to fix it, and he has missed it. He has failed and the Government has failed. Both should go and give the people of Scotland a housing minister and a Government that they deserve.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I advise members that the time that we had available has now been exhausted. Therefore, members will be kept to time. I call Christine Grahame. *[Interruption.]*

16:17

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I do not know why that always happens when I stand up.

Scotland's national housing emergency has numerous causes, some of which were enumerated by Ben Macpherson. When we speak of housing, we are all speaking of having a right to a home. First, I will give some background. Margaret Thatcher's right-to-buy policy helped many former social housing tenants to get onto the housing ladder. It was a good idea at the time, but it destroyed the supply of council houses for rent. That is still having an impact today, although the SNP Scottish Government got rid of the policy.

Scotland's population has risen from just over 5 million at the start of the 21st century to 5.4 million in 2022. Furthermore, our ageing population means that there are many more single-person households, which is impacting on the number of new houses that are needed. In Scotland, there are at least 2,509,300 single households.

The effects of the 2008 financial crash, exacerbated by the austerity measures that were introduced by the Tory-Liberal coalition Government from 2010, then the Tory Government from 2015, and now being continued by Labour—goodness knows what Rachel Reeves's budget will say—are having an impact. There is also the impact of Brexit on the cost of construction materials and the supply of workers, which I think Anas Sarwar conceded. Those are some of the economic realities. As a result, the average cost of building a new house in Scotland is nudging towards £200,000, which must impact the Scottish Government's affordable housing programme. I have been advised that, in the Borders, that estimate can reach £500,000. Smaller rural developments are costly, as Rhoda Grant referenced.

I have local and national suggestions for the Scottish Government. Locally, in the Borders, £8 million was returned to the Scottish Government as the council could not proceed, through housing associations, with new builds within the

contractual timescale. Some reasons that were given were costs of materials exceeding original estimates and lack of construction workforce. That £8 million was then not available to renovate some of the 200 houses currently empty in the Borders. Flexibility over the use of that funding would have been good.

Nationally, the Scottish Government has three key priorities: economic growth, eradicating child poverty and tackling climate change. That can be achieved in part by maximising investment in new house building.

The £200 million cut to the Scottish Government's housing budget that was made in December 2023 should be reversed. I suggest reversing the decision on the active travel budget, which has about the same amount of funding. It is a hard choice to make, but, respectfully, I suggest that the Government puts housing first.

The Scottish Government could authorise and encourage local councils and housing associations to build new houses for sale as well as for rent. The surplus income from sales should then be used to subsidise the costs of building new houses for social rent.

The Scottish Government and, indeed, local authorities could invest some of the £20 billion of available pension funds money in building at least 100,000 houses for rent. I understand that funding mechanisms are already in place in parts of the UK that protect those investments. At the end of the borrowing period, I understand that the ownership of the houses reverts to the Government or local authority without any need for additional payment.

Another issue is the workforce. On 17 May 2024, the Construction Industry Training Board in Scotland published a report stating that an extra 5,220 workers a year will be needed to meet the continued construction growth expected over the next five years. For almost a third of construction employers, as has been mentioned, finding suitably skilled staff remains a key challenge, particularly with more older workers retiring and not being replaced.

There are local and national problems and solutions. If the Scottish Government priority is to eradicate child poverty, where better to start than with affordable homes for rent in the public sector? That is where I started.

As for economic growth, that would go hand in hand with that investment. In Scotland, such a programme could create more than 30,000 new jobs, more than £500 million additional income from construction taxes, more than £1 billion savings to the NHS—because a bad home or no home leads to illness—and £1 billion savings from the reduction in homelessness.

In conclusion—this is quite controversial—transport is considered to be so important that it has a dedicated cabinet secretary. We have a fundamental right to a home. I cannot follow why housing does not have a dedicated seat at the Cabinet table.

16:22

Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con): As an MSP for the Lothian region and a former City of Edinburgh councillor, I welcome the chance to speak in the debate.

Miles Briggs has already highlighted the crisis that Edinburgh, as our capital, is facing. In November 2023, the City of Edinburgh Council formally declared a housing emergency. Council figures show that about 5,000 households in the capital were in temporary accommodation, which was the highest number in Scotland. Although housing is a nationwide crisis, it manifests most acutely in Edinburgh. The city has the lowest proportion of social housing in Scotland, but the demand is immense. In Edinburgh, about 200 bids are made for every social rented home that becomes available.

When I was a councillor, the SNP-Labour administration presented “Programme for the Capital: The City of Edinburgh Council Business Plan 2017-22”, which was approved in August 2017. It stated that the council wanted to

“Deliver a programme to build at least 10,000 social and affordable homes over the next 5 years”,

—that is, by now—

“with a plan to build 20,000 by 2027”.

However, since the 20,000 homes commitment was made in 2017, and was subsequently revised to 25,000 in March 2023, only 9,000 new affordable homes were expected to be approved by 31 March 2024, and only 8,000 have been completed. That was a commitment by an SNP and Labour run Edinburgh council, and it is a commitment that it has failed to deliver, despite having said in March 2022 that it was on track to fulfil it, in response to a question that was posed by Conservative councillor Jim Campbell.

Declaring a housing emergency is all well and good, but it is an emergency of the Government’s own making. As Ben Macpherson said, it has been “decades in the making” and has not happened overnight. The SNP Government and the Scottish Labour Party cannot keep blaming others while they are in power and failing to meet their own targets.

Ben Macpherson: In the spirit of collective responsibility, would Sue Webber agree that the right to buy created significant problems in

Edinburgh and elsewhere and that it is good that it was ended in 2014?

Sue Webber: What everyone in the chamber forgets is that there are still people living in those homes: the homes that were bought have not disappeared. Families have been brought up and are having fantastic lives in those homes. They are still being lived in, which is a fact that we cannot escape from. Let me cast members’ minds back a little bit.

Emma Roddick: Will the member give way?

Sue Webber: I have just started. If you do not mind, Ms Roddick, I will move on a bit.

Rent controls were first mentioned in the chamber by Scottish Labour and were quickly embraced by the SNP. Rent controls have been an unmitigated disaster, when it comes to their unintended consequences. We have seen rents rising in Scotland faster than they have anywhere else in the UK, including London. Industry leaders in Scotland have raised concerns about rent controls and about the Scottish Government’s proposed housing bill. More Homes More Quickly has expressed concern about the unintended consequences of rent controls, including a reduction in supply and in access to the private rented sector, which could subsequently impact on lower-income groups who are in need of housing.

That is not scaremongering. Around 21,000 flats and houses have disappeared from Scotland’s private rented sector in a single year. Statistics—*[Interruption.]*

I am happy to take an intervention if someone wants to intervene.

Emma Roddick: As with the houses that were mentioned in the member’s earlier comments, surely those houses still exist and are still being used for some function.

I will also say about the houses that were purchased under right to buy that certainly not all of them are being used as homes at this point, because many of them are Airbnbs.

Sue Webber: In the capital city, where we are sitting now, 3,000 council homes are, as my colleague Miles Briggs said, lying vacant that should be repurposed and brought up to scratch. People should be living in them—*[Interruption.]*—so why are our elected members in Edinburgh not fixing those homes? That is not scaremongering.

Statistics that have been published by the Scottish Association of Landlords have revealed that the SNP rent controls have damaged the country’s private rented sector. I am certain that members across the chamber can concur; my inbox is full of messages from people whose tenancies are being ended and whose private

landlords are choosing to take their properties off the market. They are contacting me in desperation because they are about to become homeless.

Despite clear evidence that rent controls do not work and instead merely aggravate the problem, last month the City of Edinburgh Council backed a motion that was introduced by the Scottish Greens to support rent controls—the first council to do so since the introduction of the Scottish Government's Housing (Scotland) Bill. *[Interruption.]*

I thought they would, too.

Common sense did not prevail, and the council did not support the councillors from the Conservative group in Edinburgh who submitted an alternative motion that really drilled down into the issues that rent controls will bring.

Furthermore, the SNP housing bill is going to add a £5.5 million burden to already overstretched councils, which have warned that the research that will be required to assess the sector for rent controls will equate to that amount. That is just throwing good money after bad. We need to start prioritising where we invest. Just think how many homes could be bought with £5.5 million—not that many in East Dunbartonshire.

We would reverse the rent freeze and the eviction moratorium. We will continue to oppose rent caps while ensuring that renters get a fair deal.

Rent controls are not the only issue that is contributing to the housing emergency, but they are driving investors away. Due to a lack of houses being built, there were 4,969 households in temporary accommodation in Edinburgh on 31 March 2024, which is a 4 per cent rise from 2023.

Twelve of the 32 councils have declared a housing emergency, and the SNP Government has presided over a Scotland-wide housing crisis, coupled with an increase in homelessness with thousands of people, including 10,000 children, now stuck in temporary accommodation. Willie Rennie made a plea to support investors, private builders and private landlords—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You need to wind up.

Sue Webber: I am doing that.

All that could be addressed by the SNP Government but, in SNP style, it blames others and cites UK Government budget cuts and austerity as causes of the housing emergency.

16:30

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): I want to put on record three

clear facts that have often been ignored by contributors to this debate. First, the delivery of social and affordable homes in Scotland under the SNP Scottish Government has been far greater than delivery in other parts of the UK. That is just a fact. That means that delivery of new affordable homes has been better in Scotland than it has in England under successive Labour and Conservative Governments, and better than it has in Wales under Labour. That is just a fact. Indeed, delivery is also far better than it was under the previous Labour and Liberal Democrat Scottish Executive here in Holyrood.

