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Tuesday 28 January 2025

Session 6



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Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 28 January 2025

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Good afternoon. The first item of business is time for reflection, and our time for reflection leaders are Mirrin Kirkpatrick and Sarah-Jane McKeown, who are Holocaust Educational Trust ambassadors.

Mirrin Kirkpatrick (Holocaust Educational Trust): My name is Mirrin Kirkpatrick, and this is Sarah-Jane McKeown, and we are ambassadors for the Holocaust Educational Trust. We took part in the trust's lessons from Auschwitz project as students from Dumfries high school. As part of the project, we heard from a Holocaust survivor and took part in a one-day visit to former Nazi concentration and death camp Auschwitz-Birkenau. On our return, we are sharing what we have learned with our school.

Visiting Auschwitz was an experience that I will never forget. Seeing the site truly put into perspective the stories of victims and the scale of the Holocaust. One moment that has stayed with me was walking into the room with piles of human hair and other belongings from victims of the camp. Shaving the heads of victims was one of the first ways that they were stripped of their humanity. That brought home to me the importance of rehumanising victims of the Holocaust and remembering individual stories.

We were privileged to hear from survivor Eva Clarke BEM. Eva was born in Mauthausen concentration camp in 1945, weighing only three pounds. Her mother acted as an incubator, using her body warmth to keep Eva alive. Hearing Eva's testimony made me grateful for the life that I live. As we mark the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, I know that survivors will not be able to share their stories forever. As the younger generation, we are committed to the responsibility of ensuring that those stories live on by sharing testimonies such as Eva's.

Sarah-Jane McKeown (Holocaust Educational Trust): Our next steps project is an assembly that we will share with our whole school. We want to emphasise the importance of commemorating this day every year, especially since it is the 80th anniversary. To this day, people deny the Holocaust, and we want our fellow students to know that it really happened and that there is much evidence to prove that. Through the

trust, we have heard from survivors and have seen the sites, so we are committed to safeguarding the future of Holocaust education.

As an ambassador for the trust, I pledge to help to ensure that my generation remembers the 6 million men, women and children who were killed in the Holocaust, and, as survivors grow fewer and frailer, to keep their memories alive.

Thank you so much for inviting us to be here today to share our experience and reflections on why Holocaust education is so important for young people. *[Applause.]*

Business Motion

14:03

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-16264, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on changes to the business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees to the following revision to the programme of business for Tuesday 28 January 2025—

after

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

insert

followed by Ministerial Statement: Response to Storm Éowyn.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

Motion agreed to.

Topical Question Time

14:03

Unauthorised Absences (Schools)

1. **Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to reduce the number of unauthorised absences from schools. (S6T-02302)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Jenny Gilruth): Unauthorised absence from school is primarily a responsibility of parents and carers, who have legal obligations to ensure their child receives an efficient education, as is set out in the Education (Scotland) Act 1980.

Local authorities also carry statutory responsibilities to provide children with an education along with any additional support that they might need to fully benefit from that education. That includes support that they might need to be able to attend school.

Nationally, a range of actions have been under way since Education Scotland published its attendance report in November 2023. Those include support for local authorities through the improving attendance quality improvement programme; professional learning events, including the strategic approaches to improving attendance event next week; the publication of resources to support schools in engaging with young people and families; and on-going exemplification of positive practice.

At council level, every education authority is focused on improving school attendance. At school level, a variety of approaches are being used to improve attendance, which we know has been a challenge for some young people and their families, particularly post-pandemic. The most recent national statistics on attendance showed a slight improvement in attendance and a reduction in persistent absence.

Murdo Fraser: According to an analysis by *The Sunday Times*, Scottish pupils are more likely to miss school regularly than those elsewhere in the United Kingdom. Forty-one per cent of pupils here missed at least one in 10 of their classes in the year 2022-23, compared to 40.1 per cent in Wales and just 26.5 per cent in England, which is a much lower figure.

Those statistics have serious consequences for pupils, particularly those with additional needs and those from less privileged backgrounds, and they lead to a widening of the attainment gap. Why are the figures for Scotland so much worse than the figures for south of the border?

Jenny Gilruth: I think that the member has previously raised that question with me in the chamber, and I thank him for his interest in what I recognise as a significant challenge in our schools post-pandemic.

It is worth putting on the record that we need to be careful in making direct comparisons between Scotland and England, because the functionality that is used to measure attendance in Scotland is the SEEMiS system, and that functionality might differ between schools. I accept that the challenge in Scotland is greater, but we need to be quite careful in making those direct comparisons.

The rates of persistent absence shown in those statistics are not acceptable. I have been very clear that we need a renewed drive across all levels of government and agencies to address the issue as a priority. Absence is among the post-pandemic challenges that schools face not just in Scotland but across the UK and internationally. Education Scotland is providing support to schools directly to improve attendance and reduce absence following the publication of the report "Improving Attendance: Understanding the Issues", which I commissioned in 2023.

If the member is interested, he can look at some of the data on year groups and see that there are gaps in the transition years from primary to secondary school and from the broad general education phase to the senior phase. At certain times during the school academic year, that challenge is greater than at other times. Also, as the member alluded, it seems to be more of a challenge in certain local authorities than in others. That is why Education Scotland is looking at targeting those local authorities to provide tailored local support.

I have also asked the chief inspector of education to ensure that persistent absence is addressed in every school inspection and to identify successful approaches that can be shared more widely.

Murdo Fraser: It is interesting that the cabinet secretary referenced local authorities, because there are examples of good practice. For example, initiatives in Conservative-run South Ayrshire Council have led to rising attendance in schools, which perhaps bucks the trend elsewhere. What is the Scottish Government doing to ensure that best practice is shared more widely so that other local authorities can take similar initiatives?

Jenny Gilruth: The member raises an interesting point. Practice varies across the country when it comes to the approaches that have been taken. Local authorities are undertaking a number of different practices using pupil equity funding, which is direct funding that is protected by the Scottish Government. For example,

Queensferry high school in Edinburgh has used its PEF to recruit two pupil support officers, who have worked with families to support attendance in that school. Lesmahagow high school in South Lanarkshire is using its PEF to support activities that include families and encourage pupils back into schools. We know that engaging with schools and headteachers has been a challenge for many families, particularly post-pandemic.

The responsibility for sharing good practice rests with Education Scotland as the national agency. As I mentioned, it has been working with local authorities and, in particular, has been targeting the local authorities where there are challenges. I am more than happy to hear from local authorities where there is good practice and to hold that good practice up as an example to others. It is hugely important, post-pandemic, that we support renewed efforts to bring young people back into school physically, because we know that their attainment will improve if they are in school, learning. We have to recognise that, for many young people, that has been a challenge, particularly post-pandemic.

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): Yesterday, in Glasgow, I met young people from Includem to hear from them about this issue. As the cabinet secretary will know, the issues that lead to absence from school are complex. However, what came up time and again is the lack of whole-family support and early preventative action, including through access to crucial public services such as child and adolescent mental health services. Like the cabinet secretary, I am sure that we have multiple cases of children waiting for months without any support, and often not attending school.

What conversations is the cabinet secretary having with the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care and other colleagues to address the wider issues that families face that lead to absence from school?

Jenny Gilruth: The member raises a hugely important point. I engage regularly with the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care. On CAMHS, it is worth putting on the record that we have record numbers of staff providing more varied mental health support and services to a larger number of people than ever before. Our national performance against the 18-week CAMHS standard is the best performance ever reported since the standard was introduced, in 2014.

That being said, CAMHS is at the more challenging end of the system. Pam Duncan-Glancy raises an important point about early intervention. She will also recognise the additionality of £16 million in funding that the Scottish Government provides to local authorities

for mental health counselling in schools. In this year's draft budget, there will also be £29 million of extra investment for additional support needs.

That is hugely important when we look at attendance rates and supporting the children with the greatest needs. I hope that Pam Duncan-Glancy will reconsider her party's position on supporting the Scottish Government's budget, which provides that additionality for some of those young people.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): Unauthorised absences are a widespread problem; it is not just a small group of young people who are persistently absent. We know that some families are finding it difficult to pay for holidays in peak periods, so they are taking their children out of school at other times of the year. What message does the cabinet secretary have for them and for the holiday companies that seek to exploit peak periods?

Jenny Gilruth: The member raises a very topical matter in relation to parents choosing to take holidays during the school term. As a former teacher, I would not, of course, support that course of action. There are legal obligations on parents and carers to send their children to school during the school term, and that is for good reason. Attending school is hugely important for the broader picture of improving attainment post-pandemic and trying to improve children's health and wellbeing.

That being said, families across Scotland are facing a number of different challenges. We need to be cognisant of that and support them in the best ways that we are able to. My view is that headteachers are currently doing that using a variety of methods. We have talked about PEF and how that is making a difference in our schools, and I know that headteachers are also engaged in a range of different measures. For example, across Fife—in Mr Rennie's own area—the virtual school head teachers programme has been active online in helping some young people to come back to school post-pandemic.

I recognise that some of the challenges that Mr Rennie has alluded to are multifaceted, but the important thing is that our children are engaged in their education and are back in school. That has been difficult for young people, particularly post-pandemic, and, as I said in my response to Mr Fraser, particularly for young people who went through the transition from primary into secondary and from broad general education into the senior phase during lockdown. We need to be cognisant of that in the support that we are providing.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes topical question time.

Storm Éowyn

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is a statement by Angela Constance on the response to storm Éowyn. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of her statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:12

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): I am grateful for the opportunity to update Parliament on the exceptional weather that Scotland experienced last week during storm Éowyn. I begin by expressing condolences to the families and friends of those who have died or been injured as a result of incidents during the storm. I also extend my sympathy to those who have experienced disruption or damage to their businesses and homes as a consequence of the storm.

On Tuesday 21 January, the Met Office announced the likely arrival of storm Éowyn and predicted disruption for the following Friday and Saturday. By Thursday 23 January, its forecast confidence had increased, and it took the serious step of issuing a red warning for wind that covered the central belt and southern Scotland. Red weather warnings are very rarely issued and signify not only the high likelihood of severe damage and disruption but a significant threat to life. Amber warnings for wind covered the remainder of the country, which underlined the scale of the high winds.

The Scottish Government and front-line agencies across Scotland took the threat extremely seriously. Emergency planning and resilience structures were activated across Scotland, including the Scottish Government resilience room and the Transport Scotland resilience room. Scotland's responders, including emergency services, local authorities and utility companies, quickly mobilised staff to respond to the impacts of the storm.

Ministerial meetings of the Scottish Government resilience room were held daily from Thursday to Monday, and the Cabinet discussed the storm this morning. Ministers continue to receive regular updates on the incident recovery work, including the restoration of power and the recovery of transport services. In addition, on Saturday 25 January, the First Minister joined a ministerial COBRA meeting to discuss the impacts of storm Éowyn across the United Kingdom.

Public advice was issued to support the public in planning for the storm and taking steps to stay safe. Police Scotland issued clear advice to the public not to travel during the storm. We worked

quickly with the Met Office, the UK Government and the Northern Ireland Executive to activate the new emergency alerts capability for the first time in Scotland since its launch, and we also activated the Scottish Government's Ready Scotland campaign. I am grateful to both the Met Office and Police Scotland for issuing those early and clear warnings, and to the public, who, in following that advice, helped to mitigate significantly the damage that the storm might otherwise have caused. To put it simply, people have, by following the guidance to stay at home, prevented further loss of life.

However, no amount of warning could prevent significant damage and disruption from a storm of this scale. Storm Éowyn and other recent weather events at home and abroad are symptoms of the warming world to which we are now adapting. I echo the First Minister's comments over the weekend that the

"ferocity"

of

"climate change is with us".

We also know that such trends are locked in. To prepare Scotland for the changing climate, we must therefore bring climate resilience to the heart of decision making across the nation.

The Met Office has called storm Éowyn "probably the strongest storm" to hit the UK for a decade, with gusts of wind exceeding 100mph. The entirety of Scotland was covered by weather warnings on Friday, and we saw widespread impacts across the country. A total of 92 per cent of the school estate in Scotland was closed and all rail, bus and ferry services were cancelled. There were significant impacts across the road network, including fallen trees and power cables, overturned heavy goods vehicles and road traffic collisions.

However, Transport Scotland reports that, during the red alert period, traffic volumes dropped by 80 per cent. The public listened to and followed the important advice that Police Scotland issued.

At the worst point, more than 130,000 people were reported to be without power. The weather itself meant that it was not always safe to carry out repairs, and front-line agencies established a number of welfare centres to support the most vulnerable. As of the latest update, at noon today, 2,538 customers remain off power.

Throughout that response, our health and social care partnerships worked hard, hand in hand with the utility companies, to support the most vulnerable individuals, by targeting resources to reinstate power to care homes and vulnerable individuals as soon as possible. I thank them for their on-going efforts, and I recognise the people

in our communities who came together to support vulnerable friends, family and neighbours.

The trunk road and motorway network has fully recovered following storm Éowyn; however, there is a risk of secondary impacts around weakened trees that may come down and debris that may still get into drainage systems, which could lead to further localised disruption until the clear-up is complete.

Health and social care services were impacted, with non-essential care packages suspended during the red warning and some non-urgent patient appointments cancelled on Friday, which are being rescheduled. Thanks to the excellent work and dedication of the staff who provide health, social care and social work services in our hospitals and communities, as well as the efforts of unpaid carers and the third and independent sectors, there was no significant impact on patient care, and services are returning to normal. Forth Valley royal hospital was subject to a storm-related power outage on Friday afternoon and was without mains power for approximately one hour. Thanks to the efforts of the health board and the power company, the situation was quickly resolved and no patient harm was identified.

However, we are still in the process of recovery, and the impacts of the storm continue to be felt, and may continue to be felt in the coming days and weeks. More than 2,500 customers in Scotland remain without power, and although power companies are working hard towards restoration, the extreme damage that was caused by storm Éowyn means that the task is very complex. Although power companies were able to make quick wins in the early period of recovery and restore power to thousands of customers at a time, they are now dealing with some of the most challenging and remote issues.

Recovery operations have continued on the rail network, as Scotland's railway recovers from more than 500 incidents associated with the storm. ScotRail and Network Rail are working to reopen lines as quickly and safely as possible, with services having been reinstated overnight on the lines to Ayr, Balloch and Paisley Canal. By tomorrow, it is anticipated that the lines to Largs, Wemyss Bay and Gourock will be reopened, that the landslip at Hamilton will be cleared and that services to Larkhall will resume. Earlier today, 73 per cent of services were operating, and that figure will increase as routes reopen.

Many schools suffered damage to infrastructure, to varying degrees, as well as a loss of power. However, 99 per cent of schools across Scotland were able to reopen as usual yesterday. Remedial works are on-going, and 16 schools and six local authority early learning and childcare settings remained closed this morning. I do not

underestimate the impact that the disruption has had on families and staff.

This has been, and continues to be, an extremely complex and protracted incident. Every business, home and individual was affected by an amber or red weather warning. I express my heartfelt gratitude to the organisations and individuals who are working tirelessly to restore normality to people's homes and lives. I pay tribute to the work that our responder and voluntary organisations undertake to protect the public from such emergencies. We must continue to work together to ensure that Scotland remains prepared to withstand future storms that come our way.

The Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary will now take questions on the issues that were raised in her statement. I intend to allow about 20 minutes for questions, after which we will move on to the next item of business.

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of her statement. I put on record that our sympathy is with those who have lost a loved one or have been injured as a result of the storm. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: I apologise, Mr Carson, but could you wait a moment until that phone has stopped ringing?

Do continue.

Finlay Carson: Storm Éowyn has left a profound impact on our communities, particularly in rural areas, which merited little or no mention in the Government's statement. Sadly, that is what we in rural areas have come to expect.

The storm caused unprecedented damage and left thousands of people without power, water and essential services. I thank Scottish Power Energy Networks for the support that it has given me and colleagues across the chamber in helping the most vulnerable in our communities. We have gone from more than 200,000 households being without electricity at the peak of the problem to fewer than 1,000 today, and I know that engineers are pushing hard to get as many households as possible, if not all of them, back on the grid today. That is a fantastic effort from engineers from across the UK, who are working in very challenging conditions.

Much of the storm's impact, which equates to 100 days of damage in less than three days, was in my constituency and across Dumfries and Galloway, where more than 51,000 homes were without power. I thank the local authority, the police, other emergency services and groups of volunteer resilience workers—such as Hazel Smith and her team in Whithorn—for their

amazing work to ensure the safety of everyone in the most badly affected areas.

One of the most critical issues has been the disruption to digital and mobile phone services. In many rural areas, the storm crippled telecommunications, leaving residents isolated and unable to communicate with emergency services or loved ones. The inadequacies and failings of the new digital voice service need to be urgently reviewed. The storm has highlighted the urgent need for investment in more resilient telecommunications infrastructure to ensure that our communities remain connected, even in the face of severe weather events.

The storm has disproportionately affected vulnerable people in rural areas, with reports of elderly residents and those with disabilities being left cold in homes without electricity or support. Indeed, the lack of power has also had an impact on farms and people with private water supplies.

Those rural communities are in desperate need of immediate assistance. Will the Government commit to prioritising the restoration of mobile phone and telephone services and to providing additional resources to support our most vulnerable citizens to build more resilient and inclusive communities, given that violent and frequent storms are inevitable in the future?

Angela Constance: I thank Mr Carson for his questions. I emphasise the fact that the whole purpose of having resilience structures and of our focus on recovery is to focus on the most populated areas but not just the central belt. I assure him that, in the six ministerial SGoRR meetings that took place over the weekend, we had substantial and in-depth discussions about the challenges that our rural communities face.

With regard to the issues that Mr Carson raises in relation to utilities, I am acutely conscious that Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks is working very hard in the Kintyre area. There are particular challenges in Dunoon, from Balure to Clachan villages and south of Tarbert and, of course, in our island communities, whether that is Gigha or Islay. The Cabinet Secretary for Transport was particularly focused on the resumption of ferry services. Those might not be running completely without disruption, but the resumption of ferry services was very much a necessity because of the needs of our island communities.

I appreciate Mr Carson's thanks to SP Energy Networks, which has had particular challenges. It covers a wide geographical area in Scotland, from Dumfries and Galloway through Ayrshire to central and Fife, and it has pockets of licence area right across central Scotland. It has had to deal with the challenge of 1,000 faults, so it has made

remarkable progress. Nonetheless, I very much appreciate—because I have constituency experience of this—that, if you are one of the remaining 2,500 properties without power, that progress will be of small comfort, bearing in mind the fact that we are now several days into the impacts.

Telecommunications are of fundamental importance. Mr Carson will be aware that the issue of telecommunications, including the security and resilience of the networks, is reserved to the UK Government. The Scottish Government will continue to work closely with the UK Government, Ofcom and the telecoms industry as a whole. Last year, I answered an oral question from Ariane Burgess on the subject, in which she raised issues in relation to Arran, Skye and other parts of the Highlands and Islands. Although the telecoms industry has made the decision to replace the traditional landline telephone service with a digital service by the start of 2027, there will be no change to the statutory responsibilities that apply to telecommunications providers. I wrote in detail to Ms Burgess, and I am more than happy to write to Mr Carson on that point.

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Presiding Officer, please accept my apologies for the delay in taking my place this afternoon.

I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of the statement. My thoughts are with those families who have experienced bereavement and injuries during this period.

Storm Éowyn has caused significant damage, and households, businesses and local authorities are beginning the recovery process. However, there are still homes in Fife without power, and people are frustrated by the lack of definitive information on when they will be reconnected. What assurances are the energy companies giving the Government in the resilience room meetings? Is the cabinet secretary confident that communications with customers—in the broadest terms, not just in relation to telecoms—is the best that it can be?

The Government must also reflect on whether the advice was sufficient. What advice was given to businesses? For example, does the Government know how many businesses have a severe weather policy in place? The Scottish Trades Union Congress says that the majority of businesses do not have one. On Friday morning, the Government issued an alert that said:

“Stay indoors if you can. It is unsafe to drive in these conditions”.

However, some businesses were still open and employees were still expected to go to work. Should the advice to stay at home have been

given earlier, and should it have been more unequivocal, given the extent of the storm?

