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Meeting of the Parliament

Thursday 27 February 2025

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 27 February 2025

[The Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 11:40]

General Question Time

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Good morning. The first item of business is general question time.

Highlands and Islands General Practitioners (Administration)

1. **Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government how it will reduce any administrative burdens on general practitioners across the Highlands and Islands to allow them to spend more time seeing patients. (S6O-04362)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Neil Gray): To support general practice, we have significantly expanded the primary care multidisciplinary team workforce, with more than 4,900 whole-time-equivalent staff working in services, including physiotherapy, pharmacy and phlebotomy, as at March 2024. Those teams help free up time for practice teams and GPs.

The Scottish Government funds an effective interface project with the Royal College of General Practitioners Scotland, the national centre for sustainable delivery and health boards to improve the interface between GPs and specialists. That ensures that referrals to secondary care require minimal administrative work, allowing GPs to maximise time spent treating patients.

Jamie Halcro Johnston: In 2018, the Scottish Government introduced the new GP contract with a promise to fully implement it in 2021. It told doctors that it would support general practice by funding pharmacists, nurses, physiotherapists and mental health nurses in order to relieve the huge pressure on primary care.

In true Scottish National Party style, though, the Government has failed to keep its promise, and front-line doctors are suffering as a result. Island GPs have told me that patients used to be able to ask for an appointment and were often seen that day, without argument. Now, patients can wait four weeks for an appointment, despite some doctors working 12-hour days with no break.

GPs in my island communities are clear that primary care is at crisis point under this SNP Government, so will the cabinet secretary finally commit to implementing the 2018 GP contract, as promised?

Neil Gray: We are working to implement the contract, and we are making progress on that. In that respect, I would reference two points, the first of which is the number of whole-time-equivalent multidisciplinary team staff working across the NHS Highland area. In Argyll and Bute, the multidisciplinary team workforce in the health and social care partnership numbered, at March 2024, 84.5 people, an increase of more than 17 from the previous year. In Highland, there was an increase of more than 19 from the previous year.

Secondly, the number of GPs working in rural health boards increased from 1,013 in 2018 to 1,030 in 2024. That is the equivalent of 10 GPs per 10,000 patients in rural health boards, compared with 8.4 across the rest of Scotland.

I recognise that there are particular challenges. Jamie Halcro Johnston and I hail from the same islands; I recognise the challenge in rural and island communities, and we are continuing to invest to ensure that there is support for GPs to respond to it.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): Patients would welcome the reduction of administrative burdens on doctors in an endeavour to put greater focus on patient treatment. Island health boards know how to deliver island healthcare. Does the cabinet secretary agree that island health boards should remain as separate national health service boards?

Neil Gray: I probably know where Beatrice Wishart's question is coming from, given some parties' policy announcements over the weekend.

I want to see a blurring of boundaries between our health boards to ensure greater regional working and support across different parts of the health sector and that we support patients, primarily, in enabling them to navigate through the health system. That would be a far more effective way of getting the benefit that could be derived from structural reorganisation without all the cost, the pain and the time that it would take to arrive at that position.

Sheku Bayoh Inquiry

2. **Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on when it will reach a decision regarding extending the terms of reference for the inquiry into the death of Sheku Bayoh. (S6O-04363)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic (Kate Forbes): As I confirmed in my answer earlier this week, I have decided not to extend the terms of reference for the Sheku Bayoh public inquiry. I understand that that decision might be disappointing to Mr Bayoh's family.

The inquiry's terms of reference were announced in May 2020. A public inquiry cannot determine or rule on criminal or civil liability. Only the Crown Office can reconsider prosecution, and the Solicitor General has reserved the right to do so. I am confident that the current terms of reference are broad enough to enable the chair to deliver a substantial report, and I also believe that it is in the public interest for the inquiry to conclude swiftly and for its recommendations to be implemented as soon as possible.

Claire Baker: I thank the Deputy First Minister for that response and for the letter that I received from her this week, detailing her decision. As she has recognised, the decision is a great disappointment to Sheku's family and friends.

As highlighted in correspondence from the inquiry chair, Lord Bracadale, the decision to extend the terms could have considered whether there had been a potentially flawed prosecutorial decision as a result of a misunderstanding of factual evidence, misconceived instructions and a failure to properly consider the issue of race. I note the Crown's commitment to keep evidence at the inquiry under review, but what reassurance can be provided to Sheku's family, and to the public, that the process of the inquiry has allowed all relevant matters to be properly examined?

Kate Forbes: I recognise the member's long-standing interest in the matter. She will be aware that the terms of reference for the inquiry were announced in May 2020 and included all aspects of the post-incident management of the case, including the role of the Lord Advocate in directing the investigation by the Police Investigations and Review Commissioner and the timeline from the incident up to the time of the prosecutorial decision.

The issue of race is explicitly identified in the original terms of reference for the inquiry and has been considered throughout. In September 2024, more than four years after those terms of reference were first announced in May 2020, there was a formal request that I extend them. It came as the inquiry was nearing the close of the evidential hearings and concluding statements. Under the terms of the Inquiries Act 2005, I have a statutory duty to consult the chair, which I did, and I also invited representations from all core participants to ensure fairness.

My decision, which I announced earlier this week, not to agree to an extension was made partly because I now believe that the inquiry should conclude as swiftly as possible, as we near the 10th anniversary of Mr Bayoh's death and because, as I said in my first answer, a public inquiry carried out under the 2005 act can never rule on, or determine, criminal or civil liability.

Housing (Scotland) Bill (Homelessness Prevention)

3. Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government, in relation to the Housing (Scotland) Bill, which two local authority areas have been identified as areas for the planned homelessness prevention pilots, in light of reports that the pilots are due to commence in the spring of this year. (S6O-04364)

The Minister for Housing (Paul McLennan): We are in the scoping stage of developing the fund with stakeholders. We do not expect to restrict the pilots to two local authority areas.

The funding will be used to deliver a test and learn pilot programme on the ask and act duties in the Housing (Scotland) Bill. The procurement process for the new fund is under way and we will be in a position to set out next steps soon.

Jeremy Balfour: The minister will appreciate that the bill will be moving to stage 2 next month. The pilot projects are meant to help us identify what changes have to be made. Will he tell the chamber in which month the pilots will start and for how long they will last?

Paul McLennan: As I said in my previous answer, we are still in the scoping stage of that work. One aim is to have the projects ready to go as soon as we get into the new financial year. As I have said, we will continue discussing the start dates with stakeholders, and I am happy to continue engaging with Mr Balfour as we move those projects forward.

Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I am sure that the minister will have been distressed, as I was, to see recent Scottish Government statistics showing that homelessness has risen in Scotland. In light of those worrying figures, what steps is the Scottish Government taking to ensure that the Housing (Scotland) Bill contains the strongest possible measures to prevent homelessness and reverse that situation?

Paul McLennan: I recognise how challenging the recent homelessness statistics are. The homelessness prevention duties will build on the strong housing rights that already exist for people who are homeless by eliminating the need to go through the trauma of homelessness. The duties on the named relevant bodies will require them to ask about and act on housing situations and will require local authorities to act to prevent homelessness.

We will invest an additional £4 million in 2025-26 in helping local authorities, front-line services and relevant partners prepare for the new prevention duties and respond to the housing emergency by preventing homelessness before it occurs. If homelessness can be more effectively

prevented, life chances and outcomes will be improved and savings will be made across public services.

Sanda Island Purchase

4. Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is, regarding any potential impact on the environment, to reports that Mowi Scotland, a multinational fish farming company, has purchased Sanda Island in Argyll and Bute. (S6O-04365)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): The Scottish Government is not currently aware of any submitted proposals for development. All proposed developments are thoroughly scrutinised for their potential impact on the environment and communities through the planning system. Scotland has a robust legislative and regulatory framework in place that provides the right balance between developing the fish farming sector and protecting the environment on which the sector depends. All farms must meet strict regulations and guidelines to ensure that the environmental effects are assessed and managed safely.

Ariane Burgess: One fish farm containing 200,000 farmed salmon produces the same amount of nitrogen as a city with 20,000 people and the same amount of raw sewage as 63,000 people. Sanda is a site of special scientific interest and it boasts resident bird species as well as amber-rated migrants such as wheatears. Mowi's plans to develop the island put its unique environment under threat. With that in mind, how will the Government ensure that it meets its legal requirements in relation to good environmental status to ensure that Sanda's vital ecosystems and rare species will be protected?

Mairi Gougeon: I hope that I was able to outline in my initial response to the member just how robust our regulatory framework is in assessing plans for proposed development. I point to the fact that the planning application process for aquaculture developments includes environmental impact assessments and habitats regulations consultations as well as requirements for consultation with the public and the statutory consultees, which include the Scottish Environment Protection Agency. The Scottish Government marine directorate can also be consulted on behalf of Scottish ministers as planning authorities deem necessary, depending on the nature of a development.

With the legislative and regulatory processes that we have in place and all the work that we are currently undertaking in relation to aquaculture consenting in Scotland, I think that we have the

robust measures that we need to consider such developments.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP): Mowi is an exemplar of investment in the remote Highlands and Islands. It has already massively invested in the isle of Colonsay and supported the people there with housing and broadband. It has exciting plans to bring people back to the island of Sanda and to bring back housing, the hotel, yacht moorings and tourism. Should we not be encouraging that as it is the lead company investing in parts of Scotland where there are no other jobs, no other opportunities and, currently, no people at all?

Mairi Gougeon: In response to that, I say that the Scottish Government of course recognises that aquaculture is a significant contributor to our rural economy, particularly when we consider our rural and island communities. Fergus Ewing mentioned the example of Colonsay. I visited Colonsay a couple of years ago to hear about the project there and to see the direct investment in housing that is making such a positive impact on the local community, and that is not to mention that the sector is worth £1.1 billion and supports more than 12,000 jobs both directly and across the wider supply chain. We recognise the contribution that aquaculture makes to Scotland and our national economy.

The Presiding Officer: Question 5 has been withdrawn.

Cervical Cancer Screening Rates

6. Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government when Public Health Scotland will produce updated statistics on the screening rates for cervical cancer. (S6O-04367)

The Minister for Public Health and Women's Health (Jenni Minto): Public Health Scotland expects to publish cervical screening statistics for the years 2022-23 and 2023-24 this summer. Following the publication of the 2021-22 statistics on cervical screening, the cervical screening programme board agreed the introduction of new key performance indicators to better align with the Healthcare Improvement Scotland cervical screening standards, and Public Health Scotland has been working with screening organisations to implement that transition. We welcome the new reports and key performance indicators as they will better support our efforts to increase the uptake and reach of the cervical screening programme.