Secondly—this is just as important—the Scottish Government must plot a path to our doing far better on delivery of new and affordable homes than we have been doing, given the clear housing emergency. Indeed, it is self-evidently a UK-wide housing emergency. Let us lift our heads and look at the experience not just in Scotland but right across the UK.

Thirdly, Scotland's capital budget cut from the UK Government significantly undermines our efforts to deliver as many homes as we would like to deliver to tackle that crisis.

Those are just facts that the Opposition parties simply wish to ignore. That leads me to a fourth aspect, which I thought the Minister for Housing outlined clearly. Scotland needs a partnership approach to tackling the housing emergency. That partnership must involve the Scottish and UK Governments, councils, housing associations, housing charities, house builders, financiers, and innovators—everyone and anyone who has something meaningful to offer. What is the approach of the Labour Party in Holyrood today? It is to ignore all that, to ignore the facts, to play the man and not the ball and to attack Scotland's Minister for Housing and suggest that there is nothing new or meaningful to address the housing emergency. Shame on the Labour Party.

Anas Sarwar: Will the member take an intervention?

Bob Doris: In a moment, Mr Sarwar—I am coming to you.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Speak through the chair.

Bob Doris: I am coming to Mr Sarwar. Shame on him for suggesting that any of us on these benches does not know the human cost of the housing emergency. I see it every week in my constituency case load, and I will work with everyone and anyone, including the Labour Party, to do better—but I will take no lessons from the Labour Party.

Anas Sarwar: Bob Doris wants not to play the man and to play the ball instead, but the most

important thing is that the debate is about the 40,000 people who applied for housing and homelessness support last year, the 10,000 children who are living in temporary accommodation and the thousands of people whose human rights were breached, along with the law being breached, because they were not given access to a temporary home. There is no addressing the actual crisis. Instead, the member is flailing about trying to find somebody else to blame.

Bob Doris: Mr Sarwar should listen. I say to him that that is why political parties need ideas and action and not just soundbites, which are what the Labour Party appears to have this afternoon.

I accept, however, that none of what I have set out changes the lived experience of the too many people in Scotland who are homeless and in temporary accommodation and of people more generally who are in housing need. I therefore want to discuss a partnership approach that can improve the situation in Glasgow, which is clearly under significant strain. Through my casework in Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn, I see at first hand the demand for affordable homes far outstripping supply.

The factors that feed into the housing emergency will vary across the UK and Scotland. A key factor for Glasgow has been the previous UK Government's heartless and cack-handed management of our asylum and refugee system. The UK Government proclaimed, "Stop the boats," and procrastinated when it came to making decisions in the asylum process for people who have come to our shores fleeing persecution and seeking shelter and safety here. Many are denied the right to work and have to survive in the most austere circumstances and face deep poverty.

It is hardly surprising that, when the UK Government decided to fast-track asylum claims—what had it been doing all those years?—and offered no strategic or financial support to Glasgow to support our city, the consequences were seriously damaging. In 2022-23, 1,344 people were granted asylum seeker status, then made their way into Glasgow's and Scotland's housing system. In the past year, that number doubled to 2,709—a doubling of demand.

When the UK Government grants status, it offers not one penny of financial support to Glasgow City Council, or to any other local authority, to allow it to plan strategically to ensure that housing needs can be met. That is unfair on our councils, on asylum seekers, and on everyone else in our city who is facing significant housing needs. That must change.

With a new UK Labour Government in place, Labour must show that it has a different moral

compass to its predecessor. A strategic partnership approach to tackling housing pressures must be developed between the UK and Scottish Governments, as well as Glasgow City Council. That has to mean meaningful financial resource coming from the UK Government. It also has to mean a culture and systems change.

I understand that while refugee families await the UK Government granting them status, there can be no meaningful conversation or planning around what rehousing options might look like for those families. This Parliament is currently considering legislation for a homelessness prevention duty across a variety of public bodies in Scotland. The UK Home Office and partnerships must have a similar duty when it comes to refugees and the asylum process.

Additional funds could develop a range of housing options—not only in Glasgow but elsewhere in Scotland. Working with people who are seeking secure status to explore options in Glasgow and elsewhere in Scotland can ease pressure in our city and address population decline in other parts of our country.

I would welcome consideration of a pilot project to be developed between the UK Government, the Scottish Government and our councils to put in place a funded, structured, empowered, respectful and voluntary framework to see how we can best support all those who are in housing need, including asylum-seeking families.

I would welcome a meeting with Paul McLennan, the housing minister, to discuss that further.

16:36

Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP): There have been some constructive and positive elements to the debate. We heard some positive suggestions from Ben Macpherson, who asked for a partnership approach—albeit more in hope than expectation, I think, given some of the other contributions. We also had some good suggestions from Emma Roddick, Bob Doris and Christine Grahame. Although he is not here just now, I think that Edward Mountain also tried to make some positive suggestions.

It is important to try and think of positive suggestions. I myself have written to the Government on that. In my view, the devolution of housing benefit, which has long been talked about but never agreed, could present new opportunities, not least in relation to housing for homelessness, which is very expensive and unsatisfactory, if the budget was dealt with in the correct way.

An idea, which was perhaps mentioned by Christine Grahame, is local government pension funds. I declare an interest in relation to my own pension fund. The Falkirk pension fund has contributed towards new house building in that area. From an objective point of view, you would think that pension funds would find it attractive to build houses, as it provides a long-term investment. On that, if they build houses that are very energy efficient—I know that Willie Rennie was not too keen on the Passivhaus as an ideal—such houses can reduce to virtually nil the energy costs of living in a house, which means that they can charge more rent. Apart from being good for the environment, an emphasis on new build and energy efficiency is good for homelessness numbers as well.

In relation to the housing that we do have, a policy of having targeted affordable housing for people such as social care workers and other workers who are very important in areas would be a good idea, if it is possible.

I have to say, however, that the rest of the debate has been pretty dispiriting stuff. In fact, it has not really been a debate for many people; it has been a press release that has found words in this chamber, which is unfortunate. I think that it was Anas Sarwar who said that it was “pathetic, inept and shameful.” I think that that has been the contribution that we have had from the Labour Party.

The Labour, Liberal Democrat and Conservative coalition that we have in the Parliament has refused to acknowledge even the existence of some of the most fundamental causes of the housing crisis. There has been no mention of the cost of living crisis, no mention of rocketing energy costs and no mention of Liz Truss—but there is no surprise there. Brexit has had a massive impact on construction costs and on labour availability—that was also not mentioned by any of the parties. The budget cuts that the minister mentioned in both capital funding and financial transactions are huge, but there has been no mention of that.

This is critical: no one in the coalition of others who want to be the Government in this place has mentioned, or spoken out against, £160 million being taken out of the Scottish Government's budget at 90 minutes' notice. They have all accepted that and they all support it, but if they accept that, they must accept the fact that the money is not available for us to do the things that we want to do. There was not a word from any party about that.

I think that Willie Rennie must have been joking when he said that we should go for volume. This is a guy who supports the Liberal Democrats, who built six houses in eight years between 1999 and in 2007. “Go for volume,” says Willie. He said that

the Government should be embarrassed, but I think that Willie Rennie should be embarrassed by that shocking record.

Willie Rennie: Will the member accept an intervention?

Keith Brown: No I will not take it. He never takes interventions from me, unfortunately.

They spent eight years building six council houses at the same time as the right to buy was going around.

Those are the fundamentals of the crisis that we have, but that is not even being recognised by the other parties. This is a completely false debate. It kind of takes this Parliament's name in vain if they cannot even properly discuss the foundations of why we have a housing crisis. If this is all about attacking one party, they are not going to get to the bottom of the crisis, which shows that they have no serious intention of dealing with the crisis.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): The member will recall that, at least in the past decade, I have consistently raised in the chamber concerns about homelessness and rough sleeping and have been dismissed time and again by a succession of different ministers. For the record, I state that Labour, when in government, built 5,000 more houses than you build every single year.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please speak through the chair.

Jackie Baillie: Facts matter.

Keith Brown: Jackie Baillie just cannot escape from the fact that the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats built six council houses in the course of eight years and accepted the right to buy, which diminished the stock of housing available at affordable prices.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We have a point of order from Mark Griffin. Please resume your seat, Mr Brown.

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Will you alert members as to how to correct the record? Mr Brown has repeatedly said that Labour built only six council houses during eight years in office. It was hundreds of council houses—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That is not a point of order.

Mark Griffin: —and thousands of social houses, so I advise Mr Brown to look at the statistics and to correct the record.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please resume your seat, Mr Griffin: that is not a point of order. I can give you the time back, Mr Brown.

Keith Brown: Despite all the things that I have said about the budget crisis and Liz Truss, the Labour Party is currently telling us that the UK's finances have been completely ruined by what the Tories did but that that apparently had no effect on Scotland. That is what Labour is asking us to believe.

Let us compare that with Labour's track record in Wales, as Gordon MacDonald did. The Labour Party has an appalling record in Wales. We have seen what Labour does when it gets a chance of government: six houses, whether that was in eight years or the last four. I am happy to correct the record if I am wrong but, as I understand it, Labour created six houses in an eight-year period, or perhaps in the last four years. That is Labour's record—that is what happened. When the Labour Party tries to put forward a prospectus for housing in Scotland at the next election, people should remember its record.