Angela Constance: On the red weather warning and the advice to stay at home, as I outlined in my statement to Parliament, at the stage that the weather warning emerged at the start of last week, the scale and severity of the storm that we all ended up having to endure was certainly not predicted. As soon as that information was available from the Met Office, however, Police Scotland worked hard with the Met Office, resilience partners, the Scottish Government and partners across the UK to get that red alert issued. I refute any suggestion that the red warning could have been issued any earlier. I welcome the fact that, for the first time, the red alert was issued over registered mobile phones.

We should always review the standard and quality of communications, whether in Government, between partners or to members of the public. I have written to all MSPs on this three times now, and some of the feedback that I have had from many colleagues relates to members’ frustrations regarding some of their constituents still being without power.

There is also a positive reflection to be made: that, since storm Arwen, there has been much learning and much improved communications from utility companies in particular.

Regarding businesses, I assure members that the whole purpose of the Scottish Government resilience room is for communicating with or having follow-up discussions with particular businesses or sectors, for example retail and supermarkets and road haulage. There were concerns around businesses, and all employers have a duty of care to their employees. I and the Government are very clear about that.

For the reassurance of the member and the Parliament, I can say that, as with all storms and major resilience operations, we will go through a lessons learned operation. I will convene meetings with partners to review and reflect, and I will take the issues raised to Cabinet.

The Presiding Officer: There is great interest in the statement, as you would expect. I would be grateful for concise questions and responses, which will enable me to ensure that as many members as possible can ask a question.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): Wigtownshire and other parts of D and G were particularly hard-hit by excessively high, gale-force winds during the storm, with communities, including in the Machars, being left without power, some until yesterday. The storm closed the entirety of the A75 and impacted key infrastructure.

I thank the emergency responders, including the Dumfries and Galloway Council and SPEN teams, for their efforts to support local residents. Can the cabinet secretary set out what further action can be taken in rural areas, particularly for people who have electrical medical requirements?

Angela Constance: I of course appreciate the member's interest in and championing of the particular issues that Dumfries and Galloway and Wigtownshire have had to endure. She is right to reflect on the impacts on the A75. The motorway network and the trunk-road network are now operational, I am pleased to say, although we have to be alert to the secondary impacts that I mentioned in my statement.

Regarding members of the public and households who are reliant on electrical medical equipment, it is the job of health and social care partnerships, in collaboration with utility companies, to ensure that all those in that category are registered on the priority services register, because those customers are of the utmost priority when it comes to power outages—through restoration of power, access to generators, accommodation or other bespoke solutions.

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): I pay my condolences to the family of young Calum Carmichael from East Ayrshire, who was tragically killed during the storm. I cannot imagine the pain that his family must be experiencing. I am sure that the whole Parliament will share my thoughts on that.

The west of Scotland was hit particularly hard by the storm—and I am sure that we have all seen the viral video of Helensburgh leisure centre's roof. That is how bad things were.

I am relieved that some services are getting back to normal, such as rail services to Largs, Gourock and Wemyss Bay, which will reopen tomorrow or the day after, I believe. It is unclear, however, whether services to Ardrossan will reopen—so I could perhaps ask about that, first of all.

Given the extent of damage to many public buildings, has the Government had any conversation with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities regarding particular support packages that it could offer local councils as they seek to repair and reopen many vital public services?

Angela Constance: I am sure that all members across the chamber wish to express their condolences, like Mr Greene, regarding the loss of Calum Carmichael, who was only 19 years old and who lost his life in a road traffic accident associated with the storm. Given Calum's status as a student at one of the west coast colleges, the

Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills led the condolences at Cabinet this morning.

Mr Greene's point about Ardrossan is a wider point about provision and is not related to the storm. However, I will ask the Cabinet Secretary for Transport to provide him with more information.

Across the public sector—whether that is local government, the Scottish Government, ScotRail or Network Rail—right now, everyone is assessing the cost of the damage. However, the priority remains our people, including the 2,500 people who are offline. That is the focus. Once we have served our people, we will all have to count the cost and work through that cost collectively.

Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): My heart goes out to Mr Carmichael's family, who are my constituents.

What powers does the Scottish Government have to compel employers to act earlier to close businesses once a red weather warning has been announced, noting that such warnings are rare and are given when dangerous weather and threat to life are predicted?

Angela Constance: Bearing in mind that employment law is reserved, I suggest that our powers are somewhat limited, although I absolutely do not want to get into a dispute that is in any way political or constitutional, given that the focus right now is on recovery and addressing the storm impacts that continue. Elena Whitham raises an important point, however, which was touched on by Claire Baker, too. It is important that we do everything that we can to scrutinise and support employers, ensuring that they have the right information, pass on that information timeously to their employees and, of course, recognise that they have a duty of care.

Part of our learning-the-lessons review of any major event is always to look at things such as civil contingencies, many of the powers for which lie at a very localised level. There are issues about how best we engage, educate and encourage, but we must also enforce where necessary, and there are various partners that have powers in and around that.

Sometimes, it is not just employers who do not follow advice; it can be individuals who are, to all appearances, of sound mind. Whether you are an individual or an employer, if you do not follow advice, you do not put only yourself at risk. If you get into danger resulting in a rescue operation, you put the lives of emergency workers and volunteers at risk through your reckless actions, which is utterly unacceptable.

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): I echo the condolences for those who lost their lives during storm Éowyn. The tragic death of 19-year-

old Calum Carmichael in Mauchline will be utterly devastating for his loved ones.

Police Scotland urged people not to travel during the storm. I appreciate that the cabinet secretary has said that traffic volumes dropped by 80 per cent. However, as we have heard from other members, it is clear that some businesses still put an expectation on their employees to come to work, even when that work was far from urgent.

Will the Government review the approach to travel advice when we have a severe red weather warning? We only have to look at the pictures of HGVs lying at the side of our roads during the storm to see that advisory messages did not go far enough and were not adequate to keep workers safe. Should we be considering whether such advice is statutory and compulsory in such circumstances?

Angela Constance: I contend that the red travel warning was very clear. I do not think that it could have been clearer. Nonetheless, we always have to have an open mind with respect to reviews.

I will not repeat what I said in two previous answers on and around employers.

There is some really informative data on the public's compliance with the advice about not travelling. There is significant data on reductions in the volume of traffic—on different roads, it reduced by 95 per cent, 100 per cent and 90 per cent—that we can share with the member. I reiterate that the public overwhelmingly complied with the advice, but we will pick up on the other issues that members have raised today.

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): Can we in Scotland learn any lessons from the storm practices of countries that are more familiar with such weather or experience it as a norm? How is the Scottish Government seeking to inform its practice using the experience of those other countries?

Angela Constance: That is perhaps an issue for a slower time but, for brevity, I reassure Mr MacGregor about our openness to learning from other countries, which I hope is very apparent. Obviously, there are countries that experience significant snowfall with great regularity. A number of years ago, I was in Japan at the time of a typhoon, and it was somewhat instrumental to see how the Japanese Government dealt with that emergency and how quickly the country recovered. International experience is imperative, and we are open minded and take with all seriousness the lessons that we can learn from others.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): I thank the emergency services and offer

condolences to those who lost a loved one during the storm.

It was a relief to hear from the cabinet secretary that no patients were harmed at Forth Valley royal hospital during the power outage. I understand that the back-up generator failed. The emergency battery that was the last resort has limited capacity, of course; I understand that it can provide only up to 90 minutes of power. Given that patients would have been undergoing surgery and been in critical care at the hospital at the time, is the cabinet secretary satisfied that health boards are really putting in the resilience measures that are needed to deal with such a storm?

Angela Constance: I reassure Mr Ruskell that a full investigation of the incident is on-going. It will report, and we will share with the relevant authorities and with Parliament what it tells us and the action that flows from that.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I, too, thank the emergency services and express my condolences to the families of the bereaved.

As we heard, many members in the chamber received the loud telephone alarm, which was received across the central belt to good effect. In fact, its use seems to have gone much better than the national test, which reached a much smaller percentage of people. How is the Government reviewing the success of the national alert that was sent to mobile phones? How will it ensure that everyone receives the alert in future, including those who do not have a smartphone or compatible technology? What provision is the Government making for those who wish to opt out of the alert, particularly victims of domestic violence who may need to conceal a secret second phone?

Angela Constance: Those are very important points. I reiterate what I said earlier about the necessity and the effectiveness of the red alert. It is important that we review our overall response, and the red alert is, of course, part of that. We will seek to do that in partnership with others across the UK, particularly around widening the scope.

Mr Cole-Hamilton's point about domestic violence and people having a phone for emergency use and for their safety is well made. It has certainly featured in discussions before, but I will get back to him on the detail of that.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I, too, offer my condolences and thank all the emergency services.

Storm damage has left many people in need of urgent repairs, in many cases to roofing. I have no doubt that most roofers are decent, but there are

unscrupulous opportunists who will prey on the elderly, especially those living alone, which is something that I experienced this weekend as an elderly person who lives alone. Thankfully, I saw through someone whom I consider to have been, at best, not trustworthy. Will the cabinet secretary take the opportunity to alert all who might be vulnerable and desperate for repairs but who do not already know a tradesman, and to advise them to be wary and, if possible, check with friends and neighbours before they part with any cash?

Angela Constance: Christine Grahame makes a good point and gives valuable advice. I give her an undertaking that I will raise the issue with trading standards so that we can discuss it with our local partners and perhaps connect it with some of the resilience recovery work to ensure that vulnerable people are given relevant advice about opportunistic criminals who might be circulating in communities.

Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con): Another storm has wreaked havoc across our energy networks. With wind speeds of 90mph, conditions were far too treacherous for engineers to carry out vital repairs. The same thing happened after storms Arwen, Babet and others. The cabinet secretary spoke in her statement about power cables overturning. Does she agree that such costly and dangerous disruption to the power supply bolsters the need for transmission lines to go offshore or run underground?

Angela Constance: Tess White's question is probably one for another day. She will appreciate that, as the cabinet secretary for home affairs and with responsibility for resilience, I have a portfolio interest in the emergency response. There are always broader issues to debate about how we can improve our overall resilience.

Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): I note the earlier question and answer about Forth Valley royal hospital and am pleased that a full investigation is under way. However, there are conflicting reports about the exact length of time for which the generators were offline, with those varying from the short period of time noted in the original statement to the hour outlined by the cabinet secretary. Will the investigation establish the exact length of time, which some anecdotal reports suggest was closer to two hours?

Angela Constance: I will, of course, discuss that with the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care so that we can provide the member with assurance of the breadth and depth of the investigation that will take place. I will also ask Mr Gray to write to the member in the interim.

Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP): Some 80, mostly elderly, people living in Fordell Gardens in my Cowdenbeath constituency were

left without information or support for more than two days after they lost power on Friday. As park home residents, with a unique contractual status, they were simply abandoned. Will the cabinet secretary agree to take that up with SP Energy Networks and with Fife Council to ensure such a Dickensian approach to people in need does not happen again?

Angela Constance: Like other members, I am well aware of the arrangements for the operation of park homes and of some of the particular challenges that park home residents experience. I assure the member that I will take that matter to the energy companies, Fife and other local authorities, because we have many park home residential sites across the country that are, by and large, populated by people who are over 55 and who are sometimes quite elderly or in the latter stages of their lives. Those communities are unique, so we must ensure that they are served and protected and that they are appropriately registered with utility companies via the property services register.

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): Postal workers, many hospitality workers and other private sector workers were told that they had to take unpaid leave on Friday. The public sector seems to have adopted a very different approach. Will the Scottish Government be looking at its fair work agenda to see whether more can be done to protect workers in emergency situations where there is a risk to life?

Angela Constance: Yes, the Government always looks at its fair work agenda, because it has to permeate through all portfolios and all of our actions. Some of the issues and problems that Katy Clark highlighted relate to employment law and employment rights.

It is regrettable that any barrier to adhering to the very clear advice that was given by Police Scotland and the Met Office has been put in an individual's way.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes the ministerial statement on the response to storm Éowyn. I will allow a moment or two for those on the front benches to reorganise before we move to the next item of business.

Urgent Question

14:51

Child Safeguarding in Scotland

Ash Regan (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba): To ask the Scottish Government, in light of the reported details of abuse that came to light during sentencing at Glasgow High Court yesterday, what its position is on whether child safeguarding in Scotland has failed.

The Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise (Natalie Don-Innes): Keeping children safe is our utmost priority.

The news from yesterday's trial is horrific, and my thoughts are with the children who have suffered such abhorrent abuse. No sentence can take away their suffering. However, the perpetrators have only been brought to justice because of the bravery of their victims in coming forward.

Understandably, all of us are shocked when we hear about such terrible crimes, and I welcome the news that an independently led case learning review is under way, in line with national guidance, to ensure that child protection in Scotland is as robust as it can be and that all learning is acted on.

Ash Regan: As a mother, my heart broke when I heard about the tragic circumstances of the abuse that was suffered by those children.

Of course, the Scottish Government has a duty to safeguard vulnerable children, yet the case reeks of institutional failures. Those children were on the child protection register, yet they were failed. Those children were known to agencies with a duty of care to protect them, yet they were failed. Those children were chronically absent from school, yet they were failed. Those children showed blatant signs of neglect, yet they were failed. The Scottish Government has presided over that catastrophic failure at every single level. Minister, are the children of Scotland safe?

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Always speak through the chair, please.

Natalie Don-Innes: I agree with some of the sentiments about the experiences of those children. I am a mother, and the case absolutely horrifies me. There is no getting away from the fact that those children were failed.

As I said, the details of the case are horrific, but I understand that the case review that is taking place will be carried out to learn lessons and to ensure that safeguarding is bolstered in Scotland. My priority right now has to be on the actions that

we are taking, whether through the national strategic group, the newly established task force or the work that we are doing on the Promise and on improving child protection across the Government. My focus has to be on the actions that we are taking to protect children.

Ash Regan: Yet again, catastrophic system failures have been brought to light by brave survivors and interveners. That shows that there is a problem in the system. A child's background, behaviour and perceived social status must never impact on how they are protected in a civilised society; the mere fact that they are children must be enough. The fear of creating offence must never overshadow the instinct and the duty to protect children.

Let me be very clear that the right to and expectation of protection from abuse that the children in question had must be judged solely on the fact that they are children, and failure is not an option.

Will the Government outline what it will do to urgently address the serious safeguarding failures that have been brought to light?

Natalie Don-Innes: I gave much of the answer to that question in my previous response. The Glasgow child protection committee has brought in an independent reviewer to lead the independent review that will be carried out. That reviewer will be from outwith Glasgow but is still to be appointed. I am confident that we will learn lessons from the failings as we consider what to do to protect children in the future.

I have previously outlined—both to the member and others—the actions that we are taking to protect children, such as through the national strategic group that has been set up and, in relation to online harms, through our newly established task force. I will continue to look for ways in which we can bolster child protection measures. If the member wishes to discuss that with me, I am more than happy to have such a discussion.

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): This is a harrowing case. It is absolutely vital that we enhance our child protection services and learn lessons.

The minister will be aware that I recently raised with the First Minister the specific issue of mandatory reporting. Can she say any more about what steps the Scottish Government is taking to improve child protection, including through the new task force that it has set up to tackle online harms?

Natalie Don-Innes: I thank the member for his question and his continued engagement on this important issue, particularly around support for

victims. On mandatory reporting, it is important to note that professionals in Scotland have an existing duty to report child abuse.

It is vitally important that we do all that we can to protect children from abuse and sexual exploitation. That is why, earlier this month, I announced that the First Minister had asked the Minister for Victims and Community Safety and me to form the new task force on online safety. The task force will provide oversight, challenge and direction in order to identify what more can be done to protect children and young people from online harms.

I have already referred to the new national child sexual abuse and exploitation strategic group, which was established on 24 October to review current actions and agree on the areas in which additional focus is needed to better protect children. We want the group to be able to act in a way that is informed by the experience and expertise of practitioners. That is why the group is co-chaired by senior police officers and social work representatives.

Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con): During yesterday's sentencing, Lord Beckett, the judge, praised the children for their "formidable strength" and "courage and perseverance". Without that, the vile individuals involved might never have been caught and would still be offending and wrecking lives today. However, it should not fall on child victims to bring such monsters to account.

Given the system's failure to intervene sooner, despite the children having been in contact with services, what lessons have been learned? What immediate changes are being introduced to ensure that this never happens again?

Natalie Don-Innes: I feel as though I have already partly answered the question. I have spoken about the independent review, led by Glasgow, that will take place to establish what lessons can be learned from the failings and what further action can be taken so that we do not see anything like this happen again.

The member will be aware of a range of work that the Scottish Government is doing in relation to the Promise and whole-family wellbeing, and in getting into families' and young children's lives at an earlier point in order to intervene early, stop crisis points arising and improve children's lives.

Over and above the work that we are doing on the Promise, which is directly linked to child protection, there is the on-going work of the national strategic group and the task force. If there are other measures that members would like to see us going further on, I am always happy to discuss that, as this is a very important issue.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): The minister has said that there is to be an independently led case review, but surely we must have some answers now and not in a year's time. Perhaps she could clarify the timescale.

How could the people who were protecting the children in question, who were under 13, have missed the signs of the deep levels of abuse that were taking place in a flat when there were children screaming and there were comings and goings? Surely the minister is not satisfied with simply leaving it to a case-led review to give us some answers to that key question.

I ask the minister whether anything can be done to give us some preliminary answers now. If we are expected to wait longer than that, I do not see how the minister can say that she is satisfied that all Scotland's children are in fact protected.

Natalie Don-Innes: I do not believe that I said that. I was very clear that I believe that the children in question have been failed. This is an abhorrent case. I am doing my best, and everyone in Government is doing their best, to ensure that nothing like it ever happens again.

At the moment, I do not have the details on the independent review that is being set up. As I have already said, we are still waiting for an independent reviewer to be appointed. I will be more than happy to share details of that with the member once they are available, and to discuss any further queries that she might have.

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Ash Regan, Sharon Dowey and Pauline McNeill have all rightly asked for urgent action. I have listened carefully to the minister's responses and have heard nothing urgent about them. We have an independent review that does not have a chair, and we do not know when it will report. Can the minister reassure members in the chamber and people who are watching that the Government is considering the issue urgently? What discussions have there been at Cabinet about it, given that it impacts on every child right across Scotland?

Natalie Don-Innes: I am aware that the issue was discussed at Cabinet this morning. I do not attend Cabinet regularly, so I cannot provide any details, but I am aware that it was discussed.

I understand the strength of feeling about the case, and I have been quite clear that I am not necessarily satisfied with all the details of the case. I am more than happy to go away and look into what urgent action can be taken over and above what I have already laid out in relation to the case and to keep members updated on that.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. That concludes the urgent question. I will allow a moment or two for front-bench members to organise themselves for the next item of business.

Investing in Public Services Through the Scottish Budget

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-16237, in the name of Neil Gray, on investing in public services through the Scottish budget. I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons.

15:03

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Neil Gray): Scotland's public services are the foundation of our society. Through our public services, we ensure that all individuals, regardless of their background or circumstances, have access to essential resources and support. Our front-line services play a vital role in all our lives, providing quality education to our children and young people, supporting our most vulnerable people through social care services, and improving the wellbeing of the people of Scotland.

We saw a key example of that this past weekend. Our public services were critical in responding to the challenges that were posed by storm Éowyn. The role that they played in protecting the wellbeing of our communities cannot be overstated. From emergency services to health and social care teams, their dedication and co-ordination ensured that individuals were supported and that essential services continued to operate. I extend our deepest thanks to all those who worked relentlessly to keep us safe during the storm.

That is exactly why, in June last year, the Parliament recognised the importance of maintaining high-quality services and the need for public service investment. I am proud that the 2025-26 Scottish budget does exactly that, including investing £21.7 billion for health and social care and more than £15 billion for local government.

The Government committed to listening to the priorities of Opposition parties as we shaped the 2025-26 budget, to offer a budget by Scotland for Scotland. Our approach ensured that the budget that was presented on 4 December not only delivers on those requests but, above all, fulfils the expectations of the people of Scotland.

Since the draft budget was presented in December, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government and the Minister for Public Finance have continued to engage constructively with all parties.