Annie Wells: The Scottish Government set the 62-day standard to ensure that 95 per cent of patients who are urgently referred with suspected cancer would begin their treatment within 62 days. However, according to Public Health Scotland, as

of December 2024, only 72.1 per cent of cancer patients, including those with suspected cervical cancer, started treatment within that timeframe. Can the minister outline the urgent measures that are being taken to ensure that 95 per cent of patients with suspected cervical cancer can begin life-saving treatment within the 62-day target?

Jenni Minto: I re-emphasise the investment that the Scottish Government is putting in to reduce waiting times and improve diagnosis. We have been speaking directly with the two laboratories that check for diagnosis. I am very much looking forward to meeting Annie Wells and the other Opposition spokespeople for women's health, alongside Professor Anna Glasier, at the end of April, when we can discuss the matter further.

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): The minister previously stated that the Government continues to explore other avenues, alongside self-sampling, that may improve the uptake level of cervical screening programmes, including consideration of better use of digital technology and more personalised communication. Can the minister give any further update on the detail of that?

Jenni Minto: As Carol Mochan will know, we are awaiting a recommendation from the UK National Screening Committee regarding HPV self-sampling, and we expect it in spring. As I said, we have started preparatory work for the implementation. If implementation is recommended, we will ensure that it is done as efficiently and effectively as possible.

The Presiding Officer: Question 7 is from Bob Doris.

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): Presiding Officer, I must apologise, as I thought that my question was going to be taken this afternoon, during portfolio question time. I do not have a copy of the *Business Bulletin*. [Interruption.]

New-build Properties (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn)

7. **Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how many new-build social and mid-market rental properties have been delivered in the Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn constituency in the last 10 years. (S6O-04368)

The Minister for Housing (Paul McLennan): In the past 10 years, at least 1,000 new-build homes have been delivered in the Maryhill and Springburn constituency, with 741 social rent and 259 mid-market properties supported through the affordable housing supply programme.

Bob Doris: Well, I am glad that I asked that question, because I want to draw the minister's attention to the 380 new social, rented and affordable housing properties that will be delivered in the Wyndford estate in my constituency. How will next year's budget support more of that important work, particularly on mid-market rent, which is vitally important to ensure that all constituents can get access to good-quality affordable homes?

Paul McLennan: I am aware of the affordable housing development in Wyndford, which will make a real difference to the lives of those who live there. The 2025-26 budget will help to fund the completion of existing new build and rehabilitation project commitments, as well as new project approvals such as that at Wyndford, including our targeted £40-million voids and acquisitions commitment and our commitment to new-build site starts.

As homes for mid-market rents are aimed at helping people on low to moderate incomes, the Scottish Government requires that the starting rent level for each home, including any service charge, is generally no more than the relevant local housing allowance rate. It is also the case that rent should not at any time exceed the midpoint of any market rent levels in the relevant broad rental market area, unless it is agreed that rent levels in the local area are materially different from those.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): Another area of concern in that constituency is the number of homes left empty over the long term. In particular, there is concern about a tenement block at 272 Saracen Street that has been empty for more than 20 years. Will the minister undertake to write to the empty homes team at Glasgow City Council to encourage it to expedite the compulsory purchase of the building and its conversion into affordable or social housing without delay?

Paul McLennan: I met Glasgow City Council to discuss empty homes yesterday. I am happy to make the commitment that Paul Sweeney asked for and to take that forward with him.

Scottish Police Pension 1987 Scheme

8. **Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on any correspondence it has had with the United Kingdom Government and the Scottish Public Pensions Agency regarding the legacy of the Scottish police pension 1987 scheme. (S6O-04369)

The Minister for Public Finance (Ivan McKee): I have written to the UK Government in relation to reserved matters that affect the legacy police pension scheme and the McCloud pensions

remedy, which removed age discrimination in UK Government pension reforms in 2015.

The Scottish Public Pensions Agency is making progress on providing remedy information to more than 200,000 members of devolved Scottish schemes by 31 March 2025. The complexity of the work means that the agency will not meet that deadline for all members, which, it has to be noted, is a similar position to that of other UK schemes. I have informed the Finance and Public Administration Committee of the latest position.

Meghan Gallacher: Many officers who have proven to be unlawfully discriminated against were successful in that remedy under the terms that were set by the contingent decision process. However, despite having the opportunity to buy back their pensions, they were ultimately forced to exit. With the pause under the Public Service Pensions and Judicial Offices Act 2022, that discrimination continues and prevents officers from retiring.

Will the minister provide an update on a proposed resolution and a timescale for when those officers will be able to buy back their pensionable term under the 1987 scheme, as agreed, to provide a remedy for the group of police officers who are affected? Will the minister share with Parliament when the date range that was released last month by the Home Office and the Treasury regarding some members who can be unpaused can be clarified, because that appears to continue discrimination within the police force?

Ivan McKee: The member is referring to the McCloud remedy work that is progressing in relation to the UK Government's pension reforms in 2015. The delay has been due to a number of reasons. As I said, the issue has affected all similar pension schemes across the UK. No member of the scheme will be disadvantaged as a consequence of that, because any payments will be backdated, and they will receive interest payments on top of that. The SPPA continues to communicate with members on that.

If there are other technical aspects of the issue that the member wants to discuss further, I would be happy to meet her to delve into that in more detail.

War in Ukraine (Third Anniversary)

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): On Monday, I was honoured to represent the Parliament, along with party leaders, at a service at the national war memorial at Edinburgh castle to mark the third anniversary of the war in Ukraine and to show our solidarity with all those who are suffering as a result of the on-going war. Before we move to First Minister's question time, I invite party leaders to make some remarks.

12:01

The First Minister (John Swinney): Peace is not gifted to us. It has to be nurtured and sometimes, regrettably, it has to be hard fought for. While Russia repeats the worst mistakes of the past, years into an unnecessary war, Ukraine calls on Europe to defend her interests and to support her fight for democracy and the rule of international law. That is why Scotland supports Ukrainian independence, that is why Scotland supports Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity, and that is why Scotland will always work with Ukraine towards the goal of absolute peace in Europe.

At this moment of great uncertainty, let me be clear: Ukraine must sit at the table of any peace agreement. That is the only way to achieve a peace that not only delivers Ukraine from barbaric aggression but protects Ukraine's heritage, her culture and her social and economic future.

We have extended a warm welcome to Ukrainians who have sought refuge in our country. That is the very least that we should be able to do. Today, as ever, Scotland stands with Ukraine. [Applause.]

12:02

Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con): On Monday, it was my great privilege to attend the service at Edinburgh castle to mark the third anniversary of Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine. I was moved by the sight of Ukrainian flags flying proudly over our capital city in solidarity with those who are suffering unimaginable bloodshed and horror.

We remembered the countless innocent lives that have been lost in defence of their country and our shared values of freedom and democracy. We should take pride in the United Kingdom's significant and unwavering support for Ukraine. We all want the war to end, but the people of Ukraine deserve that to happen on their terms, not on those of Vladimir Putin. [Applause.]

12:03

Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): For 1,099 days, the people of Ukraine have felt the full force of Russian aggression. There have been 1,099 days of invasion, bloodshed, indiscriminate bombing, drone attacks, sheltering underground, and fear and heartbreak, but, today, Ukraine still stands and is still strong. The front line of democracy remains resolute thanks to the bravery of Ukraine and its people.

Scotland and the United Kingdom have reason to be proud of the role that we have played in giving Ukraine the tools that it needs to defend itself. As the Prime Minister has made clear, nobody wants the bloodshed to continue, but, as we seek an end to the war, there can be no discussion about Ukraine without Ukraine. The people of Ukraine must have long-term security. A thousand and ninety-nine days later, and for as long as it takes, we stand with Ukraine. We stand for peace and freedom in Europe and around the world. *[Applause.]*

12:04

Lorna Slater (Lothian) (Green): Today, the Scottish Parliament recognises three years of Ukrainians standing strong in the face of Russian aggression and three years of immense suffering, displacement and loss of life. From the very beginning, Scotland has stood in solidarity with Ukraine, with our people welcoming Ukrainians into their homes and communities. I am proud that, as a Parliament, we are just as united in that support today. I want to see Europe and the UK standing strong behind Ukraine, its people and the virtues of democracy. I wish for peace for the people of Ukraine with all my heart, but on their terms and with them at the table. *[Applause.]*

12:05

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): At this moment, and for every moment of the past three years, only the courage of the armed forces of Ukraine has held back the menace of Russian expansionist tyranny. In recent weeks, much reference has been made to the similarities that exist between our time and the prelude to the second world war, appeasement and the rising tide of fascism. I have found myself thinking of the words of Winston Churchill, who, from the floor of the House of Commons in 1940, pledged

“to ride out the storm of war, and to outlive the menace of tyranny, if necessary for years, if necessary alone.”—*[Official Report, House of Commons, 4 June 1940; Vol 361, c 795.]*

The fighting men and women of Ukraine have ridden the storm of war for years, but they are not alone. This Parliament stands with them, and so,

too, does the nation that it serves. Glory to Ukraine. Glory to the heroes. Slava Ukraini. Heroyam slava. *[Applause.]*

First Minister's Question Time

12:07

Public Bodies (Number)

1. Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con):

The Scottish Information Commissioner, David Hamilton, has said that he is

“astonished”

at

“the sheer number of public bodies”

in our country. He continued:

“There are literally hundreds, if not thousands, of public bodies. I keep finding new ones”.

He went on to describe

“a hidden and complicated landscape across the public sector”.

That is not some random person venting on social media; he is the gatekeeper of all state-held information—the ultimate authority in deciding which information is made public. The Information Commissioner cannot work out how many public bodies there are. If even he cannot work out how big the Scottish National Party state has become, what chance do the paying public have?

The First Minister (John Swinney): In the course of its time in office, the SNP Government has reduced the number of public bodies that we inherited. We also adopt an agenda that ensures that we adequately consult wider Scotland on the policy questions that we take forward. The Government maintains a stringent approach to the management of public expenditure, to ensure that we are constantly challenging issues to maximise value. Those considerations underpin the budget that I am glad that the Parliament passed on Tuesday.

Russell Findlay: The Information Commissioner told the Parliament that he discusses the big state with the Auditor General for Scotland. Mr Hamilton said that he does not

“think that there is a map that explains it all”

and that he and the Auditor General play a game called

“public-authority bingo”,

in which they ask each other,

“Have you heard of this one?”—[*Official Report, SPCB Supported Bodies Landscape Review Committee, 20 February 2025; c 8.*]

The Auditor General and the Information Commissioner—the two most powerful civil servants who are tasked with keeping the state in check—are hitting a brick wall of SNP secrecy.

Will the First Minister give them—and all of us—a bingo call by shouting out the exact number of public bodies that there are in Scotland?

The First Minister: On 1 December 2024, 131 public bodies in Scotland were under our control. In 2007, when the SNP Government came to office, there were 199. Those are the answers that Mr Findlay is looking for. By the way, as a point of information, I thought that the Parliament was here to hold the Government to account.