Of course we must look at how to increase housing. How can we increase housing for veterans, which is a very important area? We do not have the ability to meet the demands of all veterans. How do we combat the Brexit-fuelled inflation in labour costs? Those are some of the things that the other parties could have discussed in this debate, but they were not discussed. Instead, it has been the usual party-political nonsense.

I have one final question. Of course there are lots of questions to ask and of course the Government has to answer them. That is one of the responsibilities of government, the biggest of which is how to increase the pool of capital to build houses. The big question that I asked, and to which I never got an answer, although there is an answer that is known by the Labour Party, is how many people in Scotland are going to die because of the cut to the winter fuel allowance there has been imposed by the Labour Party?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the closing speeches.

16:43

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): The award-winning journalist Vicky Spratt recently published a book titled "Tenants: The People on the Frontline of Britain's Housing Emergency". She points out that behind the undeniable reality of a housing emergency lies a series of separate but connected emergencies: the instability of the private rented sector, unaffordable housing, the hoarding of property wealth, a lack of social housing and, of course, rising homelessness and all that that involves.

The housing crisis is inextricably linked to and bound up with wealth inequality, and to talk about

wealth is to discuss the inequalities of class as well as gender, sexuality, race and other categories of marginalisation. If we are serious about tackling the housing emergency, we must tackle wealth inequality, yet we have heard little about that today.

The First Minister has made it very clear that the number 1 mission for his Government is to tackle child poverty. We have debated various aspects of how we should do that here before, but it has been quite noticeable that few members have linked child poverty to the housing emergency. Across the UK, there are 17.5 million adults without a safe, secure or stable home. When we include children, that number rises to 22 million people—that is one in three people.

The homelessness figures that were published last week show that women who are mothers are particularly affected. We know that 26 per cent of households assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness contain children and that households with children spend, on average, the longest time in temporary accommodation. More than half spend more than six months there, and a quarter spend more than a year in temporary accommodation before their cases are closed. That period is more than three years for 4 per cent of households with children, compared to just 1 per cent of households without children, and 3 per cent of households with children are placed in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. As we have heard this afternoon, there were 10,110 children in temporary accommodation as of 31 March this year—the highest number in the time series.

If we are serious in our ambitions to tackle child poverty, we must consider how we tackle the housing emergency. We cannot just tweak the edges of our housing system. As Ben Macpherson said so passionately, sticking-plaster politics will not cut it. Our housing system is broken. It does not serve people. It views housing as a commodity or an investment, not a right or a home. That drives up prices and leaves many people—especially those on lower incomes—unable to afford homes. It channels investment away from affordable and social housing to speculative property investment. Without sufficient public housing, the private market dominates.

The housing market has failed to meet demand, particularly in rural areas, as Ariane Burgess and Rhoda Grant described. That has knock-on consequences for public service workers who cannot find homes where they need to be for work. The market has also failed to address environmental and quality issues. I am sure that we all have had constituents come to us with problems of cold, draughty, mould-ridden homes. Unlike Willie Rennie, I think that we should build homes that meet the standards that evidence tells

us will keep people warm and healthy and so reduce the burden on other public services. That is prevention in action.

That is why the Housing (Scotland) Bill matters. It is a start at tackling some of the structural problems in our housing system, and rent controls are crucial to that. Sue Webber ascribed problems that we currently face to rent controls, and they do not even exist yet. Miles Briggs says that rent controls do not work. I presume that that is why cities across the world—from Paris, Berlin and Stockholm to New York, San Francisco and Montreal—all have rent controls. Incidentally, artists and musicians in Montreal credit rent controls for the thriving creative and cultural sector in that affordable city.

Rent controls matter because they tackle soaring rent prices that leave tenants vulnerable to exploitation by landlords. They also prevent tenants from being priced out of their homes and communities. They give tenants greater security and stability in their housing and reduce the power imbalance between landlords and renters. They contribute to long-term affordability and help to address inequality by ensuring that housing remains within the reach of people on lower incomes. They combat housing insecurity and, importantly, investment insecurity.

Miles Briggs: I know that Maggie Chapman does not want to hear it from me, but has she read the Institute for Economic Affairs report that examined 196 studies in 100 countries over 60 years and drew the conclusion that rent controls do far more harm than good?

Maggie Chapman: I have read that report. It depends on what we think counts as success. If it means making homes affordable for the majority of people, rent controls are a success. If it means making some rich people slightly less rich, I am not that bothered about that.

In short, rent controls play an important part in reducing homelessness, but there are many other actions that we must explore in order to tackle homelessness. As Crisis and other organisations say, prevention must be a priority, as must investment in social housing. Christine Grahame outlined some clear mechanisms to deliver that, including the housing first model. We also need to address youth and hidden homelessness, and we must take a holistic approach to support services, including mental health support services, and so much more.

I thank Paul McLennan for his intervention during Ariane Burgess's speech—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You need to conclude.

Maggie Chapman: —in which he restated his commitment to robust rent controls, but we need more than just assurances. We need to see the details.

To conclude—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We have no more time, Ms Chapman. I must ask you to resume your seat.

I call Graham Simpson to speak for up to six minutes.

16:50

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): I hear you loud and clear, Presiding Officer.

It has been a frustrating and, at times, spicy debate, but we should not need to be having it. The frustration pours out of the Labour motion when it says that the Government

“has failed to respond adequately to the housing emergency that the Parliament declared in May”

this year.

We are getting used to the Government ignoring the Parliament, but, on this occasion, the Minister for Housing actually reluctantly accepted the situation. How the Government reacts to the gravity of the situation is the important thing. An emergency demands an emergency response, as Anas Sarwar said, but we have not had that.

I read the minister's head-in-the-sand statement yesterday with disbelief. He blamed Brexit, inflation and Westminster—not the Scottish Government at all—for our severe problems. As Homes for Scotland has said, people in need of a new home, or any home, deserve better than that. The problems have been long in the making—Ben Macpherson made that point very well.

In June, the cross-party group on housing, which I convene, had a productive discussion with five of the councils that had declared a housing emergency. At least two of the councils that were represented at the meeting said that it was likely that there would be no new social housing projects in their areas in 2024-25, and three noted that they were already failing to meet their statutory obligations on homelessness. Miles Briggs made that point. There was consensus that action needed to be taken as a matter of urgency.

We wrote to the minister and called for a national emergency plan that would address how the quality and quantity of housing stock would be improved, create more social housing and temporary accommodation and provide solutions to deal with rising rates of homelessness. That plan has not materialised in the past four months.

Last week's statistics bear out the consequences of the Scottish Government's prolonged inaction. The figures that were published last week should have been a wake-up call. Half of Scotland's population is now living in a local authority area with a housing emergency, and 17 councils have experienced an increase in the number of homelessness applications. In my own patch, in South Lanarkshire, there has been an 8 per cent increase in the past year. Meanwhile, there has been a 17 per cent decrease in the number of house building starts and completions in all sectors over the past year. The number of approvals under the affordable housing supply programme has dropped by 44 per cent from 2020, and only 22,700 affordable homes have been completed towards the Government's target of delivering 110,000 by 2032.

That is part of a pattern of SNP failure, as the Government previously fell short of delivering on its target of building 50,000 affordable homes by 2021.

Kevin Stewart: Will the member give way?

Graham Simpson: No, I will not.

Yesterday, the minister tried to blame everyone but himself for the mess that we are in. I do not actually blame Paul McLennan for that mess—well, not entirely. He was forced to work with Greens in the Government who forced through disastrous rent controls, which have led to rents rising faster in Scotland than they have risen anywhere else in the UK. You could not make it up. According to the Scottish Property Federation, an estimated £700 million in residential investment has been paused or lost due to the rent freeze. Patrick Harvie is no longer in the Government, but the Housing (Scotland) Bill proposes a system of long-term rent controls that has those who might want to invest here scared stiff.

The minister has set up a housing investment task force, and those who are on it will not stay scared for long. They will run for the hills. Some of them have done so already. In all honesty, he would be better off ruling it out altogether if he wants any confidence to return.

It is little wonder that we read reports that Kate Forbes—it is sometimes Shirley-Anne Somerville—has taken over the bill. The minister needs to spell out quickly and in detail just what he intends to do, and that does not mean him saying, "We'll leave everything to regulations." If we get this wrong, we could be facing a loss of £3.2 billion in direct housing investment, according to the Scottish Property Federation.

We have had a number of good contributions today. Rhoda Grant spoke about rural housing. Miles Briggs mentioned the multiple talking shops that the minister has set up. Sadly, Ariane Burgess

would not take any interventions, so we do not know whether she supports the Labour motion. Martin Whitfield spoke about the general impact of homelessness on children, which is a very important point. Edward Mountain talked about empty homes and his frustration that we do not have compulsory sales orders—he is quite right. Christine Grahame made a very good point about VAT that I agree with.

At the end of it, we have a housing emergency and we have not had a response. I agree with the Labour motion. We need action, not words.

16:56

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice (Shirley-Anne Somerville): Like many members, I begin by recognising the human impact of bad housing and homelessness. Willie Rennie was not the only one to do so, but he made a thoughtful contribution about that and about the people behind the statistics. I assure him that that impact weighs heavily in my responsibilities.