I am pleased to say that, as confirmed in the finance secretary's letter to the Finance and Public Administration Committee this morning, the

Scottish Greens and the Scottish Liberal Democrats have indicated their intention to support the Budget (Scotland) (No 4) Bill throughout its parliamentary passage.

This Government is proud of the successes in Scotland's public services, including the best-performing core accident and emergency departments in the United Kingdom, record levels of young people progressing to positive destinations, and police-recorded crimes at one of the lowest levels since 1974, to name but a few.

This Government is also clear about the challenges that our public services face. In recent times, our nation has faced an unprecedented range of challenges, including the Covid pandemic, prolonged Westminster austerity, Brexit, the war in Ukraine and high inflation. Those difficult challenges have all put our hard-working public services staff under significant and prolonged pressure.

Although the increase in funding from the new UK Government's autumn budget is welcome, after inflation, it equates to only around 1 per cent growth in our resource budget—the budget that is used to pay for our public services. Therefore, significant financial pressures and challenges remain.

At the same time, the chancellor has announced an increase in employer national insurance contributions, which will increase the cost of delivering public services. We estimate that this change could add over £500 million in costs for directly employed public sector staff in Scotland and, if we include the costs of wider staff who are delivering public services, such as general practitioners, dentists and those working in hospices, that figure increases to over £700 million.

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): I am glad to hear that the cabinet secretary welcomes the additional investment from the Labour Government in public services in Scotland. How would he pay for that if he rejects all means by which those moneys are raised?

Neil Gray: We have not rejected all means. We have taken responsibility here in Scotland and raised revenue through our more progressive income tax policy, which means that we have more than £1.7 billion available to us that we would not have had otherwise. There were choices available to Michael Marra's colleagues in Whitehall that they chose not to take. Instead, they took an approach that is an attack on jobs and an attack on growth and is going to hammer our public services here in Scotland. Michael Marra should stand up to the Westminster Government for taking that approach.

We have called on the UK Government to fully fund those costs. However, the Treasury plans to provide us with a much lower Barnett share, which is likely to leave us some £300 million short, as it fails to take account of the fact that we have a larger public sector per person than other parts of the UK. It feels as though Scotland is now being punished for having decided to employ more people in the public sector and to invest in key public services.

We have a range of public sector employers, including the national health service, the police and local authorities, which urgently need clarity on this to inform their spending decisions from April. It is therefore essential that the Treasury fully funds those additional costs for Scotland's public sector, rather than just giving a much lower-value Barnett share of the spending in England. It would be completely unacceptable for our public services to suffer as a result of that change in reserved taxation.

Turning to what the 2025-26 Scottish budget will deliver for Scotland's public services, I begin with my own portfolio of health and social care. Our health and care services are an essential pillar of our public services, and will be supported next year with record investment of £21.7 billion. That includes £16.2 billion for health boards, representing a 3 per cent cash uplift and a real-terms increase on their baseline funding—boards' resource funding, which has more than doubled since 2006-07. It also includes £139 million of additional investment across NHS infrastructure to support improvement and renewal.

The 2025-26 Scottish budget also contains £200 million to reduce waiting lists and increase capacity, including to help support the reduction of delayed discharge, supporting recovery initiatives such as frailty units and expanding the hospital at home programme to ensure that, by March 2026, no one will wait more than 12 months for a new out-patient appointment or day-case treatment.

With that investment, we are working closely with health boards to support the implementation of alternative pathways and initiatives to support people being seen more quickly and to increase capacity to ensure sustainability.

The budget also provides £2.2 billion of investment in primary care. That investment will deliver essential reform, improve capacity and patient access in local communities and reduce demand on acute services.

The budget delivers on our programme for government commitments for health, with £125 million to fund the real living wage for our adult social care workers, £5 million to provide short breaks for carers and more than £13 million to support growth in the independent living fund. It

supports spending by the Scottish Government and NHS boards of £1.3 billion for mental health services, more than doubling direct programme investment since 2020-21—

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Neil Gray: I will—for the final time, I think.

Murdo Fraser: The cabinet secretary mentioned social care. He will be well aware that delayed discharge is a major issue across the health system, which adds costs to the hospital sector.

On social care, I highlight that Dr Donald Macaskill, who is the chief executive of Social Care Ltd, said that

“This is a budget that kills”

and that it does not give support to social care. Will the cabinet secretary not reflect on those comments, which come from an expert in the sector?

Neil Gray: The First Minister and I dedicate considerable time in seeking to address the delayed discharge issues and to improve social care services. I have engaged with Donald Macaskill since he made that statement, and I think that there is an understanding of the investments that we are making to ensure that we expand capacity and support greater resilience.

The greatest threat and challenge that our social care sector faces right now is Labour’s national insurance contributions increase, which is putting at risk the very viability of the businesses and independent social care providers. That must be reversed at source to ensure the continued viability of our social care sector.

Importantly, with the record investment in health and social care, we will focus on improving the performance of our services and continue to take forward decisive action to support delivery against the reform vision, which I outlined to the Scottish Parliament last June.

Key to the focus on improvement and renewal is co-operation and collaboration across the system. The First Minister and I have regularly consulted health boards, health and social care partnerships, the Scottish Ambulance Service, Public Health Scotland, NHS 24 and others—and we will continue to do so. Indeed, just last week, we met a range of key stakeholders in Bute house to discuss the challenges that are ahead of us, and more meetings are planned.

It is that type of collaborative approach, and that focus on systemic change, that has led to an NHS renewal plan, which the First Minister outlined on Monday. It provides a route to address the immediate issues that impact the NHS, as well as

the long-term change that is needed to ensure its sustainable future. We will set out more details of how that will be delivered in an operational improvement plan that will be published in March.

The draft budget that is progressing through Parliament gives us the means to turn those plans into action. Those dynamic and demanding plans seek to dramatically reduce waiting times so that no one is waiting longer than a year for their treatment.

The renewal plan sets out how our health services can provide the highest quality care in the right place. We will shift the balance of care from acute settings to the community. We will be taking measures to ensure that people receive the right care in the right place, and it will be made easier for people to see their first point of contact in the NHS—the general practice team, their dentist, optometrist or pharmacist.

The plan also commits to expanding the number of hospital at home and virtual beds to at least 2,000 by December 2026, or sooner if possible, and deliver direct access to specialist frailty teams from every emergency department by this summer. It also embraces digital innovation to increase access and speed up access to care, and has a strong emphasis on prevention, so that we improve our population’s overall health and ease the pressure on a service that we all value and treasure.

Last June, I outlined the reform vision for our health and social care services, which is to

“enable and empower people in Scotland to live longer, healthier and more fulfilling lives.”

That vision remains. This budget works towards that vision, by supporting plans that improve population health, focus on prevention and early intervention, provide quality services and maximise access.

I will now consider the wider critical public services that will benefit from the budget. Local government is of critical importance to delivering our high-quality public services in Scotland. The 2025-26 budget is allocating record funding of more than £15 billion to local government, which is a real-terms increase of 4.7 per cent compared with 2024-25. The funding will protect and build on the investments that this Government has already delivered for local communities across Scotland. The additional funding will allow councils to continue to provide high-quality services and invest in local priorities, including maintaining or restoring teacher numbers to 2023 levels, enhancing interisland connectivity, tackling the climate emergency through new capital funding and addressing issues in social care.

The social security budget demonstrates the strength of our commitment to building a future-proofed Scottish social security system that has dignity, fairness and respect at its heart. We are investing around £6.9 billion in benefits and payments for 2025-26. The investment will support around two million people, which is about one in three people in Scotland. That will support our national mission to end child poverty, help low-income families with their living costs, support older people, support carers, who devote their time to others, and enable disabled people to live full and independent lives.

We remain committed to supporting a high-quality post-school education, research and skills system, with a more than £2 billion investment in further education, higher education and skills, keeping the protection of free tuition at the heart of our education system.

For early years, we continue to invest in high-quality funded early learning and childcare, with wider family support.

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): [*Made a request to intervene.*]

Neil Gray: I am sorry—I am struggling for time. I cannot take Pam Duncan-Glancy's intervention.

Overall, the Scottish Government will invest more than £1 billion in high-quality funded ELC next year.

The budget also invests in our schools, teachers and support staff. It includes £186.5 million for local authorities to maintain teacher numbers and £29 million of additionality for additional support needs, including funding to support the recruitment and retention of the ASN workforce.

That funding is part of a wider package and deal that has been agreed with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities that is predicated on trust. We will see the Scottish Government and COSLA working together to restore teacher numbers to, and maintain them at, 2023 levels, to freeze learning hours and to make meaningful progress on reducing teacher class contact time. In addition, we will continue our investment of £1 billion in the Scottish attainment challenge over this parliamentary session to support closing the poverty-related attainment gap.

At this stage, I declare an interest in that my wife is a primary school teacher.

On justice, the 2025-26 Scottish budget will invest almost £4.2 billion across the justice system.

On transport, we will continue our strong focus on sustainable transport, which is central to the 2025-26 Scottish budget, by investing nearly £2.9

billion in public transport infrastructure and green initiatives.

Recognising the importance of public sector reform, we are also introducing greater flexibility in how our key services can be delivered locally to better support the families who need them most. We will work with local government and community partners to redesign systems so that they are integrated, locally responsive and focused on improving lives.

The Government is delivering key funding to support investment in our public services through the 2025-26 budget.

As I conclude, I wish to emphasise and acknowledge the valued contribution of Scotland's public sector workforce, which forms the true backbone of our society. Our hard-working public sector workers deliver our essential services all across Scotland with dedication, dignity and compassion every day. I am proud that Scotland's nurses, teachers and public sector workers are paid more than those in the rest of the UK. I thank each and every one of them for the significant contribution that they make to society in Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary, you will need to conclude and move the motion.

Neil Gray: High-quality, sustainable public services are crucial in progressing our ambitions of eradicating child poverty, growing the economy and tackling the climate emergency. The Government remains wholly committed to delivering that now and in the future.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the investment in Scotland's public services through the draft Scottish Budget 2025-26; notes that £21.7 billion for health and social care investment and over £15 billion in funding for local authorities is being provided; calls on the UK Government to fully fund the additional cost of its increase in employer national insurance contributions, noting the significant impacts on public services, including social care, if it does not fund it in full; notes the importance of the public service reform programme to drive future financial sustainability, and celebrates the key role that the Scottish public service workforce plays in delivering these services across Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Craig Hoy to speak to and move amendment S6M-16237.2.

15:18

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): I echo Neil Gray's thanks to our emergency service workers and public service workers for their Herculean efforts in response to the extreme weather this weekend.

We approach the debate with a depressing sense of déjà vu. It is another SNP Government

debate that papers over the structural cracks in Scotland's finances and fails to address the fundamental problems in our public services. It is another SNP Government debate where the excuses pile high. The simple truth is that, under this Government, public service outcomes have declined despite significant increases in public spending. That is no criticism of our nurses, our teachers or our police—the very people that the SNP Government cynically uses as human shields to mask its policy failures. The problems that we see across Scotland's public services stem from a failure of leadership in the SNP Government. It is a Government that yet again, only yesterday, thought that a hollow speech from the First Minister would fix Scotland's ailing NHS. The First Minister's predecessor and the First Minister who went before him both served as health secretary, and the current First Minister led on Covid recovery. Therefore, the waiting lists, the workforce crisis and the staggering collapse of the national care service before it was even launched are their failures. They caused them, and they own them.

In 2021, the SNP Government vowed to increase NHS capacity by 10 per cent to tackle waiting times. That never happened—we are still waiting. In 2022, Humza Yousaf said that he would “eradicate” long waits for patients, but Public Health Scotland says that that has not happened either. We were promised a national care service by 2026 but, £30 million of wasted money later, we have a task force and nothing more.

When it comes to the SNP, we are used to having more strategies and working groups but no real, commonsense solutions to the problems across Scotland. On schools, for example, under the SNP, education in Scotland has gone backwards in international rankings. On housing, more than 10,000 children are still living in temporary accommodation. On law and order, police numbers are down and violent crime is rising.

The Government says that its budget will deliver growth. It does deliver growth—growth in the cost of the civil service and growth in the benefits bill. As the Scottish Fiscal Commission warns, this year, the Government is spending £1.4 billion more on social security than it receives funding for. By the end of this decade, social security spending will be nearly £9 billion—some 15 per cent of the entire Scottish Government revenue budget.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP): As we heard last week, one way of saving significant amounts of money, particularly in rural parts of Scotland—arguably £4 million or £5 million in the Highland health board area alone—would be the restoration of the provision of

services such as vaccinations to local GPs, rather than those services being provided under a centralised metropolitan regime that does not work.

Craig Hoy: Precisely. Our rural areas need that kind of support, as my colleague Edward Mountain has been calling for, and as I know that Fergus Ewing has also been calling for. Instead, we get one-size-fits-all, central belt-focused solutions from the SNP.

Members should make no mistake: the projected spend in welfare is simply unsustainable. As Audit Scotland warns, so too is the cost of Scotland's bloated public sector. Spending on workforce pay, pensions and national insurance contributions will swallow up 53.4 per cent of the entire Scottish resource budget this year alone.

The cabinet secretary will no doubt hide cynically behind the increased pay for front-line workers in schools and hospitals. We welcome the efforts of those staff and we thank them, and their contributions are rightly rewarded. However, while everyone else is being told to tighten their belts, it is simply breathtaking hypocrisy on the part of ministers that we discover today—of all days—that the number of senior civil servants is still soaring.

Data obtained by the Scottish Conservatives reveals that the core civil service wage bill has risen by £42 million in the past two and a half years. That is over and above the annual salary increases. In 2022, the number of top-brass, grade-C civil servants stood at 2,278. By last year, that number had leapt to 2,776—a staggering 20 per cent increase in the number of senior civil servants in just two years. When the Minister for Public Finance sums up, I challenge him to explain to the public why this Government needs 500 more senior civil servants today than it did less than three years ago.

This is a budget full of misplaced priorities.

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): What does the member say to the Lib Dems and Greens, which have announced today that they will support the budget?

Craig Hoy: I thank the member for that—it is an open goal. I was perplexed this morning to see that the Liberal Democrats will vote for the budget, not least in the light of previous comments from Alex Cole-Hamilton and a written answer that I received from the cabinet secretary for independence yesterday. I asked the cabinet secretary how much the Scottish Government

“plans to spend in 2025-26 on work related to Scottish independence.”

In response, Angus Robertson said that, next year, there is

“budget provision for a range of activity related to the constitution which will be deployed across Ministerial priorities and commitments in this area.”—[*Written Answers*, 24 January 2025; S6W-33286.]

It is clear that the budget contains spending—

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): Will Craig Hoy give way?

Craig Hoy: I will give way in a moment. Let me first quote the member’s words and see whether he has a reason for saying them.

It is clear that the budget contains spending on the constitution and independence. If it is helpful to the Parliament, before I take Alex Cole-Hamilton’s intervention, I have here what he said to the BBC only a few weeks ago. He said:

“I don’t see a circumstance where any Liberal Democrat could vote for a budget that is clearly spending money on the constitution ... I think that would be a massive misuse of public funds no matter how small ... We need every penny available spent on our schools, on our GP surgeries, on the mental health crisis.”

Alex Cole-Hamilton rose—

Craig Hoy: For the avoidance of doubt, Martin Geissler asked Mr Cole-Hamilton the question again: would he support a budget that contained a penny on independence? He said that, if there was a penny spent on independence,

“I would vote it down.”

I give way to Mr Cole-Hamilton.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Alex Cole-Hamilton.

Craig Hoy: Will he apologise for misleading Scots, just as he did in the Colinton by-election?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Is the member going to give way? I call Alex Cole-Hamilton.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I am grateful to Craig Hoy for finally giving way.

Does Craig Hoy recognise that there are aspects of Government expenditure pertaining to the constitution, on things such as legislative consent, that will still require funding irrespective? Does he recognise that there is not a single line in the budget, or a single penny, as he described it—indeed, as I described it—on independence? Had there been, we would have voted it down.

Will Craig Hoy now tell members why he is going to turn his face against increased funding for hospices, and why he is going to stop the spending—which would not have happened without the Liberal Democrats—on services for babies who are born dependent on drugs? Why is he going to vote against those important aspects of the budget?

Craig Hoy: Those things could all have been achieved without rolling over on the question of independence, as Alex Cole-Hamilton has done.

If Alex Cole-Hamilton wants to delve deeper on the point, I note that a further written answer said:

“The Scottish Government has set out its commitment to giving people information about independence. A range of civil servants across the Scottish Government provide input to developing and communicating this information.”—[*Written Answers*, 24 January 2025; S6W-33285.]

The spending continues.

I accept that this Government faces pressures resulting from Labour’s broken promise on national insurance increases. However, the challenges that Labour has created are made much worse by the decisions that the SNP Government has taken. It was this Government that chose to employ more highly paid, top-ranking civil servants, and chose to pay them more than those in the rest of the UK are paid, yet public service performance continues to decline.

Neil Gray: Will the member give way?

Craig Hoy: I do not think that I have time, I am afraid.

However, as the Scottish Fiscal Commission notes, despite the Government saying that it will raise a further £1.7 billion in taxation this coming year, a significantly lower sum will make its way through to our public services. As the SFC notes, that is an economic gap. The Scottish Government is clear on that figure—although it was challenged by an SNP member in committee today; unfortunately, she is not in the chamber just now.

It is clear that this Government has lost control of elements of the economy and that it has failed to secure the labour market. Nonetheless, it is not too late for the SNP Government to see common sense: to get serious about growth and delivering value for money for taxpayers, and to get serious about cutting tax, because we want Scots workers and businesses to have more control over their own money. We would boost growth by cutting income tax to 19 per cent for those who are earning under £43,000. We would provide 100 per cent rates relief for pubs and hospitality businesses. We would reduce the cost of buying a home by increasing the land and buildings transaction tax threshold.

In truth, this Government is not interested in growth. That is why we were not invited back to the table for the third round of budget negotiations. The SNP Government—by instinct and habit—is high tax, big state and low growth. Nonetheless, in all likelihood, the budget will be passed by the Parliament next month, in part because Anas Sarwar’s spineless Scottish Labour has already caved in to John Swinney, without any

concessions or consideration of the consequences.

Now, today, the Liberal Democrats will fall in alongside the Greens and support the budget as part of the cosy left-wing consensus that prevails in the Parliament. Scottish Conservatives are clear that we will not support the budget, because it is bad for public services, for taxpayers and for Scottish business.

I move amendment S6M-16237, to leave out from “welcomes” to end and insert:

“notes that the performance of public services has declined despite significant funding increases and the hard work of those on the frontline; believes that this decline is due to a failure of leadership from the Scottish National Party administration; is concerned by the significant rise in senior-level civil servants and the failure to deliver meaningful public sector reform; acknowledges that, despite the decline in public services’ performance, rises in Scottish income tax will see the public pay £1.7 billion more in taxation in 2025-26, and calls on the Scottish Government to start delivering value for money for taxpayers by cutting income tax to 19% for those earning up to £43,662, providing full non-domestic rates relief for pubs and businesses across Scotland and increasing the Land and Buildings Transaction Tax zero-rate threshold to £250,000, to reduce the cost of buying a home.”

15:28

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):

The worst-kept secret in Scottish politics is officially out, and with the support of the Greens and the Liberal Democrats, the budget is certain to pass. This is two weeks on from Scottish Labour calling time on the increasingly hysterical talk from John Swinney about the rise of the far right, plagues of locusts and the end of civilisation. We all knew that a deal was done, and the Government has—at least in the past couple of weeks—been dragged back to the topic of collapsing public services.

Scottish Labour has delivered a record increase in investment in Scotland’s public services, and that is possible only because the people of Scotland kicked out the Tories and elected Scottish Labour members of Parliament at the heart of a Labour Government. There is an additional £5.2 billion uplift for Scotland—that is the difference that a Labour Government, with Scottish Labour MPs, makes.

Neil Gray: Will the member give way?

Michael Marra: No, thank you.

It is true that the spending choices in the budget are an improvement on those in the previous SNP budget. To be frank, the bar was extraordinarily low. The SNP is correcting some of the most egregious mistakes that it made in last year’s budget in particular.