Russell Findlay: I thought that the First Minister might come up with the number 131. A cursory check would inform him that he has missed out at least another 75 public sector organisations. It is truly farcical that public servants in charge of information and financial transparency cannot get the answers that they and the public deserve.

The size of the bloated SNP state is out of control and shrouded in secrecy. It is costing taxpayers a fortune and reducing funding for the front line. The SNP is failing to deliver efficient and effective public services, and that must change. I will make a suggestion to John Swinney: will he bring in a credible business leader from outside his Government to sort this out?

The First Minister: I take those issues very seriously. Throughout my time as finance minister, I was regularly attacked in this Parliament for setting exacting efficiency standards on public sector budgets on an annual basis. The result of that was that we released significant value for investment in the public finances.

I am struggling to remember about the Police Scotland reforms. I might be wrong about this—if I am wrong, I will correct it, or Russell Findlay can correct the record—but I think that the Conservatives opposed us on Police Scotland reforms.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): They did.

The First Minister: My good and dear friend Christine Grahame is, not for the first time in my life, coming to my rescue. The Conservatives opposed the formation of Police Scotland, which was one of the biggest reforms of the public sector landscape and delivered £200 million in savings. What we have been treated to today is the usual hypocrisy from Russell Findlay.

Russell Findlay: I am setting out ways to save taxpayers' money while John Swinney is only ever intent on taking more of it. He has no respect for public finances—just look at his dismal record. The truth is that the Government has created far too many talking shops that achieve nothing. It has published 800 plans and strategies that no one reads, and nobody knows how many SNP state agencies there are—not even the Auditor General

and the Information Commissioner. This year's SNP budget will again hammer working Scots by raising taxes, which this lot will then squander on yet more nonsense. Is it not basic common sense for John Swinney to start saving taxpayers' money by cutting quangos and funding the front line instead?

The First Minister: We have just passed a budget that funds the front line. Russell Findlay did not vote for it, so I do not know what on earth he is complaining about.

I gave one example of a public service reform that we have delivered, which has leveraged out £200 million in savings, but Russell Findlay and the Conservatives opposed that reform. It is all talk and no action from the Conservatives. The programmes that have been taken forward by my Minister for Public Finance, Ivan McKee, are securing savings that are expected to reach up to £280 million over a two-year period by the end of 2024-25, with further projected savings of nearly £300 million over the following two financial years to the end of 2026-27.

I take deadly seriously the management of public expenditure, because I want to make sure that as much money as possible is available to support front-line services. The difference between me and Russell Findlay is that I am prepared to vote for a budget to support the front line but he is not.

Education (Attainment)

2. Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): Almost a decade ago, when John Swinney was education secretary, he said that the defining mission of the Government was education. On Tuesday, it was revealed that, under the Scottish National Party, attainment in Scotland's schools is declining across the board and that, shamefully, outcomes for young working-class Scots are getting worse compared with outcomes for those from wealthier backgrounds.

Today, the Auditor General for Scotland said that the SNP had failed to properly provide support for pupils with additional support needs. He said:

"The Scottish Government has failed to plan effectively",

and he went on to say that

"it is unclear whether all children's right to have an education that fully develops their personality, talents and abilities is being met."

Is it not the case that Scottish education—once the envy of the world—is going in the wrong direction under the SNP?

The First Minister (John Swinney): I am always prepared to listen to reports from the Auditor General and to consider the implications for the Government and for local authorities, which

are responsible for the delivery of education in our country. We take those issues seriously and will respond accordingly.

It is important that I reassure members of the public about the progress that has been made on closing the attainment gap. Under this Government, the overall poverty-related attainment gap has reduced by 60 per cent since 2009-10. In relation to meeting literacy standards in primary schools, the poverty-related attainment gap between young people from the most-deprived areas and those from the least-deprived areas is 20.1 percentage points, which is a record low. In relation to achieving the third level in literacy and numeracy in secondary schools, the attainment gap between those pupils has reached record lows of 12.7 percentage points and 12 percentage points respectively.

In relation to additional support for learning—I accept the absolute necessity to ensure that good outcomes are achieved for those young people—the attainment gap between school pupils with additional support needs and those without has reduced by almost half since 2009-10, from 45.3 percentage points to 23.1 percentage points.

I accept that more needs to be done, but important and substantial progress is being made on closing the attainment gap, and that is good for children and young people in our country.

Anas Sarwar: John Swinney was the person who was tasked with improving Scottish education, and he has failed. Last year, 42.6 per cent of pupils, almost 24,000 young people, left school without a single higher or equivalent qualification; 16.5 per cent, more than 9,000 children, left school without a single national 5 or equivalent qualification; and 1,300 young people left school without the most basic qualifications. The future of every one of those children should matter.

Let us not forget that it was John Swinney who downgraded the exam results of working-class kids during the pandemic. Now, as First Minister, he is overseeing the betrayal of young Scots, with the attainment gap widening. Why is the SNP Government letting down a generation of young Scots?

The First Minister: I am afraid that Mr Sarwar will have to learn to adapt his questions based on the information that I put on the record. Let me repeat that information—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Members.

The First Minister: The overall poverty-related attainment gap has reduced by 60 per cent since 2009-10 in the face of unrelenting austerity from the United Kingdom Government. Progress is

being made, and there has been improvement in the outcomes for young people over that period.

Mr Sarwar talked about the outcomes for young people leaving school. The percentage of young people in a positive destination three months after leaving school is 95.7 per cent, which is the second-highest level since records began.

I accept that there is work to be done, but Mr Sarwar has to accept the evidence that I am putting on the record. As a consequence of the investment that this Government has made, we are making progress in improving outcomes for young people and in closing the attainment gap. The Parliament should support that endeavour.

Anas Sarwar: The Government includes a zero-hours contract or voluntary work as a “positive destination” for young Scots. I quoted the figure of 42.6 per cent of pupils leaving school last year without a single higher or equivalent qualification, and it is interesting that the First Minister did not respond to that statistic. Almost 45 per cent of young people are leaving our schools without a single higher. Teachers have been warning about that for years. This morning, education expert Professor Lindsay Paterson said:

“the Scottish Government has never had a coherent strategy for dealing with the educational effects of poverty.”

John Swinney’s report card is woeful. Attainment is down across the board, more pupils are leaving school with no qualifications and there are fewer additional support need teachers. Our classrooms should be places for learning, growing and flourishing.

The promise that I make is that, as First Minister, I will make sure that every young Scot can reach their potential. We will agree new Scottish industry standards so that young people can see the future opportunities that their school subjects and qualifications will give them. That is the new direction that we offer.

After nearly two decades, the SNP has nobody else to blame for the damage that has been done to Scotland’s education system. Is it not clear that the SNP’s defining mission is now its defining failure?

The First Minister: Mr Sarwar might have conjured up that script before he asked me any questions, but I have refuted the detail that he has put on the record, because, as I recounted to him a second ago, we are making progress on closing the attainment gap.

Under this Government, the attainment gap has reduced by 60 per cent since 2009-10, and I am absolutely determined to improve outcomes for young people. Why are we doing that? We are doing that because this Government put in investment, through the expansion of early

learning and childcare, to give children the best start in life. This Government has put money in place to support improvement in the lives of young people living in poverty through the Scottish child payment—originally, it was set at £5 for every eligible child; now, it is £26.70—which is helping to lift hundreds of thousands of children out of poverty. *[John Swinney has corrected this contribution. See end of report.]* That is why Scotland is the only part of the United Kingdom where it is projected that poverty among children will fall, whereas it will rise in every other part of the United Kingdom under the stewardship in England and Wales of the Labour Party.

People in Scotland should look at what the SNP has delivered to improve the opportunities and the life chances of the children and young people of Scotland, and they should then look at what a Labour Government does: it went into office promising to reduce fuel bills for individuals in our country, which then went up. Labour delivers broken promises to the people of Scotland, and Mr Sarwar will be no different.

Cabinet (Meetings)

3. Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): To ask the First Minister when the Cabinet will next meet. (S6F-03836)

The First Minister (John Swinney): The Cabinet will next meet on Tuesday.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: Winifred was an active 87-year-old until she fell and broke her hip. Her family say that they are aghast at what happened next. In the weeks that followed, she experienced a 12-hour wait in an accident and emergency department, an unsafe discharge, a nine-hour wait for an ambulance to take her back to hospital and yet another 12-hour wait in A and E.

Winifred is not alone. The waits for emergency care have skyrocketed since the Scottish National Party came to power. New research that we are publishing today shows that more than 12,000 people aged over 85 waited longer than 12 hours in Scotland’s A and E departments last year.

What does the First Minister have to say to Winifred, to her family and to the thousands of others like them who have been so abjectly failed by his Government?

The First Minister: The first thing that I want to say to Winifred and her family is that I am sorry for the experience that they have had. As I have recounted on a number of occasions to the Parliament, the health service faces extraordinary pressures as a consequence of the demand for assistance in our healthcare system. I do not know when that incident happened, but, if Mr Cole-Hamilton furnishes me with the details, I will respond to that in full.

As Mr Cole-Hamilton knows, and as I have recounted to the Parliament, we have had extraordinary pressure on our healthcare system over the winter period as a consequence of flu.

I can reassure Mr Cole-Hamilton that, according to the latest data available, 12-hour waits and eight-hour waits in accident and emergency departments, which are both completely unacceptable, are falling as we begin to get on top of the implications of the wave of demand that the healthcare system has faced.

The Government is working closely with health and social care partnerships to reduce the level of delayed discharge, so that individuals are properly supported in their homes.

As a consequence of the agreement that we managed to secure with the Liberal Democrats on the budget, local authorities will be able to benefit from having more resources at their disposal to invest in social care to support individuals such as Winifred, and the health service will obviously have more resources.

Net Zero Sector (Contribution to Economy)

4. Michael Matheson (Falkirk West) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what assessment the Scottish Government has made of the recent study by the Energy and Climate Intelligence Unit regarding the contribution of the net zero sector to the United Kingdom and Scotland's economy. (S6F-03857)

The First Minister (John Swinney): I very much welcome the report, which clearly sets out the importance of net zero sectors to our economy in Scotland. Our green economy is thriving and has grown by more than 20 per cent in the past two years, which is generating more than £9 billion in gross value added and supporting more than 100,000 full-time equivalent jobs. That is faster growth than across the United Kingdom. That undoubtedly shows that the transition to net zero is driving progress towards our climate ambitions at the same time as it is delivering economic benefits.

Michael Matheson: The First Minister rightly highlights that the report demonstrates that progress towards net zero is having a positive benefit. The number of companies that operate in the sector is increasing steadily year on year, and they are creating more jobs and supporting our local economies and communities.