Emma Roddick also talked about the importance of recognising some of the main drivers of homelessness, such as poverty and inequality, and the imperative for us to look not just at housing and homelessness but at the wider inequalities in our society. She was quite right to point that out. It is exactly why the Government is investing approximately £3 billion this year to support people through the cost of living crisis.

As I said, Mr Rennie gave what I think was one of the most thoughtful contributions. He pointed out some challenges to the Government and, indeed, to us all when he raised some concerns about Passivhaus standards and regulations, and the impact that those have on sectors. I had that in mind when I listened to other members who wish us to go further and faster on regulations, whether on fuel poverty or accessibility. Those are the types of difficult decisions and areas that it is useful to debate in the chamber.

Willie Rennie was also quite right to talk about the partnership approach. I think that he was mainly talking about the private sector, to which I would add local government and the UK Government.

A number of members came forward with genuine ideas about how to deal with the issues. It was good to see an outbreak of consensus in the chamber between Kevin Stewart and Edward Mountain around VAT on refurbishments. Indeed, Edward Mountain mentioned many other issues to do with voids and the reason why social housing properties are empty. The Scottish Government has increased the flexibility of the funding that we now give local government precisely to encourage it to look seriously at what more it can do on those

voids. It would be fair to say that the standard and performance on that is mixed.

Ariane Burgess talked about microhousing building standards and made a useful contribution to the debate on where that should sit, which I will think about.

Christine Grahame, Keith Brown and others talked about innovative finance.

Bob Doris mentioned asylum. Just last weekend, I raised with the Home Secretary the impact of the near doubling of homelessness presentations in Glasgow. I asked her whether the council, the Scottish Government and the UK Government could move forward together to see what needs to be done about that. I see that as a shared responsibility, and I hope that she did too.

I will move from some of the more thoughtful contributions to some contributions that I do not think took the debate forward. Let us start with Anas Sarwar. He was right to point to the people behind the statistics and he was right to point out the urgency of the situation, but whereas he mansplained capital and revenue budgets to me, perhaps I can go through some of the details of the impact on that revenue budget. For example, there is £90.5 million on discretionary housing payments, £30.5 million on homelessness prevention and rapid response, £8 million on rapid rehousing transition plans and £2 million for the extra support for local authorities for temporary pressures—roughly £131 million out of the revenue budget. I am sure that we could all think of ways to spend that money that would better prevent homelessness, if only other people took responsibility.

I will not take any lessons from Mr Sarwar on the budget when we see a 9 per cent cut in the capital budget that comes from the UK Government, with financial transactions reducing by more than 60 per cent. Mr Sarwar said:

“Read my lips: no austerity under Labour.”

Tell that to the people who are actually homeless or suffering in bad housing. We then have to take the difficult decisions in this chamber about what we have to do when those budget cuts come our way.

Mr Briggs talked about voids—as did Mr Mountain—and he was quite right to do so. Nearly 10,000 local authority homes were vacant in March 2023. That is a very serious and difficult issue, which we must all—every single local authority and the Scottish Government—take account of. I talked about how we have been flexible in our funding to support work in that area. He and others talked about empty homes, which is also a critical issue. The Government is investing £3.7 million in the Scottish Empty Homes

Partnership, which has helped to return almost 11,000 homes to active use since 2010.

Paul Sweeney: Will the cabinet secretary give way on that point?

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The cabinet secretary is concluding.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: We have also looked at what can be done to increase the empty homes council tax premium.

This Government has done a great deal on rural affordable housing. Again, I offer Rhoda Grant the opportunity to see what more can be done in that area. We have taken action on charitable bonds, which the minister announced yesterday, and action on acquisitions and voids, and £600 million has been spent on affordable housing supply this financial year.

Yes, I will accept my responsibility; I simply ask others to do the same—local government, which does so, and the UK Government—because if we can genuinely get together, we can deliver a genuine and thoughtful response to the housing emergency. I am afraid that much of what we have heard from Labour has not given us that today.

17:03

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): I have to ask how we got here. There was a time when Scotland won international praise for its approach to homelessness. We ended priority need, introduced housing options, ended the right to buy and got people safe and off the streets during the pandemic, but that seems like such a long time ago. Now, we have tens of thousands of people caught in a quagmire of failed policy, struggling in a spiral of destitution and desperation.

Kevin Stewart: Will the member take an intervention?

Mark Griffin: Perhaps Mr Stewart will give me time to get started.

As Anas Sarwar pointed out, the shocking figures that were released last week have shown that Scotland is sliding towards levels of homelessness that we have not seen since Thatcher tore our country apart in the 1980s. The SNP Government should feel utter shame for squandering the progress that Scotland had made.

The Scottish Housing Regulator has spoken of services being helpless to deal with the rising tide of human misery washing up at its doors and warned of systemic failure. Councils across Scotland began to declare housing emergencies and finally—finally—the Government was dragged kicking and screaming into recognising that something was very wrong, and it declared a Scotland-wide housing emergency in May.

However, it did that only when it was under threat of losing the vote.

There are kids living in bed-and-breakfast accommodation without even a toilet of their own and whose mum or dad is having to cook their dinner using shower water. There are people such as my constituent, Suzanne, who, with her husband and five children, is stuck in a house that is damp, inaccessible and too small and which is making the people she loves ill.

Walking down any high street in Scotland—

Edward Mountain: Will the member be gracious enough to take an intervention?

Mark Griffin: Yes—certainly.

Edward Mountain: There is one thing that could be done, which we have not touched on. Quite a lot of Ministry of Defence houses are unoccupied, not only in Edinburgh but across the Highlands. Would Mr Griffin be prepared to take to his Government the option of releasing some of those houses to the Scottish Government to allow it to address housing problems?

Mark Griffin: I am more than happy to work on a cross-party basis—with Mr Mountain or any other member—on solutions to the housing crisis, because they seem to be in short supply from the Scottish Government.

Walking down any high street in Scotland, we see people in sleeping bags who have been turned away by desperate shelters that have no room and no choice but to give out tents. Organisations are giving out tents rather than beds for the night.

Emma Roddick pointed out that we are all too aware of the effect that the emergency will have on children, who will be traumatised for their entire lives by the lack of a permanent home right now.

As Homes for Scotland has said, we are living through the housing emergency, but we are waiting in vain for the Government to turn the blue lights on. The Government seems to dispute that.

Kevin Stewart: Will the member give way now?

Mark Griffin: I will give way to Mr Stewart.

Kevin Stewart: I will take Mr Griffin back to the start of his speech, when he talked about homelessness legislation. I paraphrase Iain Gray, who said that we have some of the best homelessness legislation in the world, but we do not have enough houses. That is one of your former leaders. Will Mr Griffin join me in calling on the UK Government to increase capital budgets and increase the financial transactions—or loans—budget, so that we can get on with the job of building?

The Presiding Officer: Please remember to speak through the chair.

Mark Griffin: I absolutely agree with Mr Stewart, who paraphrased my former colleague Iain Gray. The emergency is caused by a lack of housing supply. That is why I would like the SNP to look at its Government's record. On average, it has built 5,000 fewer houses in every single year than Labour did in its time in office. That is the cause of the housing crisis that we see just now—17 years of failure by this Government to build the houses that Scotland needs. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear Mr Griffin.

Mark Griffin: The housing minister seems to dispute that failure.

Gordon MacDonald: Will the member take an intervention?

Mark Griffin: I am sorry, Mr MacDonald—I need to make progress.

Today and yesterday, and on countless other occasions, Miles Briggs has pointed out that, despite the pillars, the action plans, the meetings, the task forces and the money that has been shuffled about and rejigged, the facts are pretty stark. Things are not getting better—they are much worse.

One in four people need a different home. There are kids at our children's school who will deal, for the rest of their lives, with the trauma of not having a home. For me, the scariest thing is that all of that is starting to feel normal. It is not normal—there is nothing normal about a Government that is unable to keep children out of hostels. My colleagues have highlighted the ways in which the inability of this Government and the housing minister to prioritise housing has affected people in Scotland.

The Government has claimed that the Labour Party is bringing no ideas to the debate but, across the chamber, there has been no shortage of ideas about what could be done to make things better. Over this debate and others, we have suggested planning improvement; tackling empty homes; dealing with the voids by speeding up electrical reconnections; a council tax escalator on second and empty homes; revised compulsory purchase orders; compulsory sale order powers; NPF4 changes; and truly rural house building.

I have agreed with Mr Macpherson previously about the need to look at VAT on modifications and bringing houses into use. We have talked about pension funds building houses. We are endlessly bringing such ideas to the chamber, but we brought this debate on the housing emergency because the Government has steadfastly refused to acknowledge it or come up with an action plan to solve it.

We are asking for an emergency response. We have brought forward proposals, but we are not alone—Homes for Scotland, Shelter, the Chartered Institute of Housing, the SFHA and the cross-party group on housing, which my colleague Graham Simpson convenes, have all asked for an emergency response from the Government. It has absolutely failed to deliver that, which is why we lodged the motion for debate.

Without resources and drive from the Government, local government will continue to struggle to keep up with the rising demand for houses.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Will the member take an intervention?

Mark Griffin: I give way to the cabinet secretary.

The Presiding Officer: I regret, Mr Griffin, that you must conclude.