At a time of increased investment, this should have been a moment for a serious Government to seize the opportunity to reform services for the better, but the SNP has declined that opportunity yet again. In the past 15 months alone, Audit Scotland has published five different reports calling on the Scottish Government to prioritise public service reform. The Parliament’s Finance and Public Administration Committee has grown increasingly exasperated as the Scottish Government has remained impervious to its calls for true fundamental reform. The Government is sticking its head in the sand while the crisis in Scotland’s public services mounts.

Nowhere is the need for reform clearer to see than in Scotland’s NHS, with one in six Scots on an NHS waiting list and hard-working staff pushed to breaking point. The Auditor General’s report “NHS in Scotland 2024: Finance and performance” could not be characterised as anything other than damning about the state of Scotland’s NHS under the SNP.

My health board, NHS Tayside, missed seven of the nine key targets that the Auditor General outlined, including the four-hour target for waits in A and E departments, the 62-day cancer treatment target and the three-week target for drug and alcohol users—that is particularly damaging in a city such as Dundee, which is so impacted by drug and alcohol addiction.

The Auditor General’s message was clear:

“fundamental change in how NHS services are provided is now urgently needed.”

There is nothing in the budget to bring that fundamental change to our NHS.

Neil Gray: Will the member give way?

Michael Marra: I will in one moment.

The recent report from the Royal College of Nursing included harrowing testimony about patients being treated in corridors, cupboards and even car parks, and about staff caring for multiple patients in one corridor without access to essential equipment. Ninety per cent of nurses said that patient safety was being compromised. The report talked about a lack of privacy and dignity, with nurses being left to discuss miscarriages with couples in hospital corridors. Despite all that, the Government has no ambition to reform our NHS. If the cabinet secretary wants to say otherwise, I will be glad to hear from him.

Neil Gray: Yesterday, we set out our plans for reforming and improving our health service, but I am interested in Labour’s approach to the budget negotiations. As a result of the way in which the Liberal Democrats and the Greens approached the budget negotiations, there has been increased funding in their areas of priority, including health

and social care and drug and alcohol services. What approach did Michael Marra take? What asks did he make? What precisely did he get out of the negotiations?

Michael Marra: From the start, the Labour Party set out that we wanted a radical departure in relation to how public services are delivered in this country—a full programme of reform—but nothing was forthcoming.

The cabinet secretary talked about the First Minister's speech yesterday, which was a cobbled-together reannouncement of a series of policies that the SNP has completely failed to deliver. John Swinney sat at the front of that—sidelining, I am afraid, the cabinet secretary—so he is obviously set to bring his anti-Midas touch to the health portfolio.

Frankly, the population can only hope that the First Minister does not replicate his horrendous record in education in our crisis-hit NHS. It was John Swinney who downgraded the exam results of the poorest kids in Scotland. It was John Swinney's incompetent flagship school reforms that crashed and burned, and what is left of them is now being undone by the current education secretary as a substitute for any real intent of her own. Is that the man who we seriously think will be able to fix Scotland's NHS? No one is buying that. The people who created the problems will not be the ones to fix them.

The Government's motion references the UK Government's decision to increase employer national insurance contributions, and we have had a short exchange about that already. We all recognise the challenges that that presents for the private sector and the public sector across Scotland, but the additional money for Scotland from the UK budget is possible only because of the difficult decisions that have been taken by the UK Chancellor of the Exchequer. The SNP has opposed every revenue-raising measure that the UK Labour Government has introduced. At the same time, it has called for additional spending of a scarcely believable £70 billion. Where would that money come from?

Neil Gray: Will the member give way?

Michael Marra: If the cabinet secretary can answer that question this time, I will be glad to hear it.

Neil Gray: During the election campaign, we made it very clear that an incoming UK Government would face a major deficit in its books, which the Labour Party denied. We set out the approach that we have taken in Scotland, which has involved addressing income tax in a more progressive manner. That approach would not have attacked growth or jobs, so why did

Labour box itself in and pursue a policy that has attacked our public services and jobs?

Michael Marra: Perhaps the cabinet secretary missed the Fraser of Allander Institute's analysis of that ludicrous wheeze just last week. According to it—not me—the First Minister's proposal that income tax in the rest of the UK should be lifted in order to pay for services in Scotland would result in a £636 million cut to the Scottish budget. That is how the fiscal framework works. Given that it was negotiated by John Swinney, one would think that he would know that.

Frankly, the proposal has no credibility whatsoever. The SNP is making it up as it goes along. This is a throwback to the First Minister's time as finance secretary, when it was all short-term populism, slash-and-burn budgets and in-year emergency cuts when the cash ran out.

Scotland needs a new direction. Unfortunately, with regard to the reform programme, the substance of the budget does not provide that new direction. Leadership has to be willing to admit when things are not working and to do the hard work of making our public services fit for the future.

I move amendment S6M-16237.3, to leave out from "calls" to end and insert:

"understands that the additional investment in Scotland's public services has been made possible by the UK Government's Autumn Budget, which delivered record funding for the Scottish Government and provided an additional £5.2 billion; believes that the future of Scotland's public services can only be guaranteed through measures to improve fiscal sustainability through public service reform and regrets the lack of progress being made by the Scottish Government in this area; recognises the role that workers in Scotland's public sector play in delivering vital services and regrets that the workforce and public are being failed by years of Scottish National Party mismanagement, which has created major challenges across the public sector in Scotland and left one in six people in Scotland on NHS waiting lists, and calls for the Scottish Government to take meaningful action to reform public services so that they work for users and staff across Scotland."

15:35

Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): I welcome the commitment to investing in our public services, particularly in my portfolio of health and social care. Far from being a burden on the economy, growth in public spending as a proportion of the economy has had a persistent positive link with gross domestic product for more than a century. The mechanisms that link public spending and economic growth include investment in and maintenance of infrastructure, supporting an educated and healthy workforce and redistributing income. There can be no sustainable economic growth without prioritising and properly resourcing our public services. That is why the

increased investment across public services is very welcome.

However, the investment must be strategically deployed to address key challenges, including workforce capacity, service accessibility and a focus on preventative care. I recognise that there are pressures, but striking a balance between those financial constraints and the consequences of reducing spending on critical services remains an immense challenge. Scotland's public finances face significant pressure, which must be met with bold action to ensure the sustainability and long-term stability of our public services. I would also like to point to the role that the Scottish Greens have played in securing progressive income tax reforms in past budgets, ensuring that lower earners in Scotland pay less tax than those elsewhere in the UK. That progressive approach underscores our commitment to fairness and equity in public finance and a commitment to bring about transformative change.

I agree with one of Michael Marra's points. I do not do that particularly often, but he is correct that reform in the NHS urgently needs to be worked on. If I have time, I will come back to that.

Many members have referred to the UK Government's decision to increase employer national insurance contributions. The impact of that move cannot be overstated, especially in Scotland, where public services depend on the hard work of more than 600,000 people, who make up 22 per cent of our total workforce; that is higher than the UK average of 17 per cent. The UK Government's increase in employer national insurance contributions poses a very serious threat to third sector organisations, care providers and charities across Scotland, many of which are already grappling with surging demand and escalating costs as well as declining funding and declining certainty in that funding. There are several estimates that the increases will cost Scottish third sector organisations an additional £75 million in 2025-26. Hospices, homeless shelters and care providers could be hit the hardest.

Several charities have highlighted and described the devastating impact that additional cost will have. The Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland has pointed out that 62 per cent of its members anticipate needing to cut services, with 58 per cent expecting to reduce staff. It has reiterated the calls to exempt third sector organisations from the national insurance contributions increase, and it has pointed out that several providers have noted that such relief could be game changing.

Hospices have also opposed the increase, and a joint letter from 14 Scottish hospices warned the Chancellor of the Exchequer that rising costs

could force them to turn people away from their essential services. It is the same story for social care providers. The increase is projected to cost organisations such as Turning Point Scotland £1.1 million annually, pushing them further into deficit. Nearly 48 per cent of care providers that were surveyed reported that service closures are a real possibility without additional support.

I was grateful to attend the Scottish Care care home conference, along with Brian Whittle, Jackie Baillie and the cabinet secretary, where we heard about the impact on individual care homes. Some said that the additional cost of the national insurance contributions could be £300,000 per care home and some expressed doubt about whether they could weather the additional cost for more than a year.

What happens if we lose some care homes should be a real concern to us all. The impact that that could have on our local authorities and the individuals who support the care homes is staggering, and we need a resolution to that. That is without even talking about the impact on GPs, councils' arm's-length organisations and commissioned services within local authorities. The Labour Government's decision to prioritise a national insurance contribution increase over other tax reform exacerbates those issues. Aligning UK income tax rates with Scotland's progressive system could raise an additional £11 billion.

It is important to recognise the scale of the challenges that we face and to double down on efforts to safeguard Scotland's health and social care systems, and public services more generally, for generations to come. The investments that we welcome today are a step in the right direction, but they must be met with concrete action. We need sustained, focused funding that prioritises prevention, supports overstretched services and ensures equitable access to care. That means shifting from a system that reacts to crises to one that proactively supports good health and wellbeing. I echo the cabinet secretary's calls on the UK Government to do its part by fully refunding the additional costs of employer national insurance contributions for the public sector. That is about protecting vital third sector organisations, sustaining our hospices and ensuring the resilience of the entire health and care system.

I sincerely wish that the chancellor would show more willingness to listen to the concerns of third sector organisations in the same way that she seems to have listened to and acknowledged the demands of the non-dom community recently. At the same time, I reiterate my call on the Scottish Government to tackle the harms that we see across public services and to ensure that health and social care services are properly funded, that we have the plans to tackle the on-going issues

that we are seeing and that we have Scottish public services that generations to come can be proud of.

I move amendment S6M-16237.4, to leave out from “notes the importance” to “sustainability” and insert:

“further calls on the UK Government to fully fund the increase in employer national insurance contributions in commissioned services and arm’s-length external organisations; notes the importance of the public service reform programme to drive future financial sustainability; further notes the success of the four-day week pilot trialled by South of Scotland Enterprise, and calls on the Scottish Government to expand the four-day working week within the public sector workforce”.

15:41

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): Yesterday, I met the First Minister and his officials and intimated that there now stands an agreement between our two parties on the passage of the budget. In a Parliament of minorities, it is incumbent on all of us to act responsibly and to seek common ground wherever we can.

After several rounds of productive negotiation and consultation with stakeholders, we have arrived at the position where, today, I have publicly committed the support of the Scottish Liberal Democrats for the Scottish budget in its transit through the Parliament. All in all, Scottish Liberal Democrat priorities will now be backed by hundreds of millions of pounds of Government investment. They would not have been included without our involvement. We have done good work today.

I will focus now on the extra steps that we have persuaded the Scottish Government to take, which are over and above the commitments that we secured in our first round of talks, as intimated to the Parliament, on the draft budget that was placed before the Parliament in early December.

I declare an interest at this point. Before being elected to Parliament, I worked for eight years for the children’s charity Aberlour, which is in large part a beneficiary of today’s announcements. Before politics, I worked with Aberlour as a youth worker.

A fortnight ago, I told the Parliament about the time when I was introduced to a medical device known as a Tummy Tub. They are, essentially, buckets that are filled with body-temperature water, which simulate the womb to comfort babies who are going through withdrawal because they have been born addicted to drugs. Since 2017, research by my party has shown that 1,500 babies have been born with neonatal abstinence syndrome and show signs of drug addiction

through uncontrollable trembling, hyperactivity and distressed crying.

I am pleased that, today, we can announce further investment in drugs and neonatal services totalling £2.6 million, with a special focus on creating new services to help babies who spend the first days of their lives withdrawing from drugs. That will mean new residential beds for mothers and their babies, and new intensive perinatal services. Scotland has been in the grip of a drugs emergency for years. It desperately needs world-leading services, and the announcement today is one step closer to that goal.

There is £3.5 million for colleges to help them to deliver the skills that our economy and our public services need. What difference will that make? It is about creating a pipeline of a skilled workforce for offshore wind. It can kick-start regional training hubs throughout the college sector. There will be a special focus on Aberdeenshire, Ayrshire, Forth Valley and the Highlands and Islands—the communities where our renewables revolution is set to begin. We know the importance of seizing the big opportunities in renewable power in paving the way for economic growth, and we know about the need to take special care of the communities and regions that must be at the heart of the just transition.

The new investment in colleges that we have secured will create a new care skills partnership to increase the number of new entrants to the care sector and to widen access to caring careers. That is absolutely vital if we are to answer the challenge of delayed discharge in our hospitals, which causes an interruption in flow throughout the whole health service.

We know about the challenges that the care sector faces. The Accounts Commission has shown that unmet need is rising, vacancies are at a record high and a quarter of staff leave their jobs within the first three months. Recently, record numbers of people have been stuck in hospital because there are just not the required community care packages or care places to receive them—they are well enough to go home, but too frail to do so without wraparound support. The requirement to do much more to fix our care sector could not be clearer.

Members will have seen the widespread coverage last week of Corseford College and the worry among all those who use it. We have heard the families talk about everything that the college does and about how, without opportunities such as it offers, students would be left at home feeling isolated. They would miss out on vital opportunities for learning and social interaction, because mainstream colleges are not in a position to deliver what the young people there need and to meet their quite significant learning needs.

The Scottish Liberal Democrats were not willing to stand by and see young people with complex disabilities lose access to learning, so, in our talks with the Scottish Government, we have secured support of £700,000 for those young people, with the prospect of at least the same amount being provided next year. A review is already under way to explore how the funding will best be spent and, whatever happens, my party is determined that nobody should be left behind.

Our agreement also means that there is another £1 million for hospices.

There is an agreement to focus ScotWind revenues on growing the economy, creating jobs, tackling climate change and driving forward reform.

On the pipeline of capital projects, we have persuaded the Scottish Government to look much more closely at replacing the Gilbert Bain hospital in Lerwick, Kilmarnock special school in Cupar and the Newburgh railway station in Fife.

The significant uplift in ferries funding will enable Orkney Islands Council to finalise work on the business case that it requires ahead of new vessels being procured. Meanwhile, the ferries task force will continue to work at pace to prepare the procurement process.

The details that I have set out today are on top of what we secured before the budget was published in December. I do not have time to go through all that now, but I am sure that Willie Rennie will talk about it in his closing speech.

The Scottish Liberal Democrats have been vociferous critics of the SNP for many years, but sometimes we have to sit down and talk if we want to get things done. The budget that the Parliament will pass in the coming weeks is not a referendum on the performance of a Government, but a means of achieving change and fixing problems in our society. We are doing our job by working to improve the budget. There is a long list of policies and projects that we have won for our constituents and for Scotland as a whole, so we will support the budget in its transit through the Parliament.

I move, as an amendment to motion S6M-16237, to insert at end:

“; notes that Scottish Liberal Democrat priorities have been reflected in the first draft of the Budget through the inclusion of the reinstatement of a winter heating payment for pensioners, extra funding for social care, additional funding for local healthcare to make it easier to see a GP or NHS dentist, funding for new specialist support across the country for people with long COVID, chronic fatigue syndrome and other similar conditions, the right for family carers to earn more without having support withdrawn, business rates relief for the hospitality sector, funding to build more affordable homes, enhanced support for local authorities operating ferry services, and the resumption of the work required to replace the Belford Hospital in NHS

Highland and the Princess Alexandra Eye Pavilion in NHS Lothian; calls for further investment in drug and neonatal services, hospices, support for the young people with complex and additional needs attending Corseford College, and colleges, so that they can deliver the skills that the economy and public services need, and further calls for local authorities to receive a fair share of the money for additional employer national insurance contributions when it is received by the Scottish Government.”

15:48

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): I congratulate the First Minister, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government and the negotiators for the Greens and Liberal Democrats on reaching consensus.

One thing that I have taken from the speeches thus far is that some folk have got it all wrong, as per usual. Mr Marra talked about Labour's new direction. The reality is that Labour has a new direction: direction came from the First Minister, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government, the Greens and the Liberal Democrats. By coming together at the table, they have all achieved good for the people of Scotland and have brought forward some of the priorities that they have talked about for a while.

Craig Hoy: Kevin Stewart talks about people getting it all wrong. Will he take this opportunity to apologise for botching the early stages of the national care service, which has cost this country £30 million and done untold damage to people who are waiting in our care system?

Kevin Stewart: No, I will not, because the national care service debate has created better pay for care workers in this country. We see care workers having better terms and conditions: the money that has been spent has achieved that.

I am disappointed about where we are because vested interests, including political parties in this Parliament, have tried to put the kibosh on something that people who receive care, their carers and many people on the front line wanted. I will not apologise. I think that we will see in the very near future the kind of change that was proposed initially, because that is what people out there actually want—and, as I have always said, we are here to represent people.

The budget is set against some unprecedented challenges. The past two decades in the UK have been tumultuous, to say the least. We have had economic turmoil from the collapse of banks, the disaster of Brexit, the Covid-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, the energy crisis, the gilts crisis of Trussonomics and now the debt disaster of Reeves and Starmer, and we have had austerity throughout.

Let us be clear that the challenges that our public services face are significant. As our

population ages, our health and social care needs increase. We are still in the long shadow of the Covid pandemic and the healthcare needs that have stemmed from it.

To make matters worse, the UK national insurance hike will have a devastating impact on the NHS, local government and the third sector. We will meet those challenges only if we address them head on, and the budget will do that.

Public services are the bedrock on which our communities thrive. They form the foundation of a better Scotland. A strong NHS ensures that we have access to good-quality healthcare when we need it. Well-funded social care allows our most vulnerable citizens to live with dignity and respect, and an excellent education system provides our children with the skills and knowledge for them to succeed in life.

The budget will deliver a record £2 billion increase in front-line NHS spending and take overall health and social care investment to £21 billion. That includes an increase in capital spending power of £139 million.

Michael Marra: Kevin Stewart recognises the need for investment in health and social care, but the Finance and Public Administration Committee was told that the plan for a national care service that he brought forward, which he has just talked about, would have cost £3.9 billion. Officials produced that statistic. Does he seriously think that that is what we need?

Kevin Stewart: I do not agree that it would have cost £3.9 billion. I say to Mr Marra and other sceptics that, in social care, we spend huge amounts of money on crisis. The bill was going to change that. We were going to spend money on preventative measures: we were going to spend money on short-term breaks for people and we were looking at how we could ensure that housing was changed to stop crises happening.

Quite frankly, many people have put the kibosh on a lot of that good work through what they have said. I hope, and I am sure, that the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care and the minister will do all that they can to ensure that the voices of lived experience are listened to, and that we drive forward the change that is required. I am not convinced, though, that we will not need further legislation in the future on all that.

The budget will invest in our health and social care system and it is a budget that has brought parties together to put people's priorities first. I hope that, at the end of the process, members will vote for a financial proposal that is very well put together.

15:54

Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests. I am a practising NHS GP.

Today, we are being asked by the SNP Government to celebrate its draft Scottish budget for 2025-26, a budget that it claims invests in Scotland's public services. However, let us not be blinded by hollow headlines and empty rhetoric. The truth is that, after 18 long years of SNP rule, the Government's record is one of failure, mismanagement and broken promises.

Let us begin with Scotland's NHS, which the SNP claims to prioritise. As a GP on the front line, I see the impact of the Government's incompetence every week. Patients wait months or even years for appointments and treatments while GPs, nurses and hospital staff all struggle under intolerable pressure. Targets are missed and promises broken, but the Government's response is more empty announcements that are light on detail and heavy on spin.

Just two days ago, First Minister John Swinney fatally undermined his health secretary, Neil Gray, by making a grand show of pledging 150,000 extra appointments and procedures in the coming year. Like a self-styled interim health minister, he promised reductions in waiting times, the tackling of delayed discharge and a modernising of the NHS, but who does he think he is fooling? The people of Scotland know better because they have seen that movie before.

In 2015, the then health secretary, Shona Robison, pledged to eliminate delayed discharges by the end of that year. She failed and, since that broken promise, more than 3,000 Scots have died while waiting to be discharged from hospital. In 2017, we were promised 800 new GPs, but Scotland now has fewer full-time-equivalent GPs than we had a decade ago, while patient demand has soared. In 2022, the SNP set the target of eliminating waits of more than a year for treatment by September 2024, but today more than 90,000 Scots have been waiting more than 52 weeks for care. We have heard promise after promise but have seen absolutely no delivery.