However, the progress that is highlighted in the report flies in the face of those who seek to undermine the importance of achieving net zero not just for our environment, but for our economy. Some of those people go as far as to deny that there is a need to achieve net zero.

Does the First Minister agree that achieving net zero is critical to having a future sustainable Scotland? Can he outline how the Scottish Government will ensure that my constituents, especially those who work in places such as the Grangemouth industrial cluster, will benefit from the growth of the sector in the months and years ahead?

The First Minister: First, let me make it clear that I believe that there is an absolute necessity and there is an imperative for us to take climate action. That was the subject of a speech that I made last week, in which I addressed the understandable unease that Mr Matheson has expressed to me about voices that say that we no longer need to take climate action. All the evidence demonstrates that we have to do so urgently. The report helps us to win the argument that there is economic opportunity to be had from the transition to net zero and—again—that is very welcome.

On Mr Matheson's local point about his constituents who are affected by what is happening at Grangemouth, I set out in a statement to Parliament last week the investment of £25 million of additional resources that the Scottish Government is making available. I welcome the Prime Minister's announcement on Sunday of the opening up of £200 million from the National Wealth Fund. I assure Mr Matheson that we will work closely with the workforce in Grangemouth to advance on all those issues.

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): With the growth in renewable energy, we are also seeing a huge rise in the number of battery storage sites across Scotland, with more than 300 in the planning system. Last week, there was a fire at one of those sites at Rothienorman, and constituents are concerned about the fire and pollution risks at those sites.

At committee this week, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency admitted that it is

"concerned about the risks associated with battery energy storage systems"

and admitted that there is currently no regulatory framework or even

"a timescale for when a legislative change might happen."—[*Official Report, Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, 25 February 2025; c 34.*]

They can be dangerous systems, so will the Government take action to regulate the battery storage industry before a major incident occurs?

The First Minister: I recognise the importance of the points that Mr Lumsden has put to me. I will have to scrutinise the situation, but I imagine that regulatory oversight on those matters is reserved, and that the proximity of the Health and Safety

Executive will be critical in all that. I will explore the point that Mr Lumsden has put to me and write to him setting out the definitive answer.

Regardless of where the responsibility lies, we must have a safe approach to delivery of battery storage plants. The plants are critical to the transition to net zero, but members of the public are entitled to reassurance about safety. I will write to Mr Lumsden with the definitive response that he is looking for.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): The ECIU report highlighted statistics that show that Scotland's growth in net zero employment has slowed down and is now growing more slowly than every other region of the UK. Can the First Minister tell us why net zero employment growth in Scotland is much slower, when our natural resources are potentially greater? What are his plans to deliver the jobs and training that are urgently needed to decarbonise our transport, homes, buildings and land?

The First Minister: I indicated in my previous answer that Scotland's net zero economy supports 100,700 full-time equivalent jobs. The number has grown by 19.5 per cent since 2022, while the UK's growth has been 15.2 per cent. Based on the data that I have in front of me, Scotland's job growth in net zero has been faster than that of the rest of the United Kingdom.

I am all for encouraging employment growth in net zero. We are taking decisions. A few weeks ago, I was up at Sumitomo, in Nigg. I have more visits to the north of Scotland next week, when I will be looking at other renewable energy developments. I am all for it. In the budget on Tuesday, the Government put in place £150 million of additional resources for renewables development. Unfortunately, that was just one of the many things that Sarah Boyack was not able to bring herself to vote for on Tuesday.

Farming Support (Livestock Disease)

5. Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): To ask the First Minister what action the Scottish Government is taking to support farmers responding to threats to livestock from disease. (S6F-03839)

The First Minister (John Swinney): Farmers are facing an unusually high number of threats at the moment, including avian influenza, bluetongue virus, foot-and-mouth disease and Schmallenberg virus. Supporting farmers and producers is a key concern, and we are working with industry to guard against those threats.

The Scottish Government has robust and regularly exercised contingency plans, and has a proven track record in responding effectively to notifiable diseases. We are asking farmers to

remain vigilant, to discuss any concerns with their vet and to report suspicion of notifiable disease immediately to the Animal and Plant Health Agency.

The Scottish Government continues to work closely with other nations in the United Kingdom to monitor and assess the risks, and to prevent incursions of disease.

Brian Whittle: Farmers do not have their problems to seek, and they continue to feel the financial squeeze from the UK Labour Government's unfair family farm tax and the Scottish National Party Government's failure to deliver the rural support plan on time.

As the lambing and calving seasons are now upon us, farmers fear that they might be facing further risks to the viability of their businesses in the form of biosecurity threats. Recently, a farmer in Ayrshire reported losing 92 of his 152 lambs to Schmallenberg virus infection, which is spread by the same disease vector as bluetongue virus.

What considerations has the Government given to supporting provision of Schmallenberg vaccine, as the number of affected farms rises? How are the reports impacting on disease surveillance of bluetongue virus, and what additional support is available to help farmers to deal with the financial impact?

The First Minister: I share Mr Whittle's concern about the sustainability of farming as a consequence of the inheritance tax changes. I have made that comment publicly before.

The Government has put in place a financial settlement of more than £600 million for the farming sector, which was allocated in the budget process that—I gently remind Mr Whittle—he was unable to support on Tuesday. We are putting financial support in place for the farming industry. The Government fulfils its commitments to farmers.

I have seen the news reports that Mr Whittle referred to, and I am concerned about the implications for the individual farmer. Schmallenberg virus is non-notifiable in the UK and the European Union, which means that there is no requirement for farmers to report suspicion of the disease, because there are no control measures that the Government could take to prevent or eradicate the disease.

I will return to my earlier point. I represent a large rural constituency, and I know that the farming community takes incredibly seriously reporting to the relevant agencies any concerns that it has. As a consequence of that vigilance, we have managed to stop outbreaks of dangerous and damaging conditions circulating, and we will continue to do so in the period ahead.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): As members will be aware, I have many hill farmers in my Midlothian, South Tweeddale and Lauderdale constituency. Like everyone else, they are concerned about the spread of the viruses.

I hear what the First Minister says about the measures that are in place to reduce their spread, because the chief veterinary officer for Scotland has said that it is inevitable that the viruses will come. I also hear what the First Minister said about Schmallenberg not being notifiable. What measures are in place in relation to imports from Europe, not just from within the UK, to reduce the spread of viruses such as Bluetongue? *[Laughter.]*

The First Minister: On bluetongue, we already undertake routine testing for it before and after movements of susceptible imported animals in order to ensure that they do not introduce disease into this country. I hope that that provides Christine Grahame with some reassurance that cross-border co-operation exists, in that respect.

On vaccine provision, we do not allow vaccination for bluetongue serotype 3 in Scotland, which is a position that is supported by key Scottish industry organisations. As I put on the record in response to Mr Whittle, we encourage farmers to advise their vets of any issues. The chief veterinary officer engages on those questions, and the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands updated the Cabinet on those questions on Tuesday and will continue to do so.

Racing Greyhounds

6. Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): To ask the First Minister how the Scottish Government will protect the lives of racing greyhounds. (S6F-03851)

The First Minister (John Swinney): The Government is committed to ensuring the welfare of all animals. The Government introduced powers in the Animals and Wildlife (Penalties, Protections and Powers) (Scotland) Act 2020 to increase maximum sentences and fines for serious animal welfare offences. We also introduced provisions in the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 that offer significant and important safeguards for the welfare of all animals, including greyhounds.

I am aware of Mr Ruskell's proposed member's bill to prohibit greyhound racing in Scotland. I assure him that the Government will give full and careful consideration to the details of his bill when it is introduced.

Mark Ruskell: I thank the First Minister for that response and the summary of existing legislation. However, I ask him to reflect personally on the fact

that every year hundreds of greyhounds are killed and thousands are injured across the United Kingdom, and that those deaths and injuries are happening at licensed tracks. It is quite clear that licensing will not protect the dogs and that we should not be licensing animal cruelty as a nation.

Will the First Minister work more closely with me, and with the Welsh Government now, too, to reject the licensing of greyhound racing and to phase out greyhound racing to protect the dogs?

The First Minister: I am aware of the developments in Wales. I am happy for officials and ministers to engage in dialogue with Mr Ruskell on those questions, and we are happy to engage with our Welsh counterparts to explore the decisions that it has taken. I understand the importance of the point that Mr Ruskell puts to me and will happily engage with him on that question.

The Presiding Officer: We move to general and constituency supplementaries. If we are all concise, more members will have an opportunity to speak.

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP): Sir Keir Starmer, in the Labour manifesto, committed to restoring development spending to 0.7 per cent of gross national income. Just three weeks ago, the Foreign Secretary cautioned that President Trump's foreign aid cuts could be "a big strategic mistake". This week, Labour has U-turned and announced major cuts to United Kingdom foreign aid.

Does the First Minister share my concern about the UK Government stepping away from global leadership on aid? Does he agree that, if the UK Labour Government is looking to save cash, it could scrap the planned move of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office from East Kilbride, in my constituency, to Glasgow?

The Presiding Officer: Ms Stevenson, I believe that you may have mentioned your constituency at the end of that question. I will allow the First Minister to address that point specifically, but I remind all members that we are here to discuss matters for which the Scottish Government has responsibility.

The First Minister (John Swinney): I recognise the importance of the employment in the East Kilbride constituency of my colleague Colette Stevenson that is provided by the FCDO. There are outstanding plans to change the location of those employees' jobs, and I understand the concern that that is to the local member. If there are any representations that she wishes the Government to make, we will happily do so on her behalf.

Fatal Accident Inquiries (Deaths Abroad)

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): The *Sunday Post* revealed that a legal loophole is denying answers to Scots families when their loved ones die abroad. Confusion over the term “ordinary residence” means that, since 2016, no fatal accident inquiry following the repatriation of a body has been held. Families such as that of Aberdeen’s David Cornock have been denied closure. David died in Thailand in 2019, and his children were made homeless because the insurance would not pay out.

The Government has been aware of the situation for years but has not fixed it. Will the Government urgently review and resolve it before any more families have to suffer?

The First Minister (John Swinney): I will look at the issue. Various colleagues have raised it before, and I understand the concern caused to the families of those who are affected. I will explore the issues and determine whether the Government can take further action.

Secure Accommodation

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): Last week, no secure accommodation was available in the network in Scotland. Today, there is just one bed. On 20 February, the Children and Young People’s Commissioner Scotland wrote to the Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise, saying:

“I have been told that instead of a placement in a safe and therapeutic environment, with integrated education and mental health support”—

that is, our secure accommodation network—

“children have instead had to be placed in what has been described to me as ‘cobbled together’ provision”.

Is it right that, under your Government, the most vulnerable children in Scotland are relying on “‘cobbled together’ provision”?

The Presiding Officer: Always speak through the chair, please.