Mark Griffin: I apologise to the cabinet secretary.

For two years, Mr McLennan has been the minister with responsibility for housing policy and housing budgets. It is simply unacceptable for him to continue to stand on the sidelines, acting as a commentator and blaming everyone and everything other than himself. When 10,000 children have no place to call home, it is on the Minister for Housing. When 40,000 people are homeless, it is on the Minister for Housing. When one in four people do not have the house that they need, it is on the Minister for Housing.

The children who are caught up in this emergency desperately need homes; they cannot wait for the minister to get back on track. He needs to stop blaming everyone else, he needs to take responsibility and, frankly, he has to go.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on the housing emergency.

Business Motions

17:11

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-14742, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Bill timetable and suspension and variations of standing orders. I invite Jamie Hepburn to move the motion.

Motion moved,

That, subject to the Parliament's agreement to the general principles of the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Bill, the Parliament agrees, for the purposes of further consideration of the Bill, that—

(a) consideration of the Bill at stage 2 be completed by Tuesday 29 October 2024;

(b) Stage 3 proceedings take place on Tuesday 5 November 2024;

(c) Rule 9.5.3A be suspended;

(d) Rule 9.5.3B be suspended;

(e) Rule 9.6.3A be suspended;

(f) Rule 9.7.8A be suspended;

(g) Rule 9.7.8B be suspended;

(h) Rule 9.7.9 be suspended;

(i) Rule 9.7.9A be suspended;

(j) Rule 9.10.2 be varied to replace the words “fourth sitting” where they first appear with “sixth”, so that the deadline for lodging a stage 2 amendment will be the sixth day before proceedings; and

(k) Rule 9.10.2A be varied to replace the word “fifth” where it first appears with “second”, so that the deadline for lodging a stage 3 amendment will be the second sitting day before proceedings.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-14732, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme. I invite Jamie Hepburn to move the motion.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 8 October 2024

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Challenge Poverty Week

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business
 Wednesday 9 October 2024
 2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
 Constitution, External Affairs and
 Culture, and Parliamentary Business;
 Justice and Home Affairs
followed by Scottish Green 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 10 October 2024
 11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 11.40 am General Questions
 12.00 pm First Minister's Questions
followed by Members' Business
 2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:
 Education and Skills
followed by Stage 1 Debate: Climate Change
 (Emissions Reduction Targets)
 (Scotland) Bill
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
 Tuesday 29 October 2024
 2.00 pm Time for Reflection
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Topical Questions (if selected)
followed by Scottish Government Business
followed by Committee Announcements
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business
 Wednesday 30 October 2024
 2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
 Deputy First Minister Responsibilities,
 Economy and Gaelic;
 Finance and Local Government
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 31 October 2024
 11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 11.40 am General Questions
 12.00 pm First Minister's Questions
followed by Members' Business
 2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:
 Net Zero and Energy, and Transport
followed by Finance and Public Administration
 Committee Debate: Scotland's
 Commissioner Landscape
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 7 October 2024, 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.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motions S6M-14733 and S6M-14734, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on stage 2 timetables for bills. I invite the minister to move the motions.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Police (Ethics, Conduct and Scrutiny) (Scotland) Bill at stage 2 be completed by 11 October 2024.

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Scottish Elections (Representation and Reform) Bill at stage 2 be completed by 15 November 2024.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

Motions agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:13

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is consideration of two Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motions S6M-14735, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, and S6M-14736, on designation of a lead committee.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Plant Health (Import Inspection Fees) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 2) Regulations 2024 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Criminal Justice Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Criminal Justice Modernisation and Abusive Domestic Behaviour Reviews (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

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

Decision Time

17:13

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): There are four questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that if the amendment in the name of Paul McLennan is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Miles Briggs will fall. The first question is, that amendment S6M-14719.4, in the name of Paul McLennan, which seeks to amend motion S6M-14719, in the name of Anas Sarwar, on the housing emergency, 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 the digital voting system.

17:14

Meeting suspended.

17:17

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: I remind members that if the amendment in the name of Paul McLennan is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Miles Briggs will fall.

We move to the vote on amendment S6M-14719.4, in the name of Paul McLennan. Members should cast their votes now.

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)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)

Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 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)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 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)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Clare Haughey]

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foysof (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (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)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)

Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (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) [Proxy vote cast by Richard Leonard]
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD) [Proxy vote cast by Alex Cole-Hamilton]

Abstentions

Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-14719.4, in the name of Paul McLennan, is: For 60, Against 54, Abstentions 8.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The amendment in the name of Miles Briggs has fallen.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-14719, in the name of Anas Sarwar, on the housing emergency, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)

Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 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)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 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)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 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)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollak) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Clare Haughey]

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 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)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)

Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (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) [Proxy vote cast by Richard Leonard]
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD) [Proxy vote cast by Alex Cole-Hamilton]

Abstentions

Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-14719, in the name of Anas Sarwar, on the housing emergency, as amended, is: For 59, Against 55, Abstentions 8.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that Scotland is in a housing emergency; notes the Scottish Government's ongoing work with partners, including COSLA and the Housing to 2040 Board, on priorities in tackling the housing emergency; highlights the Scottish Government's commitment to provide £80 million across 2024-25 and 2025-26 to support acquisitions and bring empty social homes back into use, bringing the Affordable Housing Supply Programme investment to almost £600 million this year, and its commitment to £100 million for 2,800 mid-market rent homes; welcomes the investment of £22 million in affordable housing through charitable bonds and the launch of a planning hub to improve capacity and skills; notes the Housing (Scotland) Bill, which includes key measures on preventing homelessness, including action through rent controls, and calls on the UK Government to reverse the 9% capital budget cut, to permanently uprate local housing

allowance to the 30th percentile of local rents, and to scrap the so-called bedroom tax in its Autumn Budget.

The Presiding Officer: I propose to ask a single question on two Parliamentary Bureau motions, unless any member objects.

The question is, that motions S6M-14735, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, and S6M-14736, on designation of a lead committee, both in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Plant Health (Import Inspection Fees) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 2) Regulations 2024 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Criminal Justice Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Criminal Justice Modernisation and Abusive Domestic Behaviour Reviews (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Medical Aesthetics Industry

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-14436, in the name of Stuart McMillan, on regulation of the medical aesthetics industry in Scotland. The debate will be concluded without any question being put. I ask those members who would wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes the belief that legislation must be introduced to regulate those operating within the medical aesthetics industry because, at present, only clinics that employ healthcare professionals to offer treatments such as Botox and dermal fillers are regulated by Healthcare Improvement Scotland; considers that this means that lay injectors who are not qualified healthcare professionals are not monitored or regulated by any professional body; recognises the reported growth in demand for medical aesthetics, including in the Greenock and Inverclyde constituency, and believes that regulating the sector would help to improve patient safety; acknowledges the reported physical, mental and emotional impact on members of the public who have endured botched experiences at the hands of lay injectors, and the impact that this can have on the NHS, which, it understands, is where people typically turn to for correctional treatment; considers that these treatments should therefore only be offered to people aged over 18, and that patients should be able to expect that the individual offering these treatments is regulated, and welcomes, therefore, the recent announcement by the Minister for Public Health and Women's Health that the Scottish Government will launch a consultation later in 2024, which, it understands, will include proposals on introducing legislation to regulate the sector in the current parliamentary session.

17:23

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): I am pleased to lead this members' business debate on the need for non-surgical medical aesthetics to be regulated. I have been highlighting the topic for several years, as have colleagues on all sides of the chamber. I thank those colleagues who supported the motion to allow the issue to be debated.

The issues arising from the lack of regulation, combined with greater access to non-surgical medical cosmetic procedures, was first raised with me by a constituent, Jill Best, in 2018. I am therefore delighted to welcome Jill and some of her colleagues to the public gallery, and I thank them for coming along.

This debate is about making the industry as safe as possible for patients. It can be argued that, just as with any other purchase, people should, in this area, consider the quality of a product and the person who is selling or administering it. That is especially true when they are considering

treatments that involve needles and substances being injected into skin. Understandably, people expect lay injectors to be properly trained and to provide safe, regulated treatments, but that is not always the case. Without regulation, if a procedure goes wrong, there is little chance of holding that lay injector accountable, and the national health service is left to foot the bill for any corrective treatments.

In contrast, if a patient goes to a healthcare professional for the same treatment, that professional will be regulated by Healthcare Improvement Scotland. That means that they are a regulated prescriber and will have obtained medicines from a reputable source. Furthermore, they must have in place safeguards to ensure that the environment in which they are administering the treatments meets health and safety requirements, and that they have policies in place for what happens if a treatment does not go to plan.

In addition, a healthcare professional can rely on their medical training to ensure that a patient is looking for the right type of treatment, following an initial consultation with that patient. Healthcare professionals are also trained to identify whether someone is displaying signs of capacity or mental health issues before making a final decision to carry out any procedure on a patient. If they turn someone away on those grounds, however, the worry and concern is that the person may simply go elsewhere and seek out a lay injector to have the treatment done.

That is only a brief synopsis of the huge range of issues that have been brought to my attention—and, no doubt, to the attention of colleagues on all sides of the chamber—but it is clear to me that regulation of the whole sector is non-negotiable. I am pleased, therefore, that the Scottish Government is looking at bringing in additional regulation. While I know that that has taken longer than anyone would have liked, it is important that we get it right.