Meanwhile, Audit Scotland has been crystal clear that our NHS is unsustainable without urgent reform, but reform is precisely what the SNP has failed to deliver. Look at its flagship policy, the so-called national care service. We could all see how flawed the idea was, as could the trade unions, COSLA and countless other experts, but the SNP pressed on regardless. Its grand plan to revolutionise social care was likened to the creation of the NHS itself, but what did we get instead? We saw the £30 million that was spent on preparatory work being flushed down the drain,

and much of the bill has now been torn up, leaving Scotland's social care system worse off than it was three years ago.

The Minister for Public Finance (Ivan McKee): Sandesh Gulhane has spoken about the need for reform and about the reform that he does not want to see. Can he be specific about the sort of health service reform that he does want to see?

Sandesh Gulhane: If the minister would care to read the paper I wrote, called "Modern, Efficient, Local", he would see page after page of policy setting out exactly what we would do.

It is not just incompetence; it is arrogance. The SNP ignored warnings from all quarters, barrelled ahead with a flawed plan and wasted taxpayers' money in the process. It chose to chase headlines and political stunts when Scotland deserves better.

Let me turn to the real cost of SNP mismanagement. We hear a lot from this Government about investment, but it does not tell us that that investment comes straight out of the pockets of hard-working Scots. Under the SNP, Scotland is now the highest-taxed part of the UK. Since the devolution of income tax powers, the SNP has imposed £1.4 billion in tax rises, and we will pay an additional £1.7 billion compared to our counterparts in the rest of the UK.

What do we get in return? We get declining public services, failing infrastructure and an NHS in perpetual crisis. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has even suggested that the SNP's tax policies may have reduced revenues as higher earners move their income or leave Scotland altogether. Let us not forget the SNP's failure to grow our economy, which has cost Scotland an estimated £624 million a year. Instead of taxing Scots into oblivion, we should be growing our economy and delivering resources to our public sector.

This Government has been in power since 2007 and has had every opportunity to deliver for the people of Scotland. Instead, we have seen 18 years of failure, record A and E waiting times—with the Government's four-hour target unmet nationally since July 2020—and more than 10,000 children living in temporary accommodation despite repeated promises.

There have been 21,965 drug and alcohol deaths since 2014, which is a damning indictment of the SNP's so-called public health priorities. In education, Scotland's once-proud reputation has plummeted. Our programme for international student assessment rankings for reading, maths and science are at an all-time low. The SNP's legacy is one of decline. It has failed our NHS, our schools, our economy and the people of Scotland.

I urge the Parliament to reject the SNP's self-congratulatory narrative. It is time to put an end to the Government's culture of excuses and blame shifting. Scotland deserves better—better public services, better leadership and better value for hard-earned taxpayers' money.

16:00

Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): Public services are not only nice-to-haves; for many people, they are lifelines, especially in rural constituencies such as mine. The Scottish Government's draft budget for 2025-26 demonstrates a deep commitment to those lifelines, with £21.7 billion allocated to health and social care and more than £15 billion for local authorities.

The motion ensures fairness and sustainability for Scotland's communities, especially in the north-east, where public services are often the glue holding us together. Across Aberdeenshire, Moray and rural areas more broadly, public services face unique challenges, and long distances to essential services are a daily reality.

I have worked with local campaign groups in Banffshire and Buchan Coast that oppose library closures. Libraries are more than places to borrow books from; they are hubs of community activity offering internet access, educational resources and a sense of belonging for those who might otherwise feel lonely. I recently visited Macduff library, and I have been chatting to constituents who are campaigning against library closures.

Tim Eagle (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I completely agree with the member on the point that libraries are essential. However, does she not agree that the previous year's SNP budget has put so much pressure on local authorities that they cannot sustain front-line public services any more?

Karen Adam: The SNP groups at Aberdeenshire and Moray councils managed to propose a budget that did not include cutting libraries. If the member thinks that it is down to resource, surely he will welcome the extra investment by the Scottish Government.

I met constituents who are campaigning to keep open libraries that have health initiatives, resources and signposting. Surely, if we learned anything during Covid it was how important connection is to our communities. Our public services are places of connection, and a delivery of books in a box disguised as library provision cannot replace that.

The passion and emotive responses from my constituents for their libraries set the temperature for how fiercely we should be defending them. Tory-controlled councils are jeopardising these

much-loved services by earmarking libraries for closure and are leaving our communities in limbo by later announcing that those libraries have been saved only to U-turn on their U-turn mere hours later.

I welcome the Scottish Government's record investment in culture and digital connectivity, which is essential for sustaining vital community assets. However, this is a call to action for all spheres of government to recognise libraries' centrality to rural resilience and to act accordingly. I implore Moray and Aberdeenshire councils to do the right thing and to put the Scottish Government's investment where the people want it. They would not only be doing the right thing; they would be doing the essential thing for their citizens.

The draft Scottish budget underscores the Government's focus on fairness and sustainability. Increased funding for primary care, community health initiatives and local authority grants demonstrates our commitment to leaving no one behind. Rural communities will benefit significantly, with resources strengthening local services. That contrasts with the UK Government's policy decisions, such as the family farm tax and its right-wing Farage-flirting stance on immigration, which ignore Scotland's distinct needs and undermine progress.

Yesterday, the First Minister's speech on NHS renewal laid out a bold vision for strengthening primary and community care, which is significant for rural areas like Banffshire and Buchan Coast, where local GP services are stretched and are often the only healthcare provision for miles. Increased primary care investment will reduce delays, improve outcomes and ensure that no one is left behind due to geography. I welcome that for my constituents.

When the Conservative councillors in Aberdeenshire voted to close overnight minor injury units in Fraserburgh and Peterhead, communities were livid. Those units are vital, as they provide timely care in emergencies to rural communities, who face unique challenges in accessing healthcare, yet councillors made the decision to close them without consulting the very people those services support. That shows an unacceptable disregard for our communities' needs.

The closures are not just administrative changes; they are decisions that could have real and devastating consequences. Delays in accessing healthcare can be the difference between life and death, especially in areas where travel times to alternative services are substantial. My constituents are vehemently opposed to the closures and are demanding answers.

I thank the Scottish Government for its significant investment in our NHS and ask the Cabinet Secretary to do all that he can to urge Aberdeenshire Council to maintain these overnight services. Healthcare access is a fundamental right, and our communities deserve better than decisions being made without their input.

Sadly, Westminster is also out of touch with Scotland, and the UK Government's actions continue to undermine Scotland's public services. The failure to fully fund the additional employer national insurance costs has left our public sector with a significant shortfall, and this attack on local services disproportionately affects rural areas. It reflects a broader pattern of neglect and austerity from Westminster, which the Scottish Government works tirelessly to mitigate. Frankly, Scotland deserves better.

I want to take a moment to put on record my immense gratitude to our public servants who deliver our public services, which are the foundation of a fair and thriving Scotland. The draft Scottish budget demonstrates a clear commitment to investing in our people and our future.

16:07

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to discuss the importance of investing in public services. My involvement in politics was motivated by a belief in public service, including: education, which levelled the playing field for me; social care, which ensured that I could lead an ordinary life with freedom, choice, dignity and control; and a health service that looked after me when I was in hospital for six months, 250 miles away from my family, where staff were my carers, doctors and nurses but also family and friends. Public services have played a vital role in my life, and I will fight for them every single day.

That is why I am deeply worried about the direction that public services are going in on this SNP Government's watch. Not one public service is better now than it was when it came to office, and no number of speeches can convince people that it can turn things around now if it could not do so in the past 18 years.

This year's budget settlement is the best in the history of devolution, with £5.2 billion having been delivered by the UK Labour Government. The SNP Government has an opportunity to properly invest to improve public services and deliver a new direction for the people of Scotland, but it appears that it is yet again unwilling to use the resource that it has to do so.

Members are well versed on my concerns around education, but the detrimental impact that failing public services are having on our young people is clearer now than ever. Last week, during

the debate on the environment in schools, the Government made much of its task forces and strategies, but no comprehensive plan for the workforce and education has been delivered.

Despite the cabinet secretary listing various inputs in relation to education in his speech this afternoon, teachers are overworked, pupils are unsupported, parents are sidelined and opportunities have narrowed. Long waits and gaps in the provision of child and adolescent mental health services, educational psychology and speech and language therapy mean that our young people are held back further.

The cabinet secretary also mentioned colleges, which are institutions that have a proven track record in lifting people out of poverty. Yet, rather than support them, the SNP has managed their decline and stifled opportunity in the process.

It is not just education that the SNP has left struggling; its failure to address the ongoing crises in the NHS and social care are yet more examples of managed decline. As will be the case with others, my inbox is inundated with messages from people who have contacted my office because they are desperate to access the care that they need.

One constituent, at the end of their tether, got in touch to raise concerns about the poor, incoherent and unco-ordinated care that was received by his wife, who has long-term chronic conditions and lives in constant pain—not because of a lack of passion and dedication in the work of staff, who are doing an incredible job against SNP failure, but instead because of the SNP's failure to modernise the NHS for the future.

As a result of this, my constituent was advised in an automated message from her specialist rheumatology nurse that they would take 36 hours to respond, only to eventually be advised that she should phone an ambulance, when she was then told that it would mean a wait of between 19 and 25 hours for it to arrive. When they eventually secured an appointment with his wife's GP, they were redirected to the immediate assessment unit at the Queen Elizabeth university hospital in Glasgow. Nearly 48 hours after calling for specialist help, my constituent's wife was eventually admitted to a rheumatology ward, which was where she needed to be in the first place. That was an extremely stressful and upsetting experience for both of my constituents—and, as we know, it is not by any stretch of the imagination a unique experience. I have to say that it is also not one that frailty teams at the front door of the NHS will help with, if there are no paths to the care that my constituents need.

Let me turn to the significant issues with another crucial public service, CAMHS, where waiting

times, particularly attention deficit hyperactivity disorder assessment times, are causing huge distress, and are further proof that the SNP is presiding over a failing health service. I hear daily about the real-life impacts that those delays have on school attendance, on levels of disruptive behaviour and on already-struggling families .

I have cases of young people who have been waiting from as far back as March 2023 because they are considered low or moderate need. Where is the preventative approach here? The reality is that, for the young person and their family, that need is not moderate. These are not moderate, but life-changing, impacts, and the SNP Government cannot continue to ignore lived experience and pretend that public services are fine.

On housing, since 2023, the Scottish Government and 13 local authorities across Scotland have declared a housing emergency, including in the Glasgow region, which I represent. Glasgow City Council's draft local housing strategy says that the equivalent of 10 applicants were waiting for every home let during the previous 12 months. With rising demand and limited supply, the situation has only worsened.

I am pleased that the SNP budget, following pressure from the Labour Party and numerous organisations, has reversed the £200 million cut to the housing budget, but the damage is already done. In its report on local government finances, published this morning, the Accounts Commission said that there is further evidence that the SNP Government is failing to invest in public service and reverse decline. We know from experience that it is social care and people who are furthest from equality who bear the brunt.

The last public service that I will talk about in the time that I have is transport, where there is a proposed cut to the network infrastructure budget for rail services. Accessible rail travel for all is still a long way away. Despite a Scottish Government review of transport infrastructure in 2022 suggesting that the Strathclyde Partnership for Transport in my region should proceed with plans for the improved transport system, no progress has yet been made.

Ultimately, public services are failing on the SNP's watch, and our constituents are paying the price. With record funding of £5.2 billion delivered by the UK Labour Government, this SNP Government is out of excuses. Only Scottish Labour can turn the dial on public services and set a new direction for Scotland. In 2026, the public will remember that.

16:13

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): Substantial cuts to Scotland's budget from successive UK Governments over several years, along with the deliberate undermining of a welfare support system by the UK Government, has left many challenges for our Scottish Government and our public bodies to tackle. If we then layer on the devastating impact and legacy of Covid-19 on services across our communities, not least in our NHS, the extent of that challenge becomes clear.

However, there is a case for optimism. For instance, I am proud of the clear and unambiguous commitment by the Scottish Government to invest in public services through the draft Scottish budget; £21.7 billion for health and social care investment and more than £15 billion for councils is a strong offer for 2025-26 from the SNP. However, I must admit to many constituents that those are simply numbers. Constituents want to see services in Scotland improve. They do not want to hear the numbers—they want to see the results.

That is why I am also pleased to see that the Scottish budget will give real-terms increased spending power to Scotland's councils of more than £700 million in the year ahead. That is real money to make a real difference across Scotland's communities.

Our NHS will also deliver increased capacity to secure an additional 150,000 appointments and procedures in the year ahead—that is real action. Those are two concrete examples of this SNP budget being focused on making a real difference to the people whom we all want to serve.

Those increases suggest more money from the current UK Government compared with its Conservative predecessor. However, I am wary of placing too much emphasis on that, for several reasons. First, any UK Government must ensure that there are appropriate budgets for Scotland each and every year, and not think that an uplift in one year can fix the damaging UK cuts over many years to Scotland's finances, as well as the on-going mitigations by the Scottish Government in relation to policies from successive UK Governments, including the Scottish child payment, mitigations against the bedroom tax, and soon the two-child cap and the winter heating payment for older people—more money from Scotland's budget to fix the UK's failures.

It is also not acceptable to be seen to be putting money back into the pockets of those in Scotland but then dipping into those same pockets by taxing the Scottish public sector to the tune of £700 million next year. That is what the Labour national

insurance robbery seeks to do, and it is daylight robbery.

Michael Marra: Will the member give way?

Bob Doris: Sorry, Mr Marra, but I will not.

The national insurance tax grab will also impact on key partners that are delivering for Scotland; our GPs and our voluntary sector are just two examples.

I am convener of the Parliament's cross-party group for palliative care. Working in that capacity, I have had extensive engagement with Scotland's hospice sector, with Hospice UK and with the Scottish Government to seek to deliver a sustainable financial model for Scotland's amazing hospices. I put on record the work of two of them—the Marie Curie hospice at Stobhill in my constituency and the St Margaret of Scotland hospice in Clydebank, which looked after my father with great dignity, love and respect in the last days of his life.

I have sought to always work collegiately and on a cross-party basis to support hospices, and I was delighted that Scotland's draft budget had two key strands to support our hospice movement, with £4 million of additional resource funding to assist with the sector's severe financial pressures and, significantly, a guarantee that the Scottish Government will meet future hospice staff uplifts, tied to our NHS agenda for change pay awards. That is vital.

I also commend my colleagues in the Liberal Democrats—which is not something that I do often—who have secured a further uplift of an additional £1 million for 2025-26. I know that that will please the Deputy Presiding Officer, too. That is £5 million of additional funds in total for Scotland's hospices. However, thanks to UK Labour's national insurance robbery, £2.2 million of that will in effect be drained away and grabbed by the UK Treasury. That is simply not acceptable.

UK Labour health secretary, Wes Streeting, has said of the English hospice movement that the UK Government will look to address that shortfall by taking the money from NHS England. Not one new penny for England's hospices—that is the most wretched way of robbing Peter to pay Paul by the Labour Party.

Michael Marra: Will the member give way?

Bob Doris: Yes, Mr Marra, I will.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): Briefly—Michael Marra.

Michael Marra: I am glad that the member welcomes the additional spending, but where does he think that the money should come from? He has set out that he is opposed to the means by which the money should be raised, as did the

cabinet secretary earlier, but the cabinet secretary could not explain where he thought the money should come from.

Bob Doris: Mr Marra might want to look at the *Official Report*, because the cabinet secretary clearly laid out the progressive taxation system that Scotland has implemented over a number of years through this Parliament to get in greater funds—something that the UK Labour Government has been too timid to even consider. There is more concern for non-doms than there is for the public of Scotland or of the UK.

Financial challenges remain in the hospice sector. I would like an acknowledgment that the Scottish Government remains committed to the on-going work to have a sustainable financial model for Scotland's hospices through the years ahead.

The motion talks about public sector reform—as we look to reform health and social care in Scotland, the hospice movement should be at the heart of that. With hospice at home, work over bereavement and a whole variety of worthwhile things that Scotland's hospices do, the hospice sector could do that job the best. Sometimes, such reform does not have to be done directly through public services; it can be done through Scotland's hospices, putting them at the heart of public sector reform.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members that there is no time in hand. Indeed, we are running over time, currently.

16:19

Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con): No pressure, then, Presiding Officer.

As we have heard, the SNP Government, through its budget, continues its 17 years of failure. Unsurprisingly, Scottish Labour has fully endorsed that high-tax, low-income failure by agreeing to abstain on the budget, which I say to Mr Marra is the cheapest deal in devolution's history. That is even before we were taken by complete surprise by the Lib Dems and Greens, who have fallen in behind to support the budget, too.

The failures of the SNP are endless, from a failing economy to a decline in education standards, missed A and E targets and the highest drug death rates in Europe. Furthermore, the cost of SNP bureaucracy has risen by £42 million in the past two years, with more than 2,700 civil servants now employed in the highest pay bands. It beggars belief.

The staggering rise in the cost of Government demonstrates the SNP's staggering hypocrisy. While everyone else is being asked to tighten their

belts, the SNP can always find more money—taxpayers' money—to spend on Government. We urgently need a commonsense approach that will address the bloated Government payroll, cut out excess spending and lower the tax burden on ordinary Scots.

People in Scotland pay the highest rate of taxes in the UK, yet a poll has shown that half of Scots do not think that the higher levels of personal tax that they pay are helping to deliver better public services.

We believe that Scotland's Parliament should be focused on what matters to Scotland's people. Transport is key to tackling inequalities across our country. Good transport links connect communities to schools, colleges, GPs, dentists, shops, leisure facilities and their jobs. I say to Karen Adam that it even delivers the library books to our libraries.

Whether we are talking about ferries, trains, roads, potholes or public transport, it is clear that the SNP is failing to deliver on key services that are vital not only for the people of Scotland but for our economy.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): Does the member agree that it is deeply frustrating that, in this country, it seems that we cannot deliver infrastructure in a value-for-money manner? We seem to have the highest costs per mile to deliver railway or road projects. There needs to be a deep, fundamental review of how we are doing that compared with other countries.

Sue Webber: I welcome those comments, Mr Sweeney. I will touch on that later on, if time permits.

Every community across Scotland deserves affordable and reliable bus services, yet the Scottish Government has failed to make the public transport network cleaner, smarter and more accessible than ever before, which was the stated aim of its Transport (Scotland) Act 2019.

The SNP's nationalisation of ScotRail has been an abject failure by any and every measure. Nicola Sturgeon promised passengers that Scotland's rail service would improve with Government ownership, yet things are manifestly worse than they were under Abellio. Taxpayer subsidies, ticket prices and complaints have all soared, while the number of services and passengers using them have plummeted.

More locally, simple improvements to rail infrastructure would bring obvious benefits, such as building the train station at Winchburgh, which would put a booming town of more than 3,400 new homes on the main Edinburgh to Glasgow line, and building the short Almond chord rail link, which would turn the Edinburgh Gateway station

from a white elephant into a hub for the new west town, as it connects to Haymarket.

The SNP's record on ferries is no better.

Ivan McKee: The member is—rightly—going through a list of things that she would have liked to have seen in the budget. Would it not have made sense when her party was negotiating on the budget if it had put those things forward? Maybe it would have achieved something, like some other parties did.

Sue Webber: We have made the point many times about the need for infrastructure and transport. The SNP's promises to dual the A9 and the A96 have been broken time and time again. I do not know what more we can say. Transport is key to this economy and for growing and making our communities connect and work.

I want to go back to ferries, because here is an area in which we could have saved a little bit of money. Repairs for the ageing CalMac Ferries fleet reached almost £100 million over a decade, the MV Glen Sannox will have less capacity than was agreed to and the future of Ardrossan harbour remains in limbo.

Our roads are in a state of disrepair, with almost half a billion pounds being spent fixing potholes since 2022. Despite that, more than £4 million has been paid out by local authorities for pothole damage since 2019. Edinburgh is the pothole capital of Scotland, which will come as no surprise to anyone who, like me, lives here and drives on the roads. Is there a capital city anywhere else that can boast such an accolade?