The First Minister (John Swinney): No, I do not think that it is. There has been legislative change, which was absolutely the right thing to do, to stop the incarceration of young people in Polmont so that they cannot be accommodated in prison. That has put more strain on the secure accommodation system.

The Cabinet is actively discussing what measures the Government needs to take to boost the scale and capacity of the secure estate to ensure that the type of capacity that was available when young people were incarcerated in Polmont can be available in the secure estate. We must be able to provide appropriate accommodation for

young people when such judgments have been made. That work is actively under way at present.

Ferry Services

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Yesterday, CalMac Ferries announced the reshuffle of its vessels and timetables due to exceptional issues that caused a third of its large-vessel fleet to be out of action or operate with a reduced capacity. The overhaul of the MV Clansman has been delayed, the refit of the MV Isle of Lewis will take an extra month and the MV Isle of Mull is restricted to just 45 passengers. For most of last year, the MV Caledonian Isles was out of action and its return has now been pushed back to the end of April, which means that there will be no services out of Ardrrossan for another two months. What reassurances can the First Minister give to island communities, who now fear a summer of chaos?

The First Minister (John Swinney): CalMac faces an incredibly congested set of circumstances as a consequence of issues in the ferry fleet, which Mr Gibson has narrated. CalMac has undertaken planning to ensure that routes can be serviced and essential services delivered. The situation will be kept under constant review to ensure that there is adequate support for lifeline services.

New vessels are scheduled to be delivered. The Glen Sannox is now in operation. Four other vessels that are due to join the fleet are being constructed at the Cemre yard and the Glen Rosa is also due to join the fleet.

The assurance that I can give Mr Gibson is that the expansion and modernisation of capacity is under way. He will also be aware that the Cabinet Secretary for Transport has made a significant intervention to ensure the sustainability of routes out of Ardrrossan in the years to come.

Isle of Mull Secondary School

Tim Eagle (Highlands and Islands) (Con): A letter that I received yesterday states:

“When I was 11, I was a happy child. I had friends, I had a happy home and I never found school a struggle. Shortly after my 12th birthday, I was sent to board away from home. I live on the Isle of Mull.”

It is an emotional letter from a local resident regarding the future of the Isle of Mull secondary school. Residents on the island are contacting me with deep concerns about the selection process for the site for the new school. All islanders just want the council to listen and want what is best for every child.

There is far too much detail for me to get into now, but does the First Minister, like me, believe that it is vital to ensure that the community is at the

centre of the decision-making process? Will he meet islanders, myself and any other MSP who wishes to join—virtually or on the island—to listen to their story and help to ensure that the right decision is made?

The First Minister (John Swinney): I understand the significance of the issue, but it is exclusively a matter for the local authority.

Tim Eagle: It is not.

The First Minister: I do not know why I am being shouted at by the member, who is saying that it is not. Perhaps I have to explain it, but education provision in Scotland is delivered by local authorities, and Argyll and Bute Council is the authority that is consulting on the school. Tim Eagle and his colleagues regularly accuse the Government of centralising power in this country. I am simply pointing out that the issue that he is complaining about is a matter for Argyll and Bute Council to consult on.

On the question of consultation, I think that there should, of course, be adequate community consultation—*[Interruption.]* I am not quite sure why I am being shouted at by Rachael Hamilton. I am simply saying that I would advise and encourage Argyll and Bute Council to engage in consultation with the community to come to an agreed position. These are, of course, difficult issues and councils should engage properly with their communities.

Produodopa

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): My constituent Liam Robertson has Parkinson's, which is slowly taking away his independence and his quality of life. The disease is no longer responding to his prescribed medication. However, his consultant has advised that a treatment called Produodopa could be successful in slowing his deterioration.

When I wrote to the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, I was told that the decision on whether to prescribe that life-altering treatment is up to individual health boards. NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde has told me that it will have to wait until care home applications are restored for the drug to be prescribed to my constituent. It is critical that we break that impasse and get Mr Robertson the vital treatment that he needs. Will the First Minister ask the health secretary to meet me and Liam Robertson so that we can ensure that he has access to Produodopa as soon as possible?

The First Minister (John Swinney): I am very happy for the health secretary to meet Mr Sweeney and his constituent on that question. I am not quite clear about the status of the drug, which will obviously determine what can be made

available, but I am happy to encourage that discussion to take place to address the points that Mr Sweeney has put to me.

Energy Price Cap

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): On Tuesday, Ofgem announced that the energy price cap will rise by 6.4 per cent in April, which means that energy bills will rise for the third time under the Labour United Kingdom Government. Despite Labour's election pledge to cut energy bills by £300, those bills have instead increased by £300. Citizens Advice Scotland has stated that it has supported 9,000 folk with their energy needs and that the average energy debt is currently £2,500. Does the First Minister agree that that blatant hoodwinking of voters from Anas Sarwar's Westminster bosses is nothing short of disgraceful during this cost of living crisis, especially in Aberdeen, which is the energy capital of the world?

The Presiding Officer: Further to what I said earlier, we will go on to the next question, First Minister. I call Rachael Hamilton.

Borders Railway (Extension)

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): I am absolutely delighted that, after months of pressure from MSPs in the Borders—including my friend and colleague Bluetooth Christine Grahame—up to £5 million has been released by the Labour Government for a feasibility study on the transformational extension of the Borders railway. Does the First Minister recognise how transformational that will be for my constituents and for the Borders economy?

The First Minister (John Swinney): I am and always have been a great supporter of the Borders railway, but I do not remember that always being the position of the Conservatives—or, perhaps, not that of all the Conservatives. I will again defer to my dear friend Christine Grahame, but I seem to remember that chap John Lamont not being that supportive of the Borders railway.

On a serious note, the Borders railway has been an absolutely unparalleled success. It has improved connectivity and is a great addition to the Borders. I totally understand the aspiration to extend the railway to cover other communities in the Borders and I am glad that that funding has been released to enable that to be explored.

Dalzell Steel Plant

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): The First Minister will have seen that the Sanjeev Gupta-owned South Australian steel plant at Whyalla has been placed into administration. That follows the

placing into administration of another subsidiary, Liberty Steel East Europe, late last year. Gupta's Dalzell plant here has not been producing for months, the company has not published accounts for years and there is an outstanding Scottish Government loan, yet there has been silence from the Scottish Government. What is the First Minister doing to ensure a future for the workers at Dalzell?

The First Minister (John Swinney): Obviously, the Government acted in 2016 to ensure that there was not a closure at Dalzell. We endorse Mr Rennie's points about the importance of securing productive activity there. We are aware of the GFG Alliance's financial issues. Scrutiny of the issues is being undertaken by ministers—Mr Rennie correctly points out that there are loan-related issues involved. The Government is assiduously engaging to make sure that the interests of the workforce and the financial interests of the Scottish Government are protected at all times.

Religious Observance in Schools

Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): The Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland has said that the Scottish Government's proposed changes on religious observance do not represent significant progress towards compliance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, because they do not include allowing young people to independently opt out of religious observance at school. Parents have always had the right to opt their children out, but pupils have no equivalent right, no matter their age, maturity or personal beliefs. In an increasingly secular and religiously diverse country, it is critical that young people of all faiths and none have their beliefs and choices respected at school. Will the First Minister consider that?

The First Minister (John Swinney): This issue is the subject of a consultation that closed on 26 January. There are a wide range of views on the topic, and ministers will consider them and decide on the way forward. We will consider all the responses to the consultation and will publish an analysis in due course. At that point, we will set out the steps that we will take to address the issues that are the subject of the consultation.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes First Minister's question time. The next item of business is a members' business debate in the name of Murdo Fraser. There will be a short suspension to allow those who wish to leave the chamber and the public gallery to do so.

12:51

Meeting suspended.

12:52

On resuming—

Park Home Residents

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): I ask guests in the gallery who are leaving the chamber to do so quickly and quietly because we are going back into session.

The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-15739, in the name of Murdo Fraser, on protection of park home residents. The debate will be concluded without any question being put. I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament believes that there are approximately 100 park home residential sites across Scotland, including in the Mid Scotland and Fife region, and that these contain more than 8,000 residents, with a typical residency of pensioners and retirees; further believes that park homes are a growing component of the housing stock; notes that residents own their park home and associated structure, but not the land that the park home is located on, and understands that the average cost of such homes varies between £90,000 and £250,000; recognises that there are reported concerns about park homes being mis-sold as main residencies despite site owners only having holiday licences, which leaves occupiers vulnerable to eviction; applauds the work of the Scottish Confederation of Park Home Residents Association (SCOPHRA) in raising awareness of the legal issues facing park home residents in Scotland and in protecting its members, and acknowledges SCOPHRA's reported calls for action on crucial areas such as including the organisation in the planning approval process for park home sites, supporting local authorities with proper training regarding park home legislation, and providing support for adaptations to park homes to aid those with disabilities and health conditions.

12:53

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I thank all the members across the chamber who signed my motion, allowing it to be debated this afternoon. This issue is clearly of interest to many members. I pay tribute to SCOPHRA—the Scottish Confederation of Park Home Residents Associations—for its excellent campaigning and lobbying work on behalf of its members. Gordon Morrison, the chair of SCOPHRA, is in the gallery this afternoon. I also acknowledge the work of Colin Beattie MSP, who chaired a cross-party group on park homes of which I was a member and which helped to get some changes made.

I will put the issue into context. Park homes are a growing component of the housing market in Scotland. It is estimated that there are 100 park home residential sites across the country, which are home to more than 8,000 residents. A park home is one that is classed as a temporary structure—what might be better known as a chalet

or lodge—whereby the owner of the property pays a ground rent to lease the land on which the structure sits. However, such properties are not insubstantial structures; the average cost of such homes varies between £90,000 and £250,000, and they provide a high standard of comfortable accommodation with all the amenities of a more permanent building.

Park home developments tend to be situated in scenic rural areas, often with an attractive outlook, and have become a popular option, in particular for retirees and those looking to downsize who want to be part of a community of like-minded individuals while reducing their energy and maintenance costs and who do not want the worry of maintaining a large garden. We are seeing more of those lodge developments springing up, and their existence allows larger family homes to come on to the market and become available for those who need additional accommodation.

Park homes are a positive development but, unfortunately, a number of issues that have arisen and impacted their purchasers have led me to the conclusion that the law about the purchase and occupancy of those properties should be updated and reviewed.

There are cases of disputes between park home purchasers and site owners going unresolved and of residents feeling threatened and intimidated by unscrupulous developers. Unlike the purchase of a permanent residence, the acquisition of a park home does not involve a formal conveyance. Accordingly, many purchasers do not involve a solicitor in their purchase, even when parting with substantial sums of money, which can leave them vulnerable to exploitation.