As I have learned in recent years, just when the list of all the different types of procedures that are available seems to have been exhausted, another one comes on the market. That shows how adaptable the industry is. We need, therefore, to ensure that regulation is robust while also being flexible enough to cover any new treatments that become available—who knows what the picture will be like in five or 10 years' time? I appreciate that ministers will want to consult the United Kingdom Government to try to align any policy changes as far as possible across the UK, in order to try to reduce the likelihood of people in Scotland travelling to other parts of the UK for such treatments.

That being said, Scotland has the opportunity to lead the way on the issue. The upcoming public consultation will enable members of the public, as well as healthcare professionals and lay injectors, to have a say on potential regulation. It is important that lay injectors are part of the process and have the chance to feed into any changes that are going to affect them. The industry is not going away any time soon; societal demand shows that it is very much here to stay, so we should make it as safe as possible for everyone. In my view, that is the important thing.

I am aware that lay injectors are undercutting the prices that are being offered by healthcare professionals. If regulation drives up the cost of procedures, that will also act as a barrier and make people think twice about getting a treatment done. However, it is not just about price—the marketing of these products is also a factor in how people access them, and I have had dialogue with the Advertising Standards Authority on that very point. I have seen social media posts in which lay injectors offer treatments for free, or at a discounted price, as they need models. I fear that that leads people to think that these treatments are as simple as getting make-up done. However, make-up can be removed, whereas if a medical aesthetic treatment goes wrong or if the patient does not like it, the after-effects cannot so easily be reversed.

Furthermore, I have seen some lay injectors run online raffles with procedures as a prize. That is very much at odds with the approach that is taken by healthcare professionals, who consult patients before agreeing to offer any procedure. The examples that I have just touched on breach advertising rules. The ASA has told me that, in the past two years alone, it has proactively taken steps to have more than 50,000 online posts for prescription-only medicines taken down.

Evidently, a whole range of policy decisions needs to be considered in order to deliver effective regulation of the medical aesthetics industry. I will continue to highlight those and engage with the Scottish Government and with colleagues on all sides the chamber, and—crucially—also with healthcare professionals, to ensure that the matter is very much progressed.

I look forward to the new consultation, and I encourage anyone who has an interest in this particular issue to get involved in that consultation when it opens. I would like to think that the Minister for Public Health and Women's Health will, this evening, be able to give some information, or an update, on the consultation. That would certainly help the professionals so that they know what is coming and when, in order that they can encourage others to take part, too.

Fundamentally, we want to ensure that the industry is as safe as possible for everyone across the country, including my constituents in Greenock and Inverclyde. We in Scotland can lead the way, and we have a great opportunity to do so on this particular issue.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. I remind members that speeches should be up to four minutes.

I also remind those members who wish to speak in the debate to ensure that they have, in fact, pressed their request-to-speak buttons. I am confused, but in any event, I shall move on.

I call Clare Haughey, to be followed by Sharon Dowey.

17:30

Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP): I thank you, Presiding Officer, for giving me permission to leave the chamber before the end of the debate. I put on record my entry in the register of members' interests, as I hold a bank-nurse contract with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde.

I congratulate Stuart McMillan on bringing to the chamber this important members' business debate. In recent years, aesthetic procedures have exploded in popularity, with many clinics popping up on our high streets offering services such as dermal fillers and Botox. While some of those treatments may seem minor, the use of fillers and neurotoxins such as Botox involves medical procedures that can cause serious harm if they are performed incorrectly.

I will share the words of one of my constituents, Suzanne, who owns Pristine Aesthetics. She is a registered nurse, and she runs a regulated clinic in my constituency. She says:

"As nurses we pay high fees to our regulators Health Improvement Scotland, and we work tirelessly to give safe effective care to patients. However we are constantly undermined by people doing short courses to inject people with cheap products purchased online. There is no deterrent, no safety net, or information on this for the public.

As nurses we have high standards and strict protocol on infection control and safe practice. It takes years to train and mould a nurse with the appropriate skill and ethics. The amount of dangerous places in this area is utterly frightening ... this is poor unsafe practice."

Healthcare professionals such as my constituent Suzanne must complete extensive education and clinical training before they can be licensed to perform injections and other procedures. Licensed aestheticians—I knew that I could not say that word properly—who may perform laser treatments, for example, typically complete more than 600 hours at an accredited training centre. However, there is currently no legislation in place

to prevent an unqualified member of the public from purchasing materials online, completing a weekend seminar or online course and promoting themselves as qualified to inject clients, regardless of their actual level of knowledge, skill or experience. Worryingly, a 2021 survey of plastic surgeons revealed that 63 per cent of respondents had reported seeing patients with complications, damage and disfigurement after receiving treatments from unqualified injectors.

My constituent's concerns are reflected in responses to a previous Government consultation on the subject, with almost 98 per cent of respondents agreeing that there should be further regulation of the industry to reduce the risk of physical and psychological harm and the associated cost to the NHS when something goes wrong. As one respondent put it,

"It's easy to train to deliver these injections, it requires far more expertise to reverse or manage complications. Anyone who cannot manage their own complications should not be delivering these treatments."

One cosmetic doctor who was interviewed in the press described what she called

"a concerning trend among teenagers to pursue ... 'tweakments' to achieve a look that is often completely unrealistic and unattainable",

driven by "online beauty standards" and filtered images. That chimes with the findings of Girlguiding's recent "Girls' Attitudes Survey", which revealed that over half of girls aged 11 to 21 said that they wished that they looked like they do with social media filters.

In Scotland, there is, effectively, what my constituent has described to me as a "two-tier system" currently in place. Health practitioner services, which are regulated by Healthcare Improvement Scotland, must take into account the physical and psychological wellbeing of the patient or client when considering a course of treatment, including their age. There is currently no ban on under-18s receiving treatments from non-medical prescribers.

The announcement from the Minister for Public Health and Women's Health that there will be a new public consultation on the topic is an extremely important step towards ensuring that the treatments, which are increasingly popular, are as safe as possible. New regulations will of course have to be introduced with care and consideration, not least to avoid undue difficulties for reputable small businesses and to ensure that unscrupulous providers are not driven underground. The consultation and the continued work of campaigners to raise awareness of areas of concern in the industry will be key to ensuring that regulation will be as comprehensive and effective as possible.

The Scottish Government has stated that it wants to ensure that the procedures

“are delivered from hygienic premises by appropriately trained practitioners, applying recognised standards and using legitimate products.”

Those are sensible goals, which the public should rightly expect to be pursued.

17:35

Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con): I thank Stuart McMillan for securing this debate on an important issue that is of real concern to many of my constituents.

Concerns have been raised by medical practitioners that Scotland’s aesthetics regulations are woefully deficient. Every day, vulnerable individuals risk putting their health and their lives in the hands of unqualified laypeople offering aesthetic procedures. Doctors, dentists and nurses are heavily regulated by Healthcare Improvement Scotland, the General Medical Council and other bodies to ensure patient safety, medicine management and insurance coverage. However, laypeople with no professional oversight or competence are free to perform the same high-risk procedures, often in unsafe and unsanitary environments, with little to no accountability when complications arise.

Unqualified and unsupervised individuals are injecting botulinum toxin, or Botox—a prescription-only drug—and dermal fillers into uninformed members of the public with no mandatory insurance or medical oversight. Training courses are unregulated, and some practitioners undergo no formal training at all. There is a wild west element to many treatments.

As Stuart McMillan has noted, there is precious little oversight from any professional body, and the consequences can be severe. It is time that the Parliament looked into the matter, because the treatments seem to be growing ever more popular by the month. Action must take place now, before the situation spirals out of control.

People who undergo shoddy treatment often end up with deep physical and psychological scars from the experience, and we cannot allow that to go on. Although I understand the desire behind the practices and I appreciate how popular some of the treatments have become, it is simply not worth the potential risk to mental and physical health.

The impact goes beyond the individuals who suffer. As Stuart McMillan has said, sub-par regulation is costing our NHS a fortune in time and resources, as our health service needs to step in at a later stage to help those who suffer from a botched treatment. Sometimes, that is correction treatment; other times, the result can be an

increased demand for mental health care. In either case, poor practices and the lack of regulation are contributing to the on-going lengthy waiting times in our NHS and are putting medical practitioners under more pressure.

I recently met Lesley Blair, chief executive officer of the British Association of Beauty Therapy and Cosmetology, who highlighted the lack of regulation and standardisation in non-surgical cosmetic procedures. Such treatments are often performed not by medical practitioners but by individuals without proper qualifications, leaving consumers unaware of the risks. Lesley Blair stressed the urgent need for regulation, pointing to the tragic case of Alice Webb, who died following a botched procedure. That shows how vital it is to implement proper oversight as soon as possible. BABTAC also noted consumer surveys revealing that many people falsely believe that the beauty industry is regulated, which only increases the risks involved.

Recently, I had a meeting with the legislation team regarding a bill that would prevent under-18s from receiving such procedures unless advised by a doctor. Such legislation already exists in England. In her winding-up speech, could the minister tell us whether such a measure will be included in her consultation, and could she provide assurances that the Government will move at pace?

I thank Stuart McMillan for bringing the debate to the Parliament. The issue is important and must be examined in more detail. The Parliament has a duty to act to regulate the industry for the protection of people who might suffer from sub-par treatments. I hope that anyone considering a treatment from an unregulated practitioner will think again and exercise caution.