The need for investment has been glaring for years, although the improvement of roads such as the A9, A96, A77 and A75 is essential for sustainable economic growth as well as the protection of communities on those routes. Transport Scotland continues to reject plans to speed up dualling of the A9, which I think that we all agree is a vital project. However, the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Fiona Hyslop, has said that the current timetable for the project was "robust and practical".

Thankfully, the Government said in a recent letter to the City of Edinburgh Council that it will not fund the drawing up of a business case for the Edinburgh north-south tram proposal.

The SNP has made a mess of Scotland's train service, made a disaster of our ferry network by mismanaging state-run Ferguson Marine, and left our roads in a state of crumbling disrepair. Its record on transport is disgraceful and, frankly, embarrassing. As usual, the Scottish Conservatives want to be the party of common sense. I implore MSPs to back our budget proposals to cut taxes for workers and businesses.

16:25

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): Judging by Sue Webber's comments, I am not sure whether she is saying that there were never any potholes in Scotland until the SNP came to power, or that there are no potholes elsewhere in the UK.

Sue Webber: I am pretty sure that an intervention from me was expected, given that I was mentioned in the member's opening sentence. Constituents of mine are sick-fed up of potholes. They want them to be fixed and filled, and they want the money to get to local authorities to enable them to do so.

Bob Doris: Edinburgh is a Tory council.

Stuart McMillan: There are potholes all over the place, and, as my colleague quite rightly indicates, the City of Edinburgh Council is run by a coalition of the Conservatives, Labour and the Liberal Democrats, so I suggest that Sue Webber contact her own colleagues on the council to get the potholes fixed.

The parties that are represented in Parliament hold differing views on various issues. However, I believe that, for the most part, we all agree that Scotland's public services are the backbone of our society. Where we disagree typically is on how public services are funded and run, particularly the NHS. That is why I found Labour's logic a bit confusing, as its amendment seems to indicate that 14 years of Tory austerity adversely affected the finances at UK level, but not the finances of devolved Governments across the UK.

The SNP Government has consistently provided record funding for our NHS, and this budget is no different. It delivers a record £2 billion increase in front-line NHS spending, taking overall health and social care investment to £21.7 billion, and that includes an increase in capital spending power of £130 million from the position in 2024-25.

I make special mention of the increase in capital spending power for our health service because of my constituency. We need a new-build health centre in Port Glasgow and further investment in the Inverclyde royal hospital. The cabinet secretary is aware of my concerns on those matters. I remain of the opinion that the IRH needs to be replaced, but I recognise that the capital that is required for the project is significant. However, investment in the building is taking place. I welcomed funding from the Scottish Government to deliver the new Greenock health centre, which opened in 2021. That facility supports a wide range of services, provides access to high-quality healthcare and offers a more welcoming environment for staff and patients to work in. That is why the plans for a new-build Port Glasgow health centre must be progressed. I know from my

recent correspondence with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde that that project remains a priority. I welcome today's news that the Scottish Greens and the Liberal Democrats will support this year's budget, because it will provide our health board with much-needed clarity on what capital resources it will receive and so will inform its infrastructure planning.

Speaking of healthcare more generally, it would be remiss of me not to mention the impact of the UK Labour Government's plan to increase the national insurance contribution, which has already been touched on in the debate. As has been widely reported, the policy, which is a tax on jobs, will have a huge impact on our health and social care services and on public services overall.

It is disingenuous for Labour to boast about providing Scotland with a greater budget settlement only to ignore the implications of its NI tax hike for Scotland's finances. The financial burden of that policy will wipe out more than £700 million of the funding that is being provided to the Scottish Government, which means that our public services and third sector organisations will not be able to reap the full benefits of the investment.

Michael Marra: Does the member recognise that the Fraser of Allander Institute has set out that the cabinet secretary's proposals would actually cost £636 million of the Scottish Government's budget?

Stuart McMillan: I have heard what Mr Marra has had to say, and I am very much aware of the document that sets out that figure. That is one of the things about politics: there is a range of ideas and suggestions, and not everyone is always right.

One other aspect of this debate is that Labour has failed to acknowledge that Scotland has a larger public service workforce than England. The Barnett consequential will not provide us with the full amount that is needed to cover the extra NI cost.

I have written to the UK Government specifically about the impact that Labour's national insurance hike will have on Scotland's social care sector. Organisations that work in my Greenock and Inverclyde constituency have expressed their concerns to me. I have to say at this point that I am the chair of Moving On Inverclyde, an addiction service, and that it has not expressed those concerns to me.

I truly hope that Sir Keir Starmer's Government listens to those concerns, and I would expect Labour MSPs to raise the issue with their Westminster counterparts. Let us be clear: the Scottish Labour Party time and again comes to the Parliament and challenges the Scottish Government on a range of issues, yet it has stayed silent on the fact that its Westminster

bosses are raiding Scotland's healthcare budget by increasing the NI burden that is placed on the NHS and on public services as we go forward into the next year.

I am conscious of the time, so I will finish with this point. We know where the Labour Party stands, and we also know that we have had 14 years of Tory austerity, as well as the Truss-Kwarteng budget, which wiped more than £40 billion from the UK economy and shows that the Tories have no credibility in managing public finances, so we should not listen to them when it comes to anything to do with the economy.

16:32

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate, and I also welcome the increased investment in Scotland's public services that has been made possible by a Labour Government delivering record investment for Scotland, with an additional £5.2 billion being added to the Scottish budget to spend on public services. I pay tribute to all who work so hard in our public sector.

However, the NHS is still on its knees and the social care sector is stretched to breaking point. Council services are still being cut and the justice system is in meltdown. For example, since 2010, North Ayrshire Council has had its budget cut by more than £100 million. In the forthcoming financial year, North Ayrshire Council will still be required to make almost £6 million of cuts to services.

After years of cuts to the share of the cake for local government, with councils disproportionately facing real-terms cuts in funding since 2010 compared with other public services, next year's proposed settlement is far from a fair settlement for local government. In North Ayrshire, cuts such as the removal of all school crossing patrollers and the closure of island services such as the Arran outdoor centre are still on the table. Many of the services that are closest to people's lives, and which they rely on the most, are once again on the chopping block due to budget decisions.

Many councils are planning for council tax rises, not least because they anticipate another unilateral council tax freeze next year. The SNP has consistently broken its pledge to deliver an alternative to the council tax—we need to have a fair, locally collected property tax as soon as possible.

Those issues have been raised repeatedly by me and my colleagues; I have raised them on numerous occasions in the chamber and in writing. Indeed, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government kindly agreed to meet me earlier this month to enable me to make those

representations in more detail, and to explain the cuts that councils across the west of Scotland will be facing this year on the basis of this budget.

The Scottish Government says that health and social care is the priority, but there has been a monumental loss of time and money in dealing with the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill as a result of the Government's political decisions, and the social care system remains in crisis. Money continues to be extracted for private profit; voluntary organisations are still underfunded; and care workers still do not get £15 an hour or decent terms and conditions.

We have record waiting times in our accident and emergency departments, and record numbers of Scots are on waiting lists. Only 43 per cent of NHS staff say that they are able to meet all their demands at work, and they say that that leads to feelings of burnout and further reduces staff retention, which fuels the NHS's reliance on agency workers. That is a very poor use of our taxes, and of money that could be spent on investing in the NHS workforce of the future.

That problem of staff burnout and stress has resulted in the loss of 600,000 days of nursing and midwifery staff time as a result of mental health issues since 2020. NHS Scotland has spent £500 million on agency nurses since 2019. Some of those shifts are advertised at wages at 400 per cent of the level of pay for an NHS-employed staff nurse. I ask members to imagine how demoralising it must be for NHS staff who work beside someone who is on the same shift doing the same job and is being paid four times more than they are. That is no way to run our national health service.

We all agree that it is only by addressing social care that there is any prospect of turning the NHS around. Summits last week and speeches this week do nothing to change the daily experience of overworked NHS staff. We need longer-term solutions that have the trust and the confidence of the workforce. We have an unsustainable model of health and social care in this country, and if we do not change course soon, we will see more staff leaving our service due to burnout, and waiting times continuing to go through the roof.

With this budget, the SNP has failed to take the opportunity to reform public services and make them fit for the future. It is time for a new direction, and I hope that today's debate will lead to some of the actions that are necessary to make that a reality.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to closing speeches. I again remind members that there is no time in hand.

16:37

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): It was quite unnerving earlier, when Alex Cole-Hamilton sat down, to see that it was not only me who was applauding his contribution; there were some SNP members applauding, too. Sometimes, even I do not applaud his speech.

It was also quite difficult to hear Bob Doris being nice to us—and, even more so, to hear Kevin Stewart paying us a compliment—

Kevin Stewart: Come on—I am always nice to you.

Willie Rennie: He is always complimenting us.

I am afraid to disappoint those members: we are not suddenly the SNP's best buddies, and we will remain its biggest critics in the Parliament on occasions.

However, as Alex Cole-Hamilton said earlier, sometimes in the Parliament, in order to get things done, we just have to sit down and talk, and that is exactly what we have done through the budget process.

There was complete silence, on the other hand, when Alex Cole-Hamilton was speaking about the provisions that we have managed to secure for those babies who are addicted when they are born. No one could criticise that contribution, or that change, because it means something to thousands of babies across the country, and it will ease their transition into this world.

Sometimes, when we are debating politics—we all play politics—we should remember that it looks incredibly small in comparison with the situation of babies like that, who are born into this world in very challenging circumstances. I ask members to forgive me, therefore, for saying a bit more about some of the measures like that that we have secured in the budget process.

If members have ever been to the Faroes, they will have seen a series of interconnected tunnels that have brought economic growth to those islands in a way that nobody would ever have imagined. That has been done through fixed links and tunnels, which have boosted the economy and created great opportunities for the people who live there. I want that for Shetland, and the budget will start the process of securing the fixed links that my colleague Beatrice Wishart talks about endlessly. We also want improvements to communications between the islands in Orkney, and those have also been secured in the budget.

How many times have we heard from constituents who are frustrated that they cannot see a dentist to get the essential dental treatment that they want, or from those who are waiting to see a GP and have had to make phone calls in the

morning to try to get an appointment? We have heard from the people of Fort William, who have been desperate for a new Belford hospital, and from people in Edinburgh who have to go to St John's hospital or Haddington to get their eyes treated, who are in desperate need of the eye pavilion. We have secured funding for all those things in the budget.

We know that there is a housing emergency—we have debated that in the chamber. The fact that funding has been restored for the social capital budget is helpful, too.

We have been debating end-of-life care for some time, and the hospices told us bluntly, as Bob Doris highlighted, how desperate they were for additional resources in order to continue to provide services, especially with the increase in employer national insurance contributions that is coming down the track. We have secured an extra £5 million for them, which should make a real difference.

My colleague Alex Cole-Hamilton has been talking a lot about long Covid clinics, because there are people whose lives have been devastated, who have failed to recover from the pandemic and who are still living with the effects to this day. We will now have dedicated clinics for the first time in Scotland.

That was all agreed in the draft budget, which was published before Christmas. We have now agreed additional items, including those relating to the college costs for young people with additional and complex needs. There is a review under way on the provision of that service, but additional resources will be provided for the next two years to deliver some of the things that Pam Duncan-Glancy talked about in relation to her Disabled Children and Young People (Transitions to Adulthood) (Scotland) Bill. The bill did not make progress in the Parliament, but those things are still desperately needed. I hope that that will be one of many services across the country that will be developed over the next few years to give those young people the same chances that everyone else has.

There will be additional support for offshore wind skills through colleges, and we will have more skilled staff in the social care sector, which continues to be in crisis. That will be a big boost. On employer national insurance contributions, more compensation will come from the UK Government for local authorities.

I will mention another area that is incredibly important. We have additional income from the offshore wind ScotWind round, and we will have additional resources from community benefits from other energy projects, particularly in the Highlands and Islands. I want those revenues to be invested

in the economy instead of being used for day-to-day spending, no matter how valid that spending might be. I want to invest in order to create jobs and opportunities for the longer term, particularly for the communities that see wind farms from their houses but do not see direct benefits for themselves. I want that to change.

I hope that the infrastructure investment plan, which will be discussed soon, will result in greater priority for special schools—such as Kilmarnock school in Cupar—the Gilbert Bain hospital in Shetland and the Newburgh train station.

Those are just some of the things that we have debated and discussed in the budget negotiations. I hope that members can see the real benefit of properly engaging in that process to make a difference to people's lives.

16:44

Gillian Mackay: This has been a lively and diverse debate. I will start by reflecting on a few of the contributions to it.

Kevin Stewart is absolutely correct that we have spent far too much money on tackling crisis in social care. We must ensure that social care reform continues and that, despite what has happened with the national care service, it is not simply put in the “too hard to do” category. I also agree that we must ensure that the lived experience testimony and the work in that regard are not lost, so I was grateful to the Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport for outlining how some of that will be retained.

Kevin Stewart: I know that Ms Mackay shares my passion for listening to the voices of lived experience. Does she agree that the chair of the expert panel should be someone with lived experience?

Gillian Mackay: Yes, absolutely. If we have learned nothing else through the whole process, we know that we need to centre the voice of lived experience. If it is possible to get someone with lived experience as the chair of the expert panel, it is essential that we do so and that they are supported to ensure that they can be in the role for a long time.

For that reason, I do not agree with Sandesh Gulhane that the money has been completely wasted. He conveniently forgot to mention the massive impact that years of Tory austerity, Brexit and the Tories' disastrous fiscal policies have had on public services up and down the country.

I welcome the measures that the cabinet secretary outlined for the hospital at home and rapid access for frailty systems and for ensuring that people can see a GP more easily. We see many measures that will make staff's lives, or jobs

easier as well—I am demonstrating the pitfalls of writing notes and scribbling things down as I go.

The roll-out of a health service app is long overdue. Many of the digital advancements that we have spoken about could revolutionise how the public interact with the NHS and how care can be delivered. Although many of the things that the First Minister announced yesterday are welcome, we need fundamental reform across the NHS to improve care and the experience of staff, which is hugely important.

Karen Adam mentioned library closures in her constituency. My Green colleague Mark Ruskell has been working with local people on a campaign on library closures in Perth and Kinross. Karen Adam is entirely correct that libraries are not just about books and that, although literacy is hugely important, their wider social and health benefits for communities, including, in my region, baby and toddler groups, knitting groups and anti-loneliness initiatives, are hugely important. I encourage others to speak in the members' business debate on libraries next week. However, the issue highlights the fragility of services and the urgent need for real conversation about how we make those services sustainable for the long term. Although I do not have any library closures in my region, sport and community venues are being impacted. Some will be transferred to local groups, and, although we should empower communities wherever we can, in some places we are passing on to local groups the burden of a backlog in building maintenance.

Sue Webber mentioned potholes, which are a serious issue. The way that council roads departments are funded is pretty wild, in my opinion. They have to keep back some funding in case of a poor winter, but, if the winter is mild and that funding is not all used, we see a load of potholes getting fixed at this time of year—before the end of the financial year. Climate change and the quality of the surfacing that we are using are major issues; multiyear funding for local authorities would absolutely help with some of the issues. That was a very random piece of knowledge about road surfaces, I note.

Not to allow the Lib Dems alone to have their way on their budget wins, I want to cover the Green impact on this year's budget. We have secured the roll-out of free school meals for up to an additional 15,000 pupils. Across the chamber, we all know and agree that children cannot learn properly when they are hungry. That roll-out of free school meals is an important step towards the Scottish Greens' goal of universal free school meals. We have also secured a year-long regional trial for bus fares to be capped at £2, because we know that the cost of public transport is too high.

That builds on our work in previous budgets to give everyone under the age of 22 free bus travel.

As the climate is being put higher and higher up the agenda by many, we have worked to deliver record funding for major restoration and our environment. Those green projects are creating well-paid jobs in communities across the country, but in rural areas in particular. We have increased tax on the purchase of second or holiday homes; we are moving forward with proposals for a cruise ship levy, the consultation on which will be launched in February; and progress is on-going to give councils more direct power through our consultation on devolving parking fines to local authorities.

Well-funded public services are the bedrock of our society, as Stuart McMillan said. Our amendment also mentions the Government's trial of the four-day working week that was piloted by South of Scotland Enterprise and which demonstrated promising outcomes in terms of productivity, employee wellbeing and job satisfaction. We reiterate our calls to the Government to build on that trial, to support a better work-life balance and to position Scotland as a leader in progressive and innovative workforce policies.

I still believe that the biggest challenges that we face in public services are sustainability, demand and the looming issue of national insurance contributions. We need a change there, and I hope that some Labour colleagues recognise the issues and will make representations to their colleagues at Westminster.

We recognise the importance of the public service reform programme in driving future financial sustainability. Transforming how our services are designed and delivered is key to ensuring that they remain effective, efficient and responsive to the needs of Scotland's people, with the capacity to react and flex to any challenges that may arise.

16:50

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): It is a pleasure to support the amendment in the name of my colleague Mr Marra. There has been an interesting series of speeches this afternoon, reflecting on the great pride that this country has in its tradition of public service—a tradition that we hold dear and a great inheritance from previous generations, going back over a century, of building the public institutions from which we benefit today. The challenge for this generation has been to sustain, grow and build on that legacy.

A couple of weeks ago, I celebrated my birthday and thought about when I was first able to cast my vote as an 18-year-old, in 2007, at the election

when the present party in government first came into office. At that time, I was very attracted by what was being offered by what became the Government, in particular on scrapping and reforming the council tax and dumping student debt. As someone who was just about to leave high school to go to university, the idea of dumping the debt was very attractive, and I was seduced into casting my regional list vote for the SNP on that occasion. Sadly, I feel that, as a naive 18-year-old, I was badly misled in that investment.

Eighteen years on, with the long years of this Government in power, it is difficult to see what truly great reforms have been achieved during that generation in office. Reflecting back on that period when I was growing up, it has certainly been a difficult time for our country and for my generation—the first generation in history destined to be poorer than their parents. We have grown up in the shadow of a banking crisis, which was then turned into a manufactured crisis in public expenditure by the Conservatives. However, the bad hand that the Scottish Government might have had in recent years has been played very badly indeed. We have seen a Government increasingly characterised by reaction rather than by the prevention of problems, with a focus on stripping out cost rather than building long-term value. Those themes were at the heart of many of the speeches that were adumbrated this afternoon.

In a nation where we have had declining living standards and stagnant growth and wages, the chess moves available to build back and improve our public services are very challenging. There are no cost-free options to develop long-term value creation. It has been somewhat disingenuous—or perhaps naive—of some parliamentarians to suggest today that there are cost-free options available to this country for reforming our public services, putting them on a trajectory where we can build a positive legacy for future generations.

Many members reflected on the decline in local services. The member for Banffshire and Buchan Coast talked about libraries.

Neil Gray: I accept the challenges that exist in my area of health and social care, but does the member accept that the principles that we set out yesterday on shifting the balance of care, investing further in primary care, investing in reducing waiting times and increasing capacity in social care are ones that we would share, and areas where we can see better public services coming forward?

Paul Sweeney: The cabinet secretary makes a fair point but, as ever, the Government is rich on rhetoric and poor on the delivery of tangible benefits, and that is after 18 years—my entire

adult life—of having the privilege of being in power in this country. That opportunity of being in government has been squandered in many respects, not least in relation to the flagship national care service, and that was largely because the Government seemed to want to be an inch deep and a mile wide on the issue. It failed to make the key calls on the structural reform that is needed in social care. As was mentioned earlier by my colleague the member for West Scotland Ms Clark, 77 per cent of residential care capacity in this country is delivered by private providers. The Scottish Trades Union Congress has estimated that, on average, £4,000 per bed is extracted in profit from people seeking social care. The most profitable care home provider extracts £13,600 per bed.

That is the fundamental problem at the heart of public service delivery. We are not making the big calls that previous generations made, such as when building the national health service, by saying, “We’re not going to have private profit extraction in our acute hospital system; we are going to remove the grubby pound sign from the provision of healthcare”. Those are the sorts of calls that were needed and, because of the failure to make those calls, we have ended up with the programme falling apart and with the bill a pale imitation of what was originally very ambitious.