At present, the purchaser of a park home has the right to be given a written statement, which is a contract between the site owner and the resident and is enforceable in law by both parties. That statement will set out the details of the location and size of the pitch on which the home sits, the rules of the park and the annual pitch fee payable. That fee typically rises each year in accordance with the retail prices index, although I know that the Scottish Government has plans to change that to the consumer prices index. Despite the requirement for a written statement, we know that, in practice, there are park home owners who are not given such a statement and cases of statement terms not being met by site owners.

One of the most concerning situations that I have come across relates to the park home development at Bendochy, just outside Blairgowrie in Perthshire. In March 2022, Heritage Park Estates Ltd was given planning consent for 43 lodges and 10 glamping pods on the site of a former poultry farm, with the planning consent making it clear that the units would be used “for

holiday accommodation only". In August 2023, the Advertising Standards Authority ruled that the site owners had misled the public into believing that the homes could be used as permanent residences, and that a number of people had purchased them on that basis.

Roy and Susan Robertson are in precisely that situation. They sold their family home to purchase a park home at Bendochy park, believing that it would become somewhere they could spend their retirement. Properties there were advertised under the strapline

"Your dream home built your way"

and a prominent bullet point in the sales material stated that the park was

"open 365 days a year"

and made reference to the units being "homes". It was only after they parted with their funds that the Robertsons realised, too late, that the planning permission for the property restricted it to holiday use. They, along with a number of other residents, have now been served with planning enforcement notices that require them to find a permanent residence elsewhere or face eviction. As members can imagine, that is an extremely distressing situation for those affected, who have had to apply to the local council for accommodation elsewhere and are being treated as potentially homeless.

I have raised the issue with Perth and Kinross Council and with trading standards, which were pursuing it with the company that carried out the development. That company has now gone into liquidation and the park has been transferred to another company that cannot be pursued, which is very unfortunate.

The Minister for Higher and Further Education; and Minister for Veterans (Graeme Dey): I appreciate Murdo Fraser raising this very important issue in Parliament. I do not disagree at all with the thrust of what he is saying, but does he agree that, in some instances, local authorities could make more active use of the existing powers at their disposal? The fit-and-proper-person test could be used in relation to those operating the sites and would afford better protection for park home owners, at least in the short term.

Murdo Fraser: Graeme Dey makes a reasonable point about the enforcement of existing powers. Bendochy park was not treated as a caravan site, which meant that the fit-and-proper-person test did not apply in that particular case, but there are other cases to which that would apply, giving local authorities a legitimate role in intervening, which they could, in some cases, do more energetically. That is a reasonable point.

I will mention some other concerns that have been raised with me that affect park home

residents. Typically, utilities are paid for centrally by the site owner and billed back to the tenants, which gives rise to concerns about additional charges and profiteering. In some cases, residents who wish to alter or extend their homes or carry out landscaping work such as installing decking or patios are permitted to have that done only by the authorised contractor of the site owner and it is done at an inflated cost. When a park owner sells their property, it is typical for 10 per cent of the sale price to be taken by the site owner as a fee.

Residents who are elderly or have a disability are not eligible for local authority grants for improvements or adaptations because park homes are not treated as permanent buildings. As the Minister for Housing knows, I have lodged some amendments to the Housing (Scotland) Bill, which we will meet to discuss next week, as I think that it would be reasonable to extend the existing law on adaptations to allow those who live in a park home that is their permanent residence to be eligible for those grants.

The other important amendment that I would like to progress relates to the resolution of disputes. At the moment, when park home owners are in dispute with the site owner, their only remedy is to go to the sheriff court. As we know, that is a very expensive and bureaucratic process. Civil legal aid is almost impossible to achieve, and finding lawyers with a knowledge of and specialisation in this area is immensely difficult. That is why SCOPHRA has been pushing for the resolution of disputes to be moved to the First-tier Tribunal for Scotland, which deals with other housing issues and would not require the same expense or, necessarily, the involvement of solicitors. I have proposed that in an amendment.

I have had very good engagement with the minister, as has SCOPHRA, and I know that he is very sympathetic to some of the concerns that have been raised. I hope that this members' business debate will see the Scottish Government recognise that we need changes to the law in this area to protect some of the most vulnerable people in our society.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind all members who are seeking to speak in the debate to check that they have pressed their request-to-speak buttons.

13:02

Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): I am pleased to speak in this debate to address an issue that affects many of my constituents in Midlothian North and Musselburgh and thousands more people across Scotland—our park home residents, many of whom are not receiving the support that they

deserve. I thank Murdo Fraser for bringing the motion to the chamber for debate.

Back in 2011, when I was first elected, I convened a cross-party group on park homes that was formed to manage changes to legislation to correct anomalies that were seen as being unfair and unreasonable to residents. That was achieved successfully, but it now seems that those changes did not go far enough and that both legislation and enforcement need to be revisited.

Many of my constituents who reside in park homes are elderly or retired and they are almost consistently treated unfairly by their site owners. As I said, the Scottish Government has taken steps to improve conditions for park home residents, but I believe that more can and should be done to provide further protections for that vulnerable group.

We are all too aware of the energy crisis that has gripped our constituents' lives as prices continue to rise, but it is hard to believe that some park home residents do not have fair and transparent access to the utilities that they pay for. If they purchase utilities from the site owner as part of their written agreement, no specific charges can be identified. That bypasses the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets maximum price limits, which are there to protect customers. That lack of transparency leaves park home residents open to exploitation. A simple step that our Government could take is to ensure that residents have clarity and openness in relation to how their utility bills are calculated. Site owners must be constrained from profiteering from their residents' energy use.

Unfortunately, that is not the only common issue that residents face. The restrictions to qualifying for home adaptation grants have left many in the most appalling circumstances. I will share the story of a constituent who was given the most heartbreaking news. They had just had their second leg amputated, but because they lived in a mobile home, they did not qualify for financial help to install home adaptations, because the Housing (Scotland) Act 2006 states that any home that is not a permanent structure does not qualify. It is outrageous that anyone can be left trapped and isolated following a life-altering illness, and we must close that glaring loophole.

Following that correspondence, I reached out to the Scottish Government, which assured me that it was conducting a review of the adaptation system. I look forward to the outcome of the review, and I hope that it will bring welcome news to park residents across the country.

It is also vital that park home residents are included in wider discussions; their voices must be heard. Currently, that can be done via residents associations, which allow residents to organise

and create dialogue with their site owners. I was pleased to meet the Scottish Confederation of Park Home Residents Associations this morning, where we discussed the importance of residents associations and how SCOPHRA can assist residents in creating their own associations. However, my constituents informed me that some site owners still refuse to consult with residents associations, and co-operation cannot be enforced. I encourage the Scottish Government to investigate where the legislation can be tightened to ensure greater co-operation between site owners and residents. Simple mutual respect seems to be lacking.

Park home residents are not asking for special treatment; they are asking for fairness, stability and the ability to enjoy their home without unnecessary hardship. By working together, we can ensure that every resident—every one of our constituents—can live with dignity and security.

13:06

Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con): I pay tribute to my colleague Murdo Fraser for securing this important debate and for shining a light on an often undervalued and overlooked part of Scotland's housing landscape.

The Scottish Confederation of Park Home Residents Associations does a great job, but it is working without resource and on an entirely voluntary basis to make the case on behalf of thousands of residents. Given my constituency experience over the past eight and a half years, I was keen to speak in this debate and give voice to the legitimate concerns of local residents of park homes, who are often left without a voice or adequate mechanisms to address the unfairness and discrimination that they face. Their concerns are such that I do not want to give a number of specific examples today, because people are in such fear of the relationship that they have with park home owners and the control that they have over their home. That sort of thing would not be acceptable in any other part of the housing landscape.

Although overregulation concerns me in many other sectors, the situation here is quite the opposite. Too often, the park home sector feels like the wild west, where the normal rules do not apply. I know that some diligent site owners are doing the right thing, but too many operate to an unacceptable standard. They have identified it as a weak area in housing policy, where they can exploit vulnerable people, who are often older and disabled, and use them as a cash cow.

I am deeply troubled by the charges that are, as Colin Beattie mentioned, imposed for electricity usage, the lack of transparency around how those

costs are calculated and the inability of residents to control them. How can it be right that households that are among some of the most vulnerable—many of whom have, as Murdo Fraser has said, moved specifically to try to make their homes more affordable—are totally excluded from the consumer protections that the rest of us enjoy?

Equally, I have seen a number of issues with, for example, water pressure on sites, on which there is no oversight. There are also the well-known and well-rehearsed issues of exploitative rates for changing ownership and excessive and inflated site fees. Too often, park home owners feel as though they are being treated like second-class citizens, and they are not, as other members have mentioned, given the full facts before signing on the dotted line.

However, it is not only site owners who give rise to concern. As has been referenced, local authorities are not doing their bit and too often take a hands-off approach when it comes to their statutory and other duties in relation to such sites. In my experience, they often opt for the path of least resistance rather than stand up for local residents, adopting a tick-box approach to site licensing and showing little interest when it comes to ensuring that site designs are fit for purpose. How can it be right that roads and planning officials have such limited powers to root out bad practice in that space? How can sizeable residential developments be allowed to be built and operated without proper roads, drainage and lighting?

We then come to another area of bad practice that has already been referenced—the misselling of homes on non-residential sites. I first became aware of the scale of the issue during the Covid pandemic, when many non-residential sites were asked to close, in line with regulations. My inbox was flooded with emails from people who had been asked to move out of what they considered to be their main residence to go to other homes that did not exist. Thankfully, the Scottish Government stepped in in that instance, but, given the prevalence of the practice, I think that there needs to be a more serious rethink. Local authorities should not be, on the one hand, collecting council tax, registering people to vote and providing other services to such individuals while, on the other, claiming not to know about them.

I urge the minister to back Murdo Fraser's motion and get behind the cross-party efforts to ensure that park home owners are treated with fairness and given the same rights as other home owners.

13:10

Foysoil Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): I join other members in congratulating Murdo Fraser on securing a debate on the protection of park home residents, and I welcome the opportunity to discuss the issue, as it is not one that has been raised frequently.

According to the most recent estimate from the Scottish Confederation of Park Home Residents Associations, there are around 8,500 people living in park homes, and 100 parks, in Scotland. Park homes can be used as temporary holiday homes or as permanent residences. In recent years, the use of park homes as permanent residences seems to have grown as an option for older people.

The regulation of park home sites sits between permanent and temporary residency. The different system of rents, ownership and licences is outlined in the motion. The fact that residents own the home but not the land can cause issues. People who go on to SCOPHRA's website will find tips for living in park homes, information about membership costs and a big warning notice, in red font, that is followed by a disclaimer telling those who want to buy a holiday home to seek professional advice.