17:39

Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP): I am grateful to Stuart McMillan for securing the debate. I whole-heartedly support his motion.

The demand for non-surgical aesthetic treatments such as Botox, dermal fillers and Brazilian butt lifts has surged in recent years. However, too many practitioners are unregulated, which can lead to botched jobs with horrendous side effects. Constituents in East Kilbride have contacted me about the issue.

Many aesthetic procedures require injections, but lay injectors who often have no healthcare qualifications are performing medical procedures without being subject to the same professional standards that apply to regulated clinics. More and more people are seeking such procedures every year, but regulation has not kept pace with that growth. We absolutely need legislation to regulate

practitioners who operate in the aesthetics industry. Only clinics that employ registered healthcare professionals are monitored by Healthcare Improvement Scotland, which leaves many providers who do not have relevant formal qualifications operating without sufficient oversight.

At recent events that were held in the Parliament, members heard harrowing stories of patients who have suffered both physical and psychological harm from botched treatments that can lead to infection and disfigurement. The emotional toll for people who are affected can be huge. That also places a huge burden on our NHS, as many of those individuals need correctional treatment when things go wrong. The British Association of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons estimated that a botched Brazilian butt lift costs the NHS an average of £15,000. It is not right that the NHS has to pick up the pieces due to unregulated and unqualified people offering aesthetic treatments.

At the heart of all this is patient safety. At present, patients who obtain treatment from lay injectors have little comeback when things go wrong. It is clear that we need regulations not only to protect the public and the NHS but to ensure that good practitioners can continue to provide safe cosmetic surgery. With Stuart McMillan and other colleagues, I recently met Jenni Minto, the Minister for Public Health and Women's Health, to discuss issues with the aesthetics industry. I welcome the fact that the Scottish Government has consulted on the issue, with the result showing that the public overwhelmingly support tighter regulation. I note that the Government is moving the issue forward with key stakeholders, including healthcare professionals and beauty industry representatives, and that there will be further opportunities for the public to feed into the process later this year. The proposals should include strict requirements that only qualified healthcare professionals can administer Botox, dermal fillers and similar treatments. Patients must be able to trust that those who hold the needle have the necessary training, oversight and accountability.

I highlight that many regulated practitioners offer Botox and fillers safely and successfully. People should check out the credentials of a practice before having any aesthetic work done. However, as politicians, we need to step in on regulation. Regulating the medical aesthetics sector is necessary to safeguard the health and wellbeing of the public. I think that members across the chamber will be keen to work together on developing meaningful legislation. I hope that we will be able to deliver that in the next couple of years, so that we can protect patients and restore trust in this rapidly expanding industry.

17:44

Foyso Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): I thank the Presiding Officer for allowing me to leave the chamber before the debate finishes.

I, too, congratulate Stuart McMillan on bringing this important issue to the chamber. In France, anyone who wishes to offer medical aesthetic treatment must be registered with the board of the National Chamber of Physicians. In Belgium, practitioners must be doctors, and under-18s must have permission from a parent or guardian before they can have treatment. In Poland, practitioners need to qualify in aesthetic medicine. In Scotland, though, someone who goes on Instagram today will be presented with numerous practitioners who offer aesthetic treatments, very few of whom display medical qualifications and all of whom complete work on very young people.

Such procedures are far from non-invasive. Lip, nose and chin fillers and anti-wrinkle fillers all involve injecting Botox into people's faces, which can have severe consequences when treatments are botched. A practitioner who does not operate from a medically clean site can cause infections, which means that patients will require further care from our NHS down the line. The treatment can also cause bruising that is much worse than should be normal for such procedures. Nodules can form due to the use of cheap filler, which can cause complications years after a procedure has been completed. This year, there was a story involving 15 women being hospitalised after having beef gelatine injected into them.

Despite those risks, the practice of non-surgical procedures only seems to grow in Scotland. Since under-18s have been banned from having medical aesthetic treatments in England, we have heard reports of more and more children coming to Scotland for injections. That is deeply concerning. I join other members in calling for the provision of such treatment to be limited to those who are over 18. Most such procedures are not conducted by medical professionals. It is possible for lay practitioners to complete training in just one day. No medical body has oversight of the industry. It is therefore clear that we are in a dangerous situation.

I join other members in welcoming the Scottish Government's launch of a consultation on a proposal to regulate the sector, but it is long overdue. France, which I mentioned earlier, first legislated on the issue in 2009. In 2013, the Keogh report called for improved regulation of the cosmetic industry in the UK. However, the Scottish Government did not even consult on the matter until 2020, when respondents agreed that we needed further regulation. We heard the result of that consultation two years ago. I hope that the Scottish Government's new consultation will open

the door to meaningful progress being made. Too many people who want to improve their confidence are being left with their mental and physical health deteriorating further.

17:48

Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): I thank Stuart McMillan for bringing to the chamber his motion regarding the lack of regulation in the medical aesthetics industry in Scotland. That is a matter of growing concern to me and my constituents, because, all too often, it results in disfigurement and mutilation, mainly of women.

The lack of regulation in the medical aesthetics industry is worrying. It is a rapidly growing sector, with individuals seeking procedures ranging from minimally invasive treatments to major surgical interventions. Even more worryingly, that demand has been accompanied by an alarming rise in the number of unlicensed practitioners, which raises health risks for patients. The lack of adequate regulations poses significant risks to public health and safety.

Bizarrely, only private clinics that employ a regulated healthcare professional who provides a service are regulated. Although some such treatments are performed by qualified healthcare professionals, such as doctors, dentists and nurses, others are administered by people with little or no formal medical training. That extraordinary approach leaves too much room for high-risk cosmetic procedures being carried out by non-regulated, untrained and unskilled practitioners in unregulated premises, which too often leads to patients suffering significant physical and psychological harm.

It alarms me that, for example, anybody in the chamber could take part in an unregulated and often dubious training course and then perform medical procedures on the public. That should serve as a call to action for everybody in the chamber. We need to stop this shambles as soon as possible.

Unregulated clinics do not need to follow the same rigorous health and safety processes as regulated health professionals, which can lead to incidents involving the use of counterfeit products or even the sharing of products with different clients, risking the spread of blood-borne diseases such as hepatitis. That poses a significant health risk to the public, but the lack of regulation is also unfair on the regulated businesses that carry out procedures safely. Reaching high standards comes at a cost, while other businesses are undercutting the competition by risking their patients' health.

Thankfully, for those who have suffered from botched cosmetic surgery, our NHS is there to help. However, that help comes at a cost at a time when the health service is already under strain. Research from Save Face, a Government-approved register of medical aesthetic treatments, found that, in the case of the 96 per cent of patients who had had complications after cosmetic surgery and were then treated by the NHS, 100 per cent of the failed treatments had been carried out by untrained and unskilled staff. The British Association of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons estimates that a botched Brazilian butt lift costs the NHS an average of £15,000.

Recent media reports have highlighted cases of botched procedures that have caused permanent damage to people's faces and bodies. Some individuals have suffered infections, disfigurement and even life-threatening complications. However, in many instances, those who are responsible for performing such procedures face few or no consequences, due to the lack of clear regulation and accountability in the industry.

Other UK nations have already made moves towards regulating the industry, and, if we do not follow their lead, we risk patients border hopping to receive cheap and dangerous procedures in Scotland. We cannot allow that situation to continue. The safety and wellbeing of the public should be of paramount importance, and I therefore welcome the Scottish Government's planned consultation and hope that we can act on its recommendations as soon as possible to reduce the risk of harm, and before we lose lives.

We must create a framework that protects both practitioners and patients by ensuring a safe and professional aesthetics industry in Scotland. We need to protect our women and our men from unscrupulous exploitation by unqualified and unregulated practitioners.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Gillian Mackay, who is joining us remotely, to be followed by Miles Briggs.

17:52

Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): This debate is an important one, and I thank Stuart McMillan for raising the issue in the chamber.

The current situation with regard to the regulation of the medical aesthetics industry in Scotland is untenable. As of today, there are no laws on who can offer such treatments, yet the number of complaints about botched procedures carried out by people with no medical qualifications or in dangerous environments is rising exponentially.

I, along with others, welcome the recent announcement by the Minister for Public Health and Women's Health that the Scottish Government will launch a consultation later this year to explore legislative proposals to regulate the sector, and I welcome, too, its commitment to doing so within the current parliamentary session. However, although I commend the Government for its position, it is vital that the consultation is followed by robust and swift action.

In the debate, and in conversations around this issue, we should ensure that we never shame or blame those who have sought these procedures.

From 17 January to 30 June 2020, the Scottish Government ran a public consultation on the further regulation of non-surgical cosmetic procedures and proposals to introduce a licensing scheme, and I want to take a moment to highlight the results of that consultation. The consultation report revealed almost overwhelming support for change. Most respondents believed that non-surgical cosmetic procedures should be conducted only by trained, qualified and regulated healthcare professionals, and they also stressed that the physical, psychological or financial risks of allowing unqualified individuals to perform these procedures were far too great. In addition to those views from wider members of the public, regulatory bodies and organisations were calling—and, indeed, continue to call—for more oversight through stricter regulation and/or a comprehensive licensing scheme.