Similar issues due to failures to reform have been laid out by colleagues. Pam Duncan-Glancy highlighted colleges, for example. A couple of years ago, I spoke to a college principal in Glasgow who talked about local industrial and economic needs and why the college could not make bespoke courses and programmes to serve local industrial requirements. He said, “We’re not able to do that—to diverge, to innovate or to be enterprising”. As a result, one of the biggest industries in Glasgow is having to build its own college to train people for its workforce, because the local colleges are not able to provide for its requirements.

That is another example of wasted public service innovation and a wasted opportunity to reform public services. I know that many members and, indeed, ministers share these frustrations, but there seems to be an inability to fundamentally reform the civil service and the institutions of Government to respond to the generational challenges that we face. Many of the speeches in the debate came up short in trying to address the fundamental issues.

We have to recognise that every aspect of making decisions comes with costs. The member for Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn cited hospices, for example. Yes, there will be a challenge due to the change to national insurance contributions, but, similarly, the change in NHS

pay structures for nursing has meant that hospices have struggled to recruit nurses because of the pay differential. In addition, the business rates that councils are extracting from hospices—

Bob Doris: Will Paul Sweeney give way?

Paul Sweeney: Yes, I am happy to give way.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No, you cannot, Mr Sweeney.

Paul Sweeney: Ah, sorry—I am running out of time. I am afraid that I have to conclude.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have run out of time.

Paul Sweeney: Many members made observations about local challenges. We need fundamental reform and we need to build greater value in our public services. That is about moving away from a system of reaction to one of prevention and looking at not just short-term costs but long-term value.

16:56

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): This has been a wide-ranging debate with varied contributions. We have had members talking about the health service, education, transport and housing, as we might expect from a debate on our public services.

The context is the budget, and we are being asked by the Scottish Government to celebrate the Scottish budget and how it invests in public services. I want to drill down into that claim a little bit. Let me start by setting the context. I say this for the benefit of Bob Doris in relation to his contribution. It is a reality that the block grant from Westminster for the coming financial year is the highest in the history of devolution. It is nearly double in real terms what it was when the Parliament was first set up—

Bob Doris: Will Murdo Fraser give way?

Murdo Fraser: Let me just finish my sentence, Mr Doris, and I will give way.

As I said, it is nearly double what it was when the Parliament was first set up back in 1999, even accounting for the additional responsibilities in areas such as welfare.

Bob Doris: Does Murdo Fraser recognise that this is a budget for one year? If we look at the finances to the Scottish Government from 2010 to 2017, when the Conservatives were in charge in Westminster, we see that there was a 7.4 per cent cut to Scotland's discretionary spend budget. Will Mr Fraser apologise for that?

Murdo Fraser: I do not recognise those figures at all. All that Mr Doris is doing is selectively taking

a very short period. Over the piece, since devolution in 1999, we are looking at nearly double the amount of money in real terms compared with what there was. The real questions, which I will come to in more detail, are where all that money has gone and whether it is being spent effectively.

Another point that members on the SNP benches never mention when they are talking about the budget is that, under the Barnett formula, we have around 20 per cent more per head of population to spend on public services in Scotland than is spent south of the border. The SNP never wants to acknowledge that.

According to its own claims, the Scottish Government has boosted the budget by some £1.7 billion due to tax rises, making Scotland the highest-taxed part of the United Kingdom—although, of course, the net benefit to the Scottish budget is substantially below the sums that the headline figure would suggest.

Looking at the budget, the Institute for Fiscal Studies has said that, according to its calculations, spending on public services from the current year to next year is flat in real terms and due to fall the year after.

Against that backdrop and all the claims of extra money going in, we would expect public services in Scotland to be streets ahead of what we see in other parts of the United Kingdom. We would expect a much better health service, a much better education system and better-quality roads, yet that is simply not people's experience after nearly 18 years of SNP Administrations. In the debate, we heard members in all parts of the chamber highlight issues that illustrate that point. According to a poll that was carried out by True North, which was published at the weekend, 49 per cent of the Scottish population feel that they are not getting value for money for their higher tax bills and just 32 per cent think that public services are better as a result; the public are not convinced that that extra money is delivering greater benefits for them.

Yesterday, the First Minister set out his new plan to save the NHS. Sidelining the hapless health secretary, John Swinney proposed NHS recovery and renewal. Why, after 18 years of the SNP being in charge, does the NHS in Scotland require recovery and renewal? That question answers itself when we look at the state of the NHS and at the record waiting times. Scotland has many times more people on the longest waits than south of the border even though the population there is much higher. Every member in the chamber will have constituents raising their frustrations about having to wait for excessive periods for vital treatments and, in some cases, because they can afford it, having to go private

rather than facing months, if not years, of pain and distress. Worse still, others are having to use their life savings, dip into their pensions, borrow money or even remortgage their homes because the NHS is failing them.

The other frustration that I continually receive complaints about is the difficulty that people have in getting appointments with their GP. In too many parts of the country, the 8 am rush for appointments is letting people down. If those who have an urgent and pressing need to see a doctor can get through first thing in the morning, they will take whatever is available to them, or they will persist. The real concern is for those who do not have an emergency or an urgent situation but have that annoying pain or itch or something troubling them that is not hugely inconveniencing them but is just a worry. If they cannot get through and get an appointment after phoning two or three times, they will put it off because it is not urgent.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I very much share the member's annoyance that people cannot get through to a GP and can contact them only by phone, but does he accept that it is the private practice that is causing that and not the NHS at large?

Murdo Fraser: It is such a widespread practice that I do not think that we can blame it on individual GPs.

The problem is that, because people cannot see their GPs in time, they end up developing more serious long-term conditions, which puts a greater burden on the NHS. I looked carefully at what the First Minister said yesterday about access to GPs, but all that was offered was warm words about the need to increase capacity in general practice and to develop a new quality framework to make GPs more consistent across Scotland. There was no detail on how that will be improved. As Sandesh Gulhane said, it is many years since we had the promise from the SNP to recruit more front-line GPs. In fact, we have fewer GPs today than we had when that promise was made.

I turn briefly to Scottish education. Our educational outcomes have gone backwards in international rankings after 18 years of the SNP being in power. We know that outcomes in England are considerably better than they are in Scotland, despite England spending substantially less per pupil than is spent here.

I could say much more about the failure to deliver affordable housing and meet housing targets.

We now know that the budget will go through. The Liberal Democrats have sold their souls. Alex Cole-Hamilton is reneging on his promise not to

vote for a budget that contains spending on the constitution or independence.

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

Murdo Fraser: Do I have time, Presiding Officer?

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): You must conclude, Mr Fraser.

Murdo Fraser: I apologise to Mr Cole-Hamilton that I do not have time. However, I give him credit, because at least he got something for helping to pass the budget. The Labour Party got nothing. It sold itself for precisely zero.

So much for a competition. It is left to my party to provide proper opposition to the SNP. We will not be voting for this wretched budget, even if we are the only ones who will stand up to the SNP.

17:04

The Minister for Public Finance (Ivan McKee): The debate has been interesting in parts, when members have recognised the sustained commitment by this Government to invest in our public services in order to better the lives of people across Scotland, and when they have recognised the importance of the 2025-26 Scottish budget in delivering that.

The budget will invest in public services, lift children out of poverty, support the most vulnerable people in our society, act to address the climate emergency and support jobs and economic growth.

In short, the budget brings hope to people. It will renew our public services and deliver a wealth of new opportunities in our economy. As was outlined by the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, the budget will deliver a significant increase in funding for key public services, including health and social care, local government and education.

We in the Scottish Government recognise that lasting progress can be achieved only through collaboration and with the support of as many members as possible across Parliament. That is why we are fully committed to working together with others to accomplish our shared goals. This Government has reached agreement with the Scottish Liberal Democrats, the Scottish Greens and, today, with Alba, to support the budget, which allows us to deliver on areas of shared priority and to ensure stability for Scotland's public services.

As was outlined in the letter that was sent this morning by the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government to the Finance and Public Administration Committee, the details of amendments that are to be lodged at stage 2 have

been shared. For the benefit of members in the chamber, and for the public, I am pleased to confirm the following key additions to the budget. There will be a pilot of a £2 cap on bus fares in a regional transport partnership area. There will be increased funding for nature restoration, and expanded eligibility for free school meals to include pupils in secondary school years 1 to 3 in eight local authorities. There will be increased investment in drug and neonatal services and strengthened support for hospices. There will be targeted investment in the college sector and continued support for college costs, and there will be greater flexibility regarding capital and resource funding for Orkney Islands Council.

The Government is fully aware that lasting progress depends on co-operation between all parties in Scotland's interests, and is pleased to say that, in the spirit of co-operation across Parliament, we will deliver a budget by Scotland, for Scotland.

The process by which we arrived at this point has been interesting and instructive. We have seen parties across Parliament acting as they should by coming forward with considered proposals that reflect their priorities, and working through a series of meetings as we came together to do our best for the people of Scotland, as we should.

Fergus Ewing: The minister has mentioned increases in expenditure. Can he describe three reductions in expenditure from reform of public services, in particular in the NHS, and will he pursue, investigate and set a deadline for NHS Highland to deliver the promised return of vaccination services from the expensive, unsafe and unwieldy centralised system that it has provided for the past couple of years back to a better, safer and cheaper GP-led local service?

Ivan McKee: I will say more about public service reform shortly, but I can indicate that we have saved more than £200 million in the past two years because of the steps that we have taken to make digital services and our estates footprint more efficient, to remove duplication across our public services and to automate public service provision where that is possible. We will continue that work at an increased pace.

With regard to the specific issue that Fergus Ewing raised—and has raised more than once today—regarding vaccine delivery by NHS Highland, I know that my colleague the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care is working hard on that, and I understand that the member will get a response on that specific issue very soon.

The budget process has been a master class in negotiation skills, for better or worse. It has been

interesting to see a number of members from across the chamber standing up today with lists of things that they would like to have seen in the budget. Those members can be divided into two groups. Some are standing up with a list of things that they have managed to achieve because they were part of the negotiation process and worked painstakingly and maturely to deliver on areas that were important to them and their constituents. Others have stood up and shouted into the wilderness about the things that they would like to have seen but did not achieve because they did not take part constructively in the process. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear the minister.

Ivan McKee: Pardon?

The Presiding Officer: I was asking colleagues to ensure that we can hear you, minister.

Ivan McKee: Yes—it is very important to listen to what I have to say in my closing remarks.

Paul Sweeney's contribution was very thoughtful and considered. He talked about his generation, which is a reference back to "My Generation", for those who can remember that far back. On the specific point that he raised on the differential in relation to hospice pay, that has been addressed in the budget. I am sure that, based on that, Paul Sweeney will be able to vote for the Scottish Government's budget.

As I said, not everyone got everything that they wanted, apart from one party, and I will come on to that in a minute. Everyone came forward with their asks and, through that negotiation process, we reached a conclusion. One party got everything that it asked for—the Labour Party, which asked for nothing and got nothing in the process, due to its decision to abstain on the budget.

I am working hard with colleagues across Government and the wider public service to deliver public service reform. In response to Fergus Ewing's intervention, I have identified many of the achievements that we have delivered in relation to financial return and other work that is happening across the programme. We have set out clearly our programme of public service reform to Parliament. There is a strong focus on the data, levers and workforce that will deliver efficiencies and better public services for the people of Scotland.

To enable that work, we will deliver—within the budget, when Parliament votes for it—an invest to save fund in 2025-26, which will be supported by £30 million of funding and recognises the need to remove barriers, catalyse efficiency, improve effectiveness and carry out productivity projects as part of the reform agenda. We will continue to

modernise and streamline public services to improve efficiency and outcomes.

Craig Hoy: We found out this week that there are now 500 more senior civil servants in the Scottish public sector than there were two and a half years ago. Why?

Ivan McKee: That is a good question, and I will answer it. The first point to recognise—which Craig Hoy did not talk about—is that, two years ago, the Scottish Government’s core workforce reduced by 0.5 per cent. Last year, it reduced by 2.5 per cent, and this year it will reduce significantly. We are continuing to reduce the core Scottish Government workforce.

In answer to the member’s question about why there are more higher-paid civil servants in that cohort, he will find that the contractor workforce in the Scottish Government was reduced by almost half during that period. A significant number of very highly paid contractors who work in digital and information technology have been replaced by Scottish Government employees who deliver the same service, in many cases for less than half the equivalent contractor cost. That is the reason for that factor in the data. The Government is looking at the whole cost and we are considering where we can take out expensive contractors and deliver a service more cheaply in-house. In parallel, we are continuing to reduce the headcount in the core Scottish Government.

In conclusion, it is important to recognise that the UK Government’s decision to increase employer national insurance contributions has caused great anxiety, uncertainty and concern across the wider public sector, as well as for businesses and charities. We estimate that public services here face a bill of more than £700 million as a result of that tax increase. The indications that we receive from Whitehall are that the funding that is forthcoming will be far short of what will be required to cover those costs.

We are fully utilising the powers that the Scottish Government has granted to us under the current devolution framework to prioritise and fortify Scotland’s public services. The budget delivers on those priorities.

I urge members to support the motion and the Scottish Government’s budget for 2025-26.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on investing in public services through the Scottish budget.

Decision Time

17:14

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): There are five questions to be put as a result of today’s business. I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Craig Hoy is agreed to, the amendments in the name of Michael Marra and Gillian Mackay will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S6M-16237.2, in the name of Craig Hoy, which seeks to amend motion S6M-16237, in the name of Neil Gray, on investing in public services through the Scottish budget, 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: We move to the vote on amendment S6M-16237.2. I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Craig Hoy is agreed to, the amendments in the names of Michael Marra and Gillian Mackay will fall. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is closed.

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I am not sure whether the app worked properly. I would have voted no.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr McMillan. I can confirm that your vote was recorded.

For

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by Gillian Mackay]
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 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]
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)

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)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Abstentions

Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-16237.2, in the name of Craig Hoy, is: For 26, Against 86, Abstentions 1.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Michael Marra is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Gillian Mackay will fall.

The next question is, that amendment S6M-16237.3, in the name of Michael Marra, which seeks to amend motion S6M-16237, in the name of Neil Gray, on investing in public services through the Scottish budget, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer—

The Presiding Officer: I can confirm that your vote has been recorded, Mr McMillan.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)

Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by Gillian Mackay]
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)

MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]
 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]
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 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)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-16237.3, in the name of Michael Marra, is: For 20, Against 90, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-16237.4, in the name of Gillian Mackay, which seeks to amend motion S6M-16237, in the name of Neil Gray, on investing in public services through the Scottish budget, 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)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)

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)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and
 Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by
 Gillian Mackay]
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP) [Proxy vote
 cast by Rona Mackay]
 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)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley)
 (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)

Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire)
 (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Abstentions

Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-16237.4, in the name of Gillian Mackay, is: For 63, Against 46, Abstentions 4.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-16237.1, in the name of Alex Cole-Hamilton, which seeks to amend motion S6M-16237, in the name of Neil Gray, on investing in public services through the Scottish budget, 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)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)

Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 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)
 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) [Proxy vote
 cast by Rona Mackay]
 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]
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 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)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley)
 (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumarton) (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, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire)
 (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Abstentions

Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by
 Gillian Mackay]
 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-16237.1, in the name of Alex Cole-Hamilton, is: For 59, Against 45, Abstentions 8.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S6M-16237, in the name of Neil Gray, on investing in public services through the Scottish budget, 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)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)

Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don-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)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by Gillian Mackay]
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]
 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]
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 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)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

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

Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O’Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division—[*Interruption.*]

I would be grateful, colleagues, if we could have some focus. Thank you.

The result of the division on motion S6M-16237, in the name of Neil Gray, on investing in public services through the Scottish budget, as amended, is: For 67, Against 46, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament welcomes the investment in Scotland’s public services through the draft Scottish Budget 2025-26; notes that £21.7 billion for health and social care investment and over £15 billion in funding for local authorities is being provided; calls on the UK Government to fully fund the additional cost of its increase in employer national insurance contributions, noting the significant impacts on public services, including social care, if it does not fund it in full; further calls on the UK Government to fully fund the increase in employer national insurance contributions in commissioned services and arm’s-length external organisations; notes the importance of the public service reform programme to drive future financial sustainability; further notes the success of the four-day week pilot trialled by South of Scotland Enterprise; calls on

the Scottish Government to expand the four-day working week within the public sector workforce; celebrates the key role that the Scottish public service workforce plays in delivering these services across Scotland; notes that Scottish Liberal Democrat priorities have been reflected in the first draft of the Budget through the inclusion of the reinstatement of a winter heating payment for pensioners, extra funding for social care, additional funding for local healthcare to make it easier to see a GP or NHS dentist, funding for new specialist support across the country for people with long COVID, chronic fatigue syndrome and other similar conditions, the right for family carers to earn more without having support withdrawn, business rates relief for the hospitality sector, funding to build more affordable homes, enhanced support for local authorities operating ferry services, and the resumption of the work required to replace the Belford Hospital in NHS Highland and the Princess Alexandra Eye Pavilion in NHS Lothian; calls for further investment in drug and neonatal services, hospices, support for the young people with complex and additional needs attending Corseford College, and colleges, so that they can deliver the skills that the economy and public services need, and further calls for local authorities to receive a fair share of the money for additional employer national insurance contributions when it is received by the Scottish Government.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Brexit (Scotland)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-16143, in the name of Clare Adamson, on Brexit harm to Scotland, five years since the United Kingdom left the European Union.

The debate will be concluded without any question being put. I invite any members who wish to participate in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes that January 2025 marks five years since the UK left the EU; recognises that people in Scotland voted to remain within the EU and that there was a majority vote for remain in every one of Scotland's local authority areas, and considers that, despite this, Scotland was removed from the EU against the democratic wishes of the people of Scotland; believes that Brexit has caused, and continues to cause, substantial harm to the Scottish and UK economies; acknowledges reports that there is an estimated loss of £2.3 billion every year in public revenues for Scotland as a result of Brexit; notes with concern that the Office for Budget Responsibility has reportedly estimated that Brexit will reduce the overall trade intensity of the UK economy by 15% in the long term; understands that a recent study from the Centre for Economic Performance at the London School of Economics found that goods exports from the UK dropped by £27 billion in 2022 alone as a result of Brexit; further understands that the Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply revealed problems with supply chains and trade routes, exacerbated by Brexit, which could see imports cost between 5% and 20% more, fuelling a new cost of living crisis; considers that Brexit continues to pose significant barriers to people coming to live and work in Scotland, including in vital public services; believes that Brexit is impacting young people's right to live, work and study in 27 European nations, and denying future generations a wealth of economic, social and cultural opportunities, and notes the belief that Scotland should rejoin the EU to rebuild strong ties with fellow Europeans and to ensure that businesses, students and workers in Scotland, including in the Motherwell and Wishaw constituency, can benefit from access to the world's largest single market and the rich cultural, social and economic benefits that membership of the EU brings.

17:29

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): This January marks five years since the United Kingdom left the European Union—five fraught and turbulent years for Scotland's manufacturers, exporters, service providers, artists and musicians.

Deputy Presiding Officer,

"We announced that we would leave the European Union before we had a plan for growth outside the EU."

Those are not my words, but the words of Kemi Badenoch. For once—for what is probably the only time—I agree with her. However, I would argue that there was a lack of not only a plan for growth,

but a plan, full stop. Nonetheless, it was nice to hear a rare bit of honesty from a Tory leader on Brexit.

Let us hear from three more Brexiteers. Michael Gove opined:

“The day after we vote to leave, we hold all the cards and we can choose the path we want”.

However, we now have fewer jobs; food prices at an all-time high; and less trade.

Dominic Cummings had to concede that the figure of £350 million for the national health service that was plastered on a bus was a lie. Nigel Farage vowed to tear up the EU red tape holding Britain back. Well, our exporters now bemoan the new arrangements. The National Farmers Union Scotland told us that the trading relationship under

“the TCA ... might be ... tariff free and quota free, but it is certainly not friction free.”—[*Official Report, Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee*, 7 March 2024; c 2.]