That is because of the issue of residents being misled park homes on the false pretence that they were permanent dwellings when, for licensing purposes, they were designated as holiday homes. As a result, members of the public—often, people who were newly retired—are facing homelessness, despite the fact that their park home was advertised as a home for life.

The holes in regulation extend to energy. For example, in 2022, park home residents were initially left out of the arrangements for Government support for energy bills, and a separate scheme had to be established. In recent years, following storms, residents have been left without power for days on end; indeed, some have said that they felt as though they had been forgotten about by energy companies.

I note the motion's call for park home residents to be given access to support for housing adaptations. I am often contacted by constituents who struggle to get adaptations made to regular homes, and I hear how worrying long waits are for them. I cannot imagine how it must feel to be getting older and frailer and not be able to make adaptations because of regulatory issues. Given that such homes are being used as permanent residences, in a similar way to rental properties, consideration should be given to how adaptations can be made.

I again congratulate Murdo Fraser on bringing the issue to the chamber. I understand that the

Scottish Government is considering reviewing the licensing regime for park homes, and I look forward to hearing what the minister has to say.

13:14

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): I thank Murdo Fraser for bringing this important issue to the chamber. As a fellow representative of Mid Scotland and Fife, I am aware that residents of park homes face serious issues. At lunch time, it was good to meet Gordon Morrison from SCOPHRA, which I absolutely support in seeking reforms in this area.

It is clear that, as we continue to face a housing crisis in Scotland, especially in our rural areas, and as increased demand for homes outstrips supply, park homes will continue to meet a housing need. However, I agree with Oliver Mundell that the situation right now feels like the wild west, and further reforms really are needed.

Housing is a fundamental human right: everyone in Scotland deserves a warm, safe and secure home, including those who live in park homes. However, that does not seem to be the case at the moment. For example, Perth and Kinross Council has issued six enforcement notices to lodge owners at Bendochy, where lodges were being used as permanent residences when the original planning consent was not for that purpose. However, those units were clearly advertised as homes that were open year round and, arguably, they were missold as permanent residences. Residents there face uncertainty over their housing security, due to those misleading adverts from a company that has now been liquidated.

Oliver Mundell: Does Mark Ruskell agree that it is wrong that individual residents, rather than park owners, are often more likely to face local authority enforcement action?

Mark Ruskell: I feel that that is a very clear injustice. It is now up to the Government to consider whether amendments to the Housing (Scotland) Bill, and perhaps other legislation, could be lodged to rectify that. In the chamber, we often talk about the needs of tenants. Park home residents in Scotland are a particular type of tenant, and they face a particular type of issue. We need to understand that better and consider the options for reform.

All of the current issues are really concerning, particularly for the most vulnerable residents of the parks affected. We have already heard examples of that. People are in quite impossible situations. Often, residents are elderly or have disabilities, yet they are facing all that stress. What has happened in Blairgowrie, and elsewhere across Scotland, highlights the weakness in our current legislation

on park homes and ownership rights, and shows that unscrupulous companies can missell to consumers, seemingly without any consequences.

We have also heard about energy supply issues. The Deputy Presiding Officer and other members will know that, following storm Éowyn, residents of the Fordell Gardens site in Fife were left without power for nearly 48 hours. However, they found themselves ineligible for emergency aid from Scottish Power, which meant that they had to either pay out of their own pockets for alternative accommodation or brave the cold until power was restored. The utility companies' stance amid the current cost of living crisis is completely unacceptable. It raises the question why people who reside in park homes are not, as a point of principle and justice, eligible for the same protection as those who live in traditional dwellings.

I recognise that there is a wider housing crisis in rural areas, and that there is in some areas arguably an imbalance across holiday accommodation, private and social rents and owner occupation. We really need to address that, because I see it happening in Perth and Kinross and elsewhere. Older people need the ability to downsize and live in smaller lodge-style units for rent, surrounded by a supportive community, and possibly even with the option of co-housing, all of which bring a huge amount of benefits. That is the model that many people want and need, but it does not fit easily with the park home model or with existing planning policy.

I ask the Government to consider how we address what lies at the heart of the issue: the need of park home residents, and many other people in Scotland, to have a secure and peaceful place to retire to, free from anxiety. The points that have been made about reform are well made, including the possibility of having a statutory tribunal process. It is clear that these residents' rights are not being protected right now.

Murdo Fraser's proposed amendments to the Housing (Scotland) Bill provide strong food for thought. We will consider them, but I also look forward to working across the parties with other colleagues as we move forward.

13:19

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): Oliver Mundell got to the nub of the issue when he said that the owners of such homes feel that they, rather than the owners of the sites, are vulnerable. That is the crux of the problem.

In my constituency, there is Annsmuir park, which is near Ladybank. The owners of the site have been appalling. The site's maintenance and issues around drainage and electricity have

frequently been reported to me and my colleague Wendy Chamberlain. The site is split—it is partly a holiday park and partly a residential park—but the poor relationship between the owners of the mobile homes and the owners of the site is long standing. It is important to call the owners out when they have poor practice, because it is important that they improve their practice in the future.

As we have heard today, a common problem of such poor practice concerns misselling. Is it a holiday home or a residence? Are people staying there all year round? Do people understand that difference before they purchase their home? There are issues around poor maintenance and the distribution of statements—people frequently do not receive their statements. As Mark Ruskell has just alighted on, when there are power cuts, they are considered as commercial customers rather than individual residents, and their vulnerability is not highlighted in the power company's system.

I pay credit to Murdo Fraser for securing this debate. I was impressed with the authoritative way in which he provided great detail and knowledge on the issue, and with his clear dedication to try to resolve it.

At Ladybank, we took the issue up with the local authority, but it was very passive about it. It was underresourced, which is a frequent state for many local authorities, but it was also passive in terms of how it applied the licensing process and the original planning process. I understand that it has many challenges across the piece, but there are clearly incomplete powers and underresourced licensing teams.

Murdo Fraser's point about tribunals is valid. We need to look at a tribunal process and make sure that there is a vehicle for residents to be able to raise their concerns at an affordable price through an official channel, rather than having to use the ramshackle processes that exist at present. That may drive changes in the wider sector and improve the process. Even if the tribunal is not used very often, it will bring some discipline and order into the application of the process. I understand that there is provision for the tribunal process to be utilised in England, and I believe that it should be applied here as well.

This is an incredibly important issue. A lot of people are feeling very vulnerable just now. I hear about many cases of people living in what are actually holiday homes—they do not receive bin collections, they are not on the voting register and they do not pay council tax. Those people are all living on the edge of society. They think that they live in their homes, but they do not officially live in residential homes. That is where the nub of the problem is.

I welcome the fact that the Government is doing a review of the sector. It needs radical change, because my experience so far is that current processes are wholly inadequate.

13:23

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I congratulate Murdo Fraser on securing this debate and I thank the Scottish Confederation of Park Home Residents Associations for its briefing. I also thank many of my constituents who are among the 70-plus residents of Bruce Court, Willow Park and Millglen Lodges for sharing their views with me in advance of this debate.

Park homes are a growing and welcome component of our housing stock, and residents are typically retired and looking to downsize and enjoy their retirement among like-minded people in a peaceful and attractive setting. In the midst of a housing emergency, park homes can offer a low-cost way of expanding the housing stock while freeing up traditional bricks-and-mortar homes for young families. However, it is clear from today's debate that there is strong cross-party support for the Scottish Government to take action to protect park home owners.

Residents own their home but not the land that it is built on. They do not enjoy the rights that owners or renters of bricks-and-mortar homes have. Instead, any recourse in the event of a dispute is covered by consumer rights legislation or the park home licensing regime. The Mobile Homes Act 1983 requires that site owners must give the proposed park home occupier a written statement that sets out the rights and responsibilities of both parties and other relevant information. However, there is no standardisation of that important document. Some residents may not even have been given one, and there is no independent register of ownership.

The licence fee does not cover the cost of any enforcement action; instead, the local authority has to recover that from the business that is operating the park home. I have constituents who believe that that has held their local authority back from taking enforcement action where it is necessary, because site owners can refuse to communicate with residents associations and individuals, making it difficult to resolve issues and causing significant frustration.

There are also concerns about the lack of designated park managers to handle issues when site owners are away, which leaves residents without support during emergencies. SCOPHRA and individual constituents question whether the fit-and-proper-person test is weeding out unscrupulous site owners—we have heard from

colleagues today of a number of alleged such owners.

Site maintenance and safety is a common complaint. A prominent example is site owners allegedly failing to spread grit during cold weather despite being asked to do so by vulnerable elderly residents. Such safety measures should be included in the licensing conditions to ensure compliance. As colleagues across the chamber have touched on, park homes are excluded from legislation on adaptations to help people with disabilities, because they are not a permanent structure. That is despite more park home residents being older and therefore more likely to have mobility issues.

Residents are concerned about the high cost of utilities such as gas and electricity, which are often metered by park owners. There are allegations of overcharging, and residents feel vulnerable to exploitation. The Office of Gas and Electricity Markets limits the maximum price at which gas and electricity can be resold to residents by site owners. However, that limit does not apply when an inclusive charge is made for accommodation—for example, when a park home pitch fee includes all amenities—or for the resale of liquefied petroleum gas. When the previous UK Government awarded households £400 off their energy bills, park homes were excluded, and Patricia Gibson MP had to take the matter to the floor of the House of Commons. Residents have also had difficulties with adding an electric car charging point to their park homes.

With regard to the 10 per cent commission on sales, in days gone by, the site owner often assisted in selling a park home, acting much like an estate agent and partly justifying the fee. Park home managers consider that commission to be important and argue for its role in supporting site facilities. However, the near-unanimous feedback from residents is negative; they see the commission as being more like a feudal levy. Often, residents are opposed to the commission in principle, as they consider it unfair or because they do not see a commensurate investment in site infrastructure.

The Scottish Government has pledged to review site licensing before the current session of Parliament ends. I trust that the minister is taking on board the concerns that colleagues from all sides of the chamber are raising today and will progress changes to better protect residents, thereby ensuring that park homes remain a viable and attractive housing option for our elderly population.

13:27

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland)
(Con): I thank Murdo Fraser for bringing the debate to the chamber. I must admit that I was not aware of this subject until I signed his motion. I was then contacted by constituents in Aberdeenshire asking me to meet them, and I spent a morning with park home owners to understand more about the issues that they face.

When I went to visit, I was struck by the sense of community. Everyone seemed to know everyone else in the park—I guess that we should not be surprised by that, because that is the whole idea of these parks. A park is a community of like-minded individuals who have their own space in the countryside with reduced maintenance.

No one should think of a park home as being any less a home than one that is made of bricks and mortar. We have heard the term “mobile homes” used in the debate, but that does not do most of these homes justice. They do not move about, and it is completely wrong for them to be covered by mobile home legislation alone. They are prefabricated homes, and the home owners deserve rights that are equivalent to those of other home owners.