The UK Health and Care Act 2022 introduced enabling powers to establish a licensing scheme for non-surgical cosmetic providers in England. When we look at the experience south of the border, we see that only a small number of local authorities in London, Birmingham and Essex operate their own cosmetic licensing schemes, and they vary in the number and types of treatment that they cover. That said, there are things that we can learn from those schemes when we come to design our own.

For a start, the regulations created under these powers include two separate licences; the powers prohibit people in England from carrying out specified cosmetic procedures in the course of business unless they hold a personal licence and from using or allowing the use of premises for the provision of such procedures unless they have a premises licence. The 2022 act also specifies the high-level categories of cosmetic procedure that will be covered by the licensing scheme, and I believe that we should also set basic standards for training and competencies.

The Scottish Government has previously committed to working with other UK nations on developing proposals for Scotland, and I strongly believe that that is the right path to follow if we are

to establish a coherent and robust system for the benefit of the people in Scotland as well as learn from the experiences of other jurisdictions.

Several constituents who are worried about the situation have reached out to me—as others have—and have asked for the matter to be taken seriously and for something to be done urgently. I hope that, in shedding light on some of the dangers, today's debate means that the Government continues to work to introduce regulations and to ensure and improve public safety. The evidence is clear that, without urgent action, we will continue to see unnecessary harm and further strain on our public health system. Our ultimate goal should be to ensure that all non-surgical cosmetic procedures carried out in Scotland are delivered in hygienic premises by appropriately trained practitioners who apply recognised standards and use legitimate products, and it is my belief that that can happen only through robust regulation.

17:56

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): I congratulate Stuart McMillan on securing this debate and welcome his constituent Jill Best to the public gallery, along with other campaigners who have joined us in Parliament this evening.

In June, I was pleased to host in the Parliament a cross-party round-table meeting that Stuart McMillan and other members attended and at which we were able to discuss the regulation of invasive cosmetic procedures. I thank the minister and her officials for attending, too. At that round-table event, we heard very clearly the very emotional stories of many people across Scotland whose lives have been impacted by these procedures. We heard not just about the impact of the procedures themselves but about the impact on people's mental health and the other procedures that they now need to undergo regularly.

Gillian Mackay made a really important point about the motivation for having these treatments. I know from speaking to constituents that, often, they become blind to the reality of what they are doing and, in many cases, what they are receiving. The fact that what they are getting might cost less than treatments using the substances that should actually be used is what really motivates them to have such treatments. Moreover, the social media images that they will have seen of the often fantastic results of these procedures by those advertising them makes people feel that there is a safety net and, as members have mentioned, believe that there is regulation in place.

As other members have said, we have seen these procedures grow and get out of control, and

I worry about other potential impacts. For example, in the United States, we are seeing the growth of hangover injection therapy, with people receiving intravenous treatments from friends and others, and we really need to get ahead of all this before it becomes a huge public health emergency in Scotland and across the UK.

The previous UK Conservative Government affirmed its commitment to improving safety, and, since the election, I have written to the new health secretary, Wes Streeting MP, to ask about the Labour Government's plans to take forward those proposals. In that respect, I very much welcome the Scottish Government's plans for a consultation. As members across the chamber have said, we are at present seeing individuals with minimal training—sometimes it is only a one-day course, or even just an online course—administering prescription medications, including injectable treatments, and often with an insufficient understanding of the complications involved.

Even more concerning, though, is the prevalence of the use of certain black market products, with poisons being injected into people's bodies. We simply need to see this as a patient safety concern. As we heard from practitioners and patients at the round-table meeting that I held—and, indeed, as we have heard since—this is rapidly becoming a public health emergency. Those people raise those concerns not because they want that business but because they are picking up the pieces from the impacts on those individuals. That needs to be addressed.

One point that has not been raised in today's debate but that we also need to recognise is the number of people who seek surgical treatments abroad—for example, for tummy tucks or medical dental surgery—which is otherwise known as health tourism. From speaking to NHS professionals, I know that significant numbers of patients for whom such procedures have failed, or who have had complications abroad or when they have got home, now present to the NHS in Scotland.

I ask the minister whether there has been any progress in recording such cases. We do not have the data on how widespread the issue has become or on its negative impacts not only on individuals but on the NHS, which has to pick up the pieces. I hope that the Government will move forward quickly with the consultation and, what is more important, with actions that can be taken before the end of this parliamentary session.

Before closing, I ask the minister whether the Government will look towards some sort of public health advertising campaign on all that has been raised. It is clear that the issue will not be resolved quickly. Action is taking place, but we need to start raising more concern at Government level and

across social media about the implications for people, and to try to warn them against using these procedures.

18:01

The Minister for Public Health and Women's Health (Jenni Minto): I, too, thank Stuart McMillan for bringing the debate to the chamber and for his continued interest in what is a very important subject. I am also hugely grateful for the very helpful and collaborative speeches from everyone today.

I, too, welcome to the Parliament Jill Best and the members of the Scottish medical aesthetics safety group, and I thank them for the awareness raising that they have been working on.

Colin Beattie raised the clear point of significant risk to public health and safety. I have noticed—as have all contributors to the debate—the substantial increase in the number of businesses that offer non-surgical cosmetic procedures such as Botox and dermal fillers. As Miles Briggs said, in June, some of us attended a parliamentary round table on non-surgical cosmetics. I am grateful to Miles Briggs for hosting that event, which gave us an opportunity to hear a powerful account of one person's experience of a non-surgical cosmetic procedure that went wrong. I completely agree with Collette Stevenson that that was harrowing. I also concur with Miles Briggs's point that the professionals who attended that meeting came at the issue very much from the perspective of picking up the pieces of work that had gone wrong.

I will touch on the point about Public Health Scotland and the recording of the cases that NHS Scotland has had to treat as a result of such cosmetic work. I have spoken to Public Health Scotland about that and it is exploring further; however, it is a worldwide coding issue, which we need to understand.

I am also mindful of the points that Gillian Mackay and Miles Briggs made about people's motivation for seeking such treatments. My thoughts will always go out to anyone who may have been harmed by a non-surgical cosmetic procedure. As Gillian Mackay said, we should not shame or blame such people. As Sharon Dowe mentioned, we learned only just last week of the tragic death of Alice Webb, a young mum of five children in Gloucestershire who passed away less than 24 hours after having undergone a cosmetic procedure. My sympathies are with her family.

Many people who undertake such procedures are happy with the results, and there are many responsible practitioners in the medical and beauty sectors, as Clare Haughey and others have outlined. We all want those procedures to be

delivered safely by experienced and qualified practitioners, but we know that that is not always the case.

I am grateful to the environmental health officers and public health teams in local authorities who have been working within the powers that they have to address unsafe practice, for instance, by serving prohibition notices. We want to provide a more robust and effective framework to support EHOs, but I also want to provide a framework to support responsible practitioners and give confidence to consumers. We cannot entirely eliminate the risks that are inherent in those procedures. Some are clearly more risky or carry more serious potential side effects than others, but it is appropriate to mitigate those risks.

I remind members that the Scottish Government has made progress in that area. In 2016, we introduced a requirement for independent clinics to be registered and inspected by Healthcare Improvement Scotland. Earlier this year, we expanded that by bringing into the regulation independent services that are provided by pharmacists and pharmacy technicians. Those clinics are the location for a number of non-surgical cosmetic procedures, and consumers can now access them with the confidence that the settings are regulated and inspected by Healthcare Improvement Scotland.

However, as Stuart McMillan and other members have pointed out, there is no regulation of procedures that take place outwith those settings. I agree that that gap in regulation is an issue of huge concern, and the Scottish Government is actively addressing it.

Our consultation in 2020 showed overwhelming support for further regulation. However, some of the comments that we received—on the specific model of licensing that we proposed—were that it was not sufficient to manage the risks for all types of procedures. That is why, at the very helpful meeting with some members on 10 September, I was happy to confirm that I intend to seek public views on more detailed proposals to further regulate the sector. That will build on the previous consultation and the model that we proposed. Work is already under way on that, and we intend to publish the findings before the end of this year. We will ensure that that work is publicised as widely as possible, and I hope that colleagues in the chamber and outwith will do all that they can to support that.

In addition to the consultation, my officials continue to work with the Scottish cosmetic interventions expert group and engage with a range of stakeholders about what regulation might look like. Those stakeholders include healthcare professionals, hair and beauty industry

representatives, colleges, environmental health officers and Healthcare Improvement Scotland.

The consultation will be informed by the views of those stakeholders, who have offered valuable advice on the types of procedure that are being carried out, the risks that they carry and the different ways of managing those risks or making the procedures safer.

I will specifically address Foyso Choudhury's point about age limits. I know that there is an active debate about the appropriate age for procedures to be carried out, and it appears that there is strong support for a minimum age limit for clients. I assure Parliament that our consultation will seek views on age restrictions for procedures in Scotland, as well as the level of training and qualifications that people might need in order to perform those types of procedures safely.

Our ultimate aim is that all non-surgical cosmetic procedures are carried out by appropriately trained practitioners in an appropriate setting, applying recognised standards and using regulated products. As we know, this is a fast-changing sector. Any potential regulation will need to be proportionate, robust and future proofed to capture any emerging procedures. We are working with key stakeholders to get those details right.

I thank Parliament and members for the opportunity to speak in this debate and I commit to continuing to engage with members across the chamber to ensure that we get the regulation right.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate.

Meeting closed at 18:08.

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