Many small and medium-sized enterprises are simply giving up their EU market share because trying to navigate the new exporting regime is not worth the cost, time and project wastage.

I do not have a fourth Brexiteer quote, as the young trainee could not access Erasmus+ and so was unable to take part this evening.

The people in Scotland sensibly voted to remain in the EU. There was a majority vote for remain in every one of Scotland’s local authorities, but Scotland was removed from the EU against the democratic wishes of the Scottish people. Brexit has caused, and continues to cause, substantial harm to the Scottish and UK economies.

Recently, the National Institute of Economic and Social Research think tank said that UK exports from the service sectors could be cut by up to 60 per cent. For Scotland, that would be equivalent to a £2.3 billion hit because of Brexit. The Office for Budget Responsibility has reported an estimate that Brexit will reduce the overall trade intensity of the UK economy by 15 per cent in the longer term. I understand that a study from the centre for economic performance at the London School of Economics found that, in 2022 alone, goods exports from the UK dropped by £27 billion as a result of Brexit. The Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply revealed that problems with supply chains and trade routes, exacerbated by Brexit, will see imports cost between 5 and 20 per cent more, fuelling a new cost of living crisis.

Brexit continues to pose significant barriers to people coming to live and work in Scotland, including in our vital public services. Over 10 years ago, Scotland was told that the only way for us to stay in the EU was to remain part of the UK and

vote no. Brexit has been a disaster for Scotland. It has made us poorer; it has diminished our international standing; and it has cut us off from the world’s largest economic market. It is a disaster that has denied people in Scotland a wealth of opportunity, rich cultural exchanges, academic collaboration and the right to work, study and live in 27 other nations. A generation of people in my Motherwell and Wishaw constituency have had rights that I enjoyed for most of my adult life ripped away from them against their expressed will.

Brexit is manifestly harming our present and future. I am not speaking this evening as convener of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee, but during the committee’s work on the impact of Brexit and its review of the trade and co-operation agreement, we have heard witness after witness tell of the detrimental impacts of Brexit.

Sky News reported findings that

“by 2035, the UK is anticipated to have three million fewer jobs, 32% lower investment, 5% lower exports and 16% lower imports, than it would have had if the UK had not left the EU.”

Brexit is also a tale of two countries: it is certainly the best of times for Ireland and the worst of times for us. In 2024, the Republic of Ireland, as a small nation in Europe with a similar population, economy and cultural links to those of Scotland, enjoyed a significant budget surplus, at around 8 per cent of its gross national income. It is a small country in surplus, while we are dragged down by a £2.77 trillion debt.

According to the centre for economic performance, Brexit has cost each household

“£250 when only considering the impacts on food since December 2019 ... This aggregates up to £6.95bn overall for UK households.”

Last week, the Musicians Union, having already acknowledged the impact of cabotage and visas on touring artists and musicians, had to issue guidance to artists on the general product safety regulations. It has been

“noted that the introduction of these regulations, which required certifiable safety checks and labels on goods such as CDs, vinyl, T shirts, mugs and other merchandise exported to the EU and Northern Ireland, had not been foreseen by most people in the music business.”

Ewan Robertson gave evidence to our committee on those areas and spoke of how much more difficult it is now for artists to tour and work in Europe.

There is a litany of quotes that I could have brought to the chamber—for example, from Aldomak, the company that has saved the Scottish ice-cream nougat wafer. It previously traded frequently with Europe, but it gave evidence to our

committee that it is no longer even trying to export to Europe. We also heard from our fishing industry about stock that was ruined. We know that Brexit just keeps giving us more bad news.

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

17:36

Tim Eagle (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I quickly remind members of my entry in the register of members' interests, as I am a farmer.

I thank the member for the debate—I do not enjoy a debate on Brexit, because I do not think that it is necessary, but she brought it to the chamber, so I say well done for that. However, there is a pretty one-dimensional focus on Brexit, with all the negatives and none of the potential positives, so perhaps I can touch on a couple of those positives in a minute.

I am one month away from my one-year anniversary as a member of the Scottish Parliament. In that time, I have been extremely fortunate to have participated in only a single Scottish National Party debate on Brexit, as that is quite the grievance that it likes to bring to the chamber, and I was told at one point that such debates were very common. I say that not because I do not want to talk about Brexit or the benefits of it—I do not want to shy away from facing up to the problems of significant constitutional change—but because it has been nearly a decade since voters across these isles voted by a clear majority to leave the EU.

It has, as Clare Adamson's motion states, been five years since we left the EU. However, the motion does not, at any point, mention fishing or farming—two sectors in which I have a great interest. These issues are very important to the thousands of farmers and fishermen whom I represent in my region and across the whole of Scotland. Our farmers knew of the challenges in the common agricultural policy, and our fishermen loathed the common fisheries policy. Both those policies were in place and designed to benefit everyone other than British farmers and fishermen.

The SNP, Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the Greens want us to go back into those policies, but that view is not what I hear when I speak to farmers and fishermen in my region. Since we left the EU, the Scottish Government has benefited from the opportunity to design—

Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): Does the member accept, when he talks about the fishing industry, that there are many sectors in that industry, and that the fish processing sector is suffering considerably as a

result of Brexit, in respect of not just red tape but labour?

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

Tim Eagle: I met with Jimmy Buchan from the fish processing sector quite recently, and Karen Adam is right that it has some recruitment challenges, but I say to the SNP that the answer is not to take us back into the common fisheries policy, which would destroy the Scottish fishing sector in total.

Since we left the EU, the Scottish Government has benefited from the opportunity to design a uniquely Scottish system of agricultural support and policy. Without the bureaucratic chains of Brussels, we can create an approach for our diverse group of agricultural industries that helps to deliver on our climate goals and to deliver food security for our country. Rather than returning to the one-size-fits-all approach of the common agricultural policy, we can ensure that we have a system that rewards farmers for their hard work and daily sacrifices, and supports the local environment.

The transition has not been easy; I readily acknowledge that. Scottish farming and crofting spent more than 40 years effectively being governed by the common agricultural policy, and leaving that was always going to lead to a few difficulties. That has not been helped, however, by the fact that the SNP has been incredibly vague in articulating its vision for the future of Scottish agriculture, and in passing a bill—

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): Will the member take an intervention?

Tim Eagle: Absolutely.

Finlay Carson: Would the member agree that the SNP is all about the politics of grievance? That is portrayed in no better way than by our colleague Emma Harper bizarrely calling for powers over agricultural funding to return to the UK Government, when it is firmly in the Scottish Government's hands to deliver a fair settlement.

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

Tim Eagle: We were all totally shocked by that news release yesterday. So, the SNP wants to give powers back to London; that is very interesting. However, I will move on to consider our fishermen.

Fishermen were restricted by the common fisheries policy and were often squeezed out of domestic fishing grounds by vessels from within the EU, which had near-unfettered access to our waters—

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

I seek your guidance. When a member stands up in the chamber and misquotes what another member has said, for instance in committee, what measures could a member take?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That is not a point of order. The member is well aware of the measures that members can take if they feel that the record needs to be corrected.

I call Tim Eagle to continue—I can give you a little bit more time, Mr Eagle.

Tim Eagle: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

Our fishermen, by voting to leave the EU, as they did overwhelmingly, opened the door to a sea of opportunity for Scottish fishermen—*[Interruption.]*

As I stated with regard to farming, the transition has not been easy, and I know that there are specific issues in different sectors. However, the fishing industry is beginning to feel the benefits of Brexit. Just last month, the Scottish Government's own data showed that the fishing fleet is up year on year since 2021, with the value of fish landed also rising year on year. That is despite the many challenges that the sector faces, which include the challenge of attracting new entrants, and spatial squeeze in our seas.

The sector has had to navigate the UK-EU trade and co-operation agreement, which comes to an end next June. When that deal ends, the Labour Government will be faced with a stark choice: does it back our fishermen by increasing their access to our own domestic fishing waters, or does it cede more access to EU states and their vessels? The SNP also faces a stark choice. When those vital negotiations begin, does it side with Scottish fishermen, or with Keir Starmer if he throws our fishermen under the bus?

I hold out little hope, given the SNP's record in Government, but I will continue to fight for my constituents so that we can truly realise the untold benefits that Brexit could bring us in the long term.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I encourage members who have something to say to try to make an intervention, rather than shouting it across the chamber.

17:42

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): I take the opportunity to thank my friend and colleague Clare Adamson for bringing this important debate to the chamber, because the issue is as important as it was five years ago, no matter what we have heard from Tim Eagle. We could probably put into ChatGPT, or any artificial intelligence system

around the world, "Say negative things about the Scottish Government and do a traditional Tim Eagle-type speech," and what he said is exactly what we would have got. It was complete and utter nonsense from someone who does not believe in supporting people in constituencies such as mine who are suffering because of Brexit.

It has been five years—five long years—since Scotland was dragged out of the EU against our will. That is five years of damage, lost opportunities and economic harm—harm that was entirely avoidable, had it not been for some Tories with an anti-Europe ethos.

I make it crystal clear that the people of Scotland voted overwhelmingly to remain in the EU, and every single local authority area in Scotland backed remain, yet here we are, paying the price for a Brexit that we never wanted and suffering the consequences of decisions that were made by Westminster Governments that we did not elect. That is not democracy—that is not respecting the will of the Scottish people.

Things have got even worse since the recent American election. We now have return of the Trump, who is in effect saying that he is going to put all kinds of embargoes on everyone. That is important for this debate, because I would much rather be negotiating from a strong position with our EU friends than just sitting here as a small island in northern Europe, shouting from the sidelines.

Even if we take away the "Little Britain" ideals, what was the cost of this Brexit folly? The economic impact is staggering, with the loss of £2.3 billion every year in public revenues—money that could have been used to fund our national health service, our schools and our other vital public services. Instead, that has vanished into thin air.

Trade has been absolutely devastated. The UK's overall trade intensity is down by 15 per cent in the long term, and Scottish exporters, businesses and job creators are struggling to navigate the red tape and barriers that have been imposed by Brexit.

Let us not forget the impact on our communities. Brexit has put up barriers to people coming to live and work here in Scotland, an example of which was brought up by my friend and colleague Karen Adam. With our NHS, which is a key sector, as well as the care sectors among the hardest hit, Westminster's hostile immigration policies have left businesses in Paisley, in Glasgow, in Motherwell and Wishaw and right across Scotland unable to recruit the skilled workers they need.

Our young people—our future—have had their rights ripped away. They are no longer able to live, study or work freely across 27 European nations.

We see the damage and we feel the impact, yet the UK Government buries its head in the sand and refuses to admit the harm that it has caused. That cannot go on, and we need to move Scotland forward.

There is hope. Scotland has a choice. We do not have to accept this decline. We do not have to stand by and watch our economy shrink and our opportunities diminish as our country is held back. Scotland's future lies in Europe, with co-operation, partnership and a shared vision for prosperity. That is why I whole-heartedly support my friend Clare Adamson's motion.

Scotland belongs in the EU. Rejoining will restore our place in the world's largest single market; it will rebuild the economic, cultural and social ties that Brexit has so recklessly severed; and it will open doors for our businesses, students and workers.

Scotland did not vote for Brexit, and Scotland must not be forced to live with the damaging consequences of Brexit for ever. The case for independence and a return to the EU has never been stronger. We have a future to fight for, and I know that the people of Scotland will not rest until our voice is once again heard, and our choices respected, in Europe. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members again that, if they have something to say, they may want to make an intervention, rather than chunter from a sedentary position.

17:47

Foysoyl Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): I begin by congratulating Clare Adamson on securing the debate. Five years have passed since we left the EU. In a more uncertain world, our closest geographical neighbours must remain friends and collaborators. The motion and the members who have spoken so far have highlighted the on-going effects of Boris Johnson's Brexit deal.

In November, I joined members including Clare Adamson in discussing the UK trade and co-operation agreement. During that debate, members largely agreed that the deal was not delivering. Issues faced by businesses in trading with Europe were raised, including inadequate support from the previous UK Government in the transition to new rules and the additional time and cost burden of export health certificates. Some businesses reported ceasing trade with Europe entirely. That is clearly not a welcome situation, and Governments should be taking steps to address it.

While those challenges are known, what is not known is the process for rejoining the European Union. The Brexit years were defined by their

uncertainty. We should be looking forward and improving the deals that we have now, not reopening the Brexit debate and causing further turmoil. The Labour Government in Westminster was elected on a manifesto to renegotiate the Brexit deal and to make improvements for our businesses.

For example, the UK Government is committed to seeking a veterinary agreement with Europe, which, if adopted, could improve agricultural exports by 20 per cent, according to Aston University. An improvement in conditions for touring artists, who have suffered as a result of Brexit, could also be achieved. Scotland and Edinburgh in particular benefit from cultural exchanges, yet the Conservative Brexit deal made touring more complicated for artists. I am pleased that Lisa Nandy has recently reaffirmed her commitment to making touring easier; work is on-going with Europe on that front.

Devolved Governments also have a role to play. The Scottish Government has completed two test and learn exercises that involved international student exchanges, while the Welsh Government has introduced its Taith scheme, which has sent thousands of students abroad and deepened cultural ties. I return to my point that action can be taken today where Brexit has put up barriers.

The five years since Brexit have been globally challenging and uncertain. Our relationship with Europe remains one of our most important relationships. I am pleased that the UK Labour Government is looking to build a positive relationship with Europe and to renegotiate the Brexit deal so that it delivers for businesses and people. That will demonstrate that, rather than looking back and rehashing old debates, we can move forward.

17:51

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I congratulate my colleague Clare Adamson on securing the debate.

From Shetland to the Scottish Borders, not one part of Scotland voted leave—not one single council area. However, that is the union for you, and that is democracy for you: it is part of the "union bonus."

Even in England, 53 per cent of voters voted leave and 47 per cent voted remain, so even south of the border the vote was nip and tuck. There was no 60 per cent requirement, as is sometimes called for when there is a vote that affects the unwritten British constitution. Remember that, when it comes to a referendum on Scottish independence.

We now know that the British public was sold a pup. In fact, they were sold several pups, including the side of a bus showing the “Boris bonus” of £350 million a week for the NHS; cutting of immigration, although the majority of migrants were and are legal migrants; cutting of red tape for businesses and farmers; no border down the Irish Sea; reclaiming our seas; and the world waiting eagerly for our trade. It was all “oven ready”.

How did that go? The £350 million was not so much “oven ready” as it was a Boris porky pie. Immigration, both legal and illegal, has increased since Brexit. Indeed, leaving the EU has made co-operation with EU countries more difficult. As for increases in red tape, just ask businesses, farmers and the horticultural sector. There are special rules for trade between Éire, which is still in the EU, and Northern Ireland, which remains in the EU in all but name. As for trade bonuses, there are none.

The NFU Scotland overwhelmingly backed a remain vote because it knew what was coming if we left. The Confederation of British Industry was one of the most vocal opponents of Brexit, and stated that it would

“dent the economy and knock living standards.”

Then again, what do they know? Billions of pounds have been lost to the UK economy to date.

The loss of free movement in the workforce had immediate impacts on the NHS, the care sector, horticulture and hospitality—just for starters—all of which have affected my constituency.

What got the Brexit vote through by the skin of its teeth were allegations about damaging immigration. As for Boris Johnson’s yellow brick road, we know what Dorothy found at the end of that: a wee man masquerading as a great wizard. Boris Johnson, Donald Trump or Nigel Farage? Take your pick.

Some who were once forceful and vocal defenders of the EU now say that that ship has sailed. To continue the metaphor, I point out that a ship can change course, especially if the sea is stormy and you can see that rocks lie ahead.

Of course, the UK will not change course, but Scotland can do so as an independent nation. Let us have no nonsense about it taking decades to rejoin, or—worse—that we would not be welcome. Our laws are aligned with the EU. We are a rich nation that produces energy, food and drink. Our history with Europe differs from that of England. My goodness—the first language of Mary, Queen of Scots was French. That fact is handy for pub quizzes. However, I digress.

In the dismal years of “Trumpland” ahead, we need an EU that is both politically and economically strong, and we need not to be

consigned to watch in painful embarrassment as the UK Prime Minister genuflects to Trump out of desperation to avoid tariffs. Indeed, “embarrassment” is not a strong enough word—it is more of a public humiliation.

We can change course. Scotland would and will rejoin the EU with those 27 other nations. Believe you me—rejoining the EU cannot come soon enough.

17:55

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): I thank colleagues for their contributions to today’s debate. It is crystal clear that, in the five years since Brexit, the time that we have spent outside the European Union has damaged our economy, weakened civic society, degraded opportunities for our young people and worsened the cost of living crisis for us all. It has been five long years of pain.

Although the proposed reset that is being sought by the UK Government could offer progress in some areas—we will, of course, engage positively with that—in reality, any gains that the process can make will do little to redress the fundamental challenges that we face while we remain outside the single market and the customs union.

The single European market numbers 447 million consumers and 23 million companies, and is the largest free-trading area on earth. By population, it is seven times the size of the United Kingdom. It is small wonder, in that case, that despite our having not voted in favour of such folly, we have suffered the dire consequences that colleagues have eloquently attested to in today’s debate.

Let us consider the facts. The National Institute of Economic and Social Research estimates that, in 2023, there was a 2.5 per cent hit to UK gross domestic product because of Brexit, and that it will increase to 5.7 per cent by 2035. In Scotland, that equated to a cut in public revenues of about £2.3 billion in 2023. This month, the Institute for Public Policy Research think tank reported that UK goods exports to the European Union were 27 per cent lower between 2021 and 2023 than they would have been had we remained in the European Union. While other G7 countries saw an average 5 per cent increase in goods being exported in 2023 compared to 2019, the UK experienced a 10 per cent decline. We should add to that the Office for Budget Responsibility’s view that UK trade intensity with the European Union will be 15 per cent lower in the long run.

Later this week, the Scottish Government will publish fresh analysis of the trade impact of the

Tory Brexit deal—which is, sadly, being continued by Labour—compared with European Union membership. The evidence is now legion and it is undeniable. The economic impact of Brexit is nothing short of an egregious act of self-harm by the United Kingdom, and a deeply damaging imposition on Scotland, without counting the cost of what we have lost in social and cultural terms.

The loss of access to the Erasmus+ programme is particularly damaging. A generation of Scots will be denied the life-enhancing opportunities of living or working in the European nations that are on our doorstep. The loss of access to creative Europe is similarly damaging to the culture sector. It does not have to be that way.

I turn to some points that have been raised during the debate. Clare Adamson highlighted the harm to the culture sector and to so many others. It does not need to be that way.

Tim Eagle mentioned the “untold benefits” of Brexit. He did not, however, tell us any benefits of Brexit, so he was right—they are untold. Perhaps in the next debate, he might choose to tell us what they are.

George Adam talked about Scotland’s proper place being back in the European Union as an independent member state. He is absolutely right that the 27 other European nations are not wrong.

Mystifyingly, Foysol Choudhury said that we should not reopen the Brexit debate. Why should we not talk about that self-harm? Why should we not end the self-harm? I have to say to him—as somebody who represents this part of the world, as I do—that this part of the country, where 74.4 per cent voted to remain in the European Union, is the most pro-European part of Scotland, but he thinks that we should not reopen the Brexit debate. I am sorry to say it, but on that count, he is very wrong.

Finally, I come to Christine Grahame. What a strong voice talking about Scotland’s strong position of being able to rejoin the European Union. The choice is ours. We live in a democracy and we should be able to have that say.

Until such time as we rejoin the European Union as an independent country, we must encourage the UK Government to be ambitious in its efforts to improve relations with the EU. Last week, Maroš Šefčovič, the EU trade commissioner, indicated that the UK might be able to join the pan-Euro-Mediterranean convention, which allows for a measure of tariff-free trade of goods between a range of European and other countries. My message to the UK Government on that and, indeed, on other areas including youth mobility, is to take the time to consider their merits and potential economic and other benefits, not to rush

to rule things out for political purposes and certainly not to pander to the likes of Nigel Farage.

Both those issues, and many more, are of interest to people right across Scotland. I will continue to make sure that the UK Government understands why a closer relationship with the EU remains such an important priority for Scotland until such time as we rejoin, as an independent member state of the European Union.

Meeting closed at 18:00.

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