During my visit, I heard of home owners not being given an adequate power supply to their homes, which meant, for example, that the oven could not be on at the same time as the heating. However, the site owner would not do anything about it. I heard stories of the local council asking for improvements to be made at the site but there being no evidence that the local council was actually checking that the improvement conditions of a licence were being met. Instead, the local authority was taking the owner’s word for it—no doubt due to limited budget, as we heard from Willie Rennie. I heard stories of site owners dismissing owners’ concerns out of hand and the owners having only a limited or expensive course of action open to them. That is not good enough. We cannot simply ignore those legitimate concerns.

That is why, on the back of my meeting, I submitted a number of questions on the subject to the devolved Government. The response to those questions was pathetic, to say the least. I asked how residents’ legal rights could be improved, and

“what new regulations are being considered to enhance the protection of park home residents.”—[*Written Answers*, 19 February 2025; S6W-34562.]

In response to my question on legal rights, I was told that the

“priority at present is to work to change the basis of pitch fee uprating from the Retail Prices Index to the Consumer Prices Index.”—[*Written Answers*, 21 February 2025; S6W-34568.]

That is an embarrassment—the only thing that the minister thinks should change is the price rise mechanism. There is nothing about improving legal rights and giving these residents more protection.

I asked the minister whether there were any plans to establish an independent body to oversee and regulate park home sites. Again, the devolved Government would rather turn a blind eye and do nothing. I asked the Scottish Government how it monitors and enforces compliance with existing regulations for park home sites. Basically, it does not; it just devolves all responsibility to our underresourced local authorities.

This Government has declared a housing emergency, and park homes can play a big part in helping to address that emergency. However, we need proper protections and regulations in place. The ideal chance to do that is the Housing (Scotland) Bill, which could put in place legal protections and set out a conflict resolution process and the rights that park home owners could expect from site owners. However, the bill does not do any of that. It is as though these homes and their owners just do not exist. I urge the minister to come with me to meet residents. He can tell them why the devolved Government does not care about their rights. He can tell them why he is content to turn a blind eye to rogue site operators. Minister, it is not too late. Listen to the issues, work with SCOPHRA, make sure that the housing bill works for all home owners and end discrimination against park home owners.

13:31

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

I, too, congratulate Murdo Fraser on securing today's debate and, as Willie Rennie said, on opening the debate with great authority and great knowledge of the subject while also proposing solutions. Often, Government ministers accuse Opposition members of complaining about issues but not coming up with potential solutions. We will discuss that later, following the minister's response, and, I hope, next week in relation to the Housing (Scotland) Bill.

I will focus on one point in my speech, but I want to acknowledge what others have said. Oliver Mundell was right to say that, although there is great interest in the issue in many of our constituencies and regions—I have dealt with the matter in this chamber and in the United Kingdom Parliament—some people are concerned about their names being mentioned in these debates, or even in correspondence to the minister, because of their fear that they will face repercussions from site owners.

I am not often the one who inserts balance into debates, but some site owners are very good. Sadly, they are sometimes in the minority, but I will give the example of a site owner who went to great lengths for elderly and disabled residents during the recent cold snap in Moray. The owner and his staff went out to clear the pavements and the ramps into residents' homes. It is important to put that on the record, but, sadly, a significant number are not acting in the best interests of the owners in their parks.

Murdo Fraser was right to say—Douglas Lumsden pointed this out, too—that the parks are extremely welcoming. Many people come to Moray and the Highlands because they like the location, but the sites also look extremely appealing from the outside, so we can understand why many people want to retire and move there.

The issue that I want to focus on, which was briefly mentioned by Kenny Gibson, is the rate of commission on the sales of properties. I wrote to the minister earlier this month, and I got a very prompt response from him. Owners have to provide 10 per cent commission to the site owners when they sell their property. I accept that everyone knows about that when they buy their property in the first place, but we must look at whether that is still a reasonable cost for people when they want to sell their home. The minister nodded when Kenny Gibson explained some of the reasons why that rate of commission remains in place.

However, when the Scottish Government carried out a consultation on the topic in 2011, the response was split right down the middle: the site owners and their representatives wanted the commission to be maintained, and the home owners opposed it. We will not please both sides, but we must decide whether we want to keep supporting the site owners, who like that income, or whether we want to respond more to the concerns of the home owners.

In response to the consultation, residents groups said that the commission is not directly related to the services that are provided. An important point that came out of the consultation is that the commission provides an incentive for unscrupulous site owners to harass residents into selling their homes in order to maximise their own profits. That is why the issue needs to be looked into.

The Scottish Government did a review of the wider impacts of the situation in 2013. Looking at the Scottish Parliament information centre briefing and at the situation in England, I was surprised to see that the United Kingdom Parliament has not considered a change since I was born. The last change was made in 1983, when the commission went from 15 per cent to 10 per cent. Surely, 12

years on from the Scottish Government's most recent review and more than four decades since the UK Parliament looked at the issue, now is the right time to consider whether the commission is still right and whether it should be set at 10 per cent.

Members' business debates are often consensual, and we have seen that today. Ministers often say in their responses that they will go away and look into the issues, but it can be weeks, months and sometimes years before action is taken. With this debate, we have a real opportunity in days—this time next week—to make some of the important changes that Murdo Fraser has suggested in his amendments. I hope that the Government will consider them positively.

13:35

The Minister for Housing (Paul McLennan): I thank Mr Fraser for securing the debate and members for their important contributions and for coming up with some solutions.

Mr Fraser and I have met previously on this issue, and he has my commitment that, as well as meeting next week to talk about the bill, we will meet again to discuss the issue. I have also met representatives of SCOPHRA. Mr Fraser has my commitment to on-going discussions.

We have heard from a few members about how residential mobile homes are an important housing option, especially for people who want to downsize and enjoy the lifestyle that a park home can offer in retirement. We have also heard that there are about 100 such sites in Scotland, and we have heard from many members that they have park homes in their constituencies. Everyone has the right to a safe and secure home, and we are committed to ensuring that those who live on permanent mobile home sites have appropriate rights and protections.

I will go into a bit more detail on some of the things that we have talked about. The Mobile Homes Act 1983 and the Caravan Sites Act 1968 were touched on. The 1983 act sets out implied terms that are automatically included in any contract between a permanent resident and a site owner. One of the key things that I have heard today is about how definitive that written statement has been for residents and tenants. The 1968 act protects residents against eviction and harassment.

My second point is about the licensing of mobile home site providers. That is one of the key things that I have heard all the way through the debate. On the back of today's debate, I will write to all local authorities to remind them of the powers that they have. The fit-and-proper-person test has been mentioned a few times.

Oliver Mundell: One of my concerns is that a lot of this sits with environmental health. There are good individuals working in that area, but they do not necessarily have the necessary experience, knowledge and housing expertise. Will the minister look at that when he contacts local authorities?

Paul McLennan: That is a valid point. It is not just about reminding local authorities of their obligations but about how they implement them. It is fine to have the powers, but are they able to implement them?

Licensing is important. The licensing system, which was introduced in 2019, provides local authorities with the range of powers that we have talked about to manage and, ultimately, revoke licences for sites that have received planning permission for residential use. A few members have discussed the issue, particularly with regard to Covid, of park homes that have been sold while being misrepresented. I remember a few cases of constituents coming to me because they were in the same situation. They were told that they had to move out for a period and were not aware of that right at the start—that had not been described at the start—so we have to eradicate that problem.

The Scottish Government provided model standards for local authorities to take into account when setting licensing conditions, as well as guidance to help with the operation of licensing systems and to provide some consistency. Mr Mundell's point on that is really important.

In addition, mobile homes are a consumer purchase, and caravan park owners and operators are subject to consumer protection legislation. It is important to keep protections under review, and we are taking action to do that.

We have talked about pitch fee increases, which are regulated by the Mobile Homes Act 1983, so fees do not increase by more than RPI. We have listened to concerns from residents that the gap between RPI and CPI has been greater in recent years, with the effect being that pitch fees are growing faster than pensions income. The Housing (Scotland) Bill, which I will come on to in a second, includes a proposal to update the inflation rate in the 1983 act to CPI. As RPI is typically above CPI, we expect there to be a slower rate of increase in pitch fees once the change comes into force.

We are committed to undertaking a post-implementation review of the residential homes site licensing scheme before the end of this parliamentary session, as has been referred to by a few members. What we have heard in the debate today will be part of that discussion on how to address some of the problems. We will consider the issues that have been raised about the operation of the scheme to date.

I am aware of the on-going concerns of residents, as highlighted by members today. I have heard concerns directly from SCOPHRA, and I have a mobile home site in my constituency, so I know that there can be issues with sites. The issues that we have heard about today are ones that I have heard from constituents. I have met representatives of SCOPHRA previously, and I am happy to meet SCOPHRA, Mr Fraser or anybody else outwith the bill discussions that we have had.

I wish to address a few specific points. I thank Colin Beattie for the work that he has already carried out. He made some points about adaptations and Ofgem, and I will summarise some of those issues. Graeme Dey mentioned the role of local authorities. Oliver Mundell talked about site licensing and misselling—I will come on to site licensing. Foysol Choudhury talked about some issues concerning storms, and I will touch on what we are considering in that regard, too. I thank other members for the points that they raised.

I have talked about what we are planning to do with the licensing scheme. One key thing concerns energy. One of the actions that I will take away from today's debate is to contact Ofgem about that. There are certain rules and regulations under which site owners should be operating. I will write to Ofgem today, and I am happy to share information with Mr Fraser on the back of that. That is a really important issue. There is guidance from Ofgem on site owners charging only at the price paid for unit energy, plus the standing charge, so site owners cannot profit from charges to residents.

We have spoken about adaptations. Local authorities have a duty to ensure that the needs of disabled residents, whatever their housing circumstances, are met and to offer support under the provisions of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970. We plan to undertake a review of the current housing adaptations system, which will make recommendations on how best to improve and streamline the system and how to better target resources.

Douglas Lumsden: Could provisions be changed through the Housing (Scotland) Bill to allow park home residents—who still pay council tax to the local authority, just like everyone else—to have adaptations made, just like other residents?

Paul McLennan: As has been mentioned, Mr Fraser and I are discussing his amendments to the Housing (Scotland) Bill, and we will pick up and discuss that issue.

There is a recognition of concerns about misselling, which can have a significant impact on individuals. We have heard about some similar

cases coming through. Consumer protection policy on advocacy and advice is devolved to the Scottish Government, and we promote services to residents locally. Policy on redress and enforcement is reserved to the UK Government, so we are limited by the action that it takes in that area. That might be a matter on which I can write to my UK equivalent.

On access to justice, we are keen to support residents, and I continue to listen to the views of constituents, as well as those that have been expressed in the debate today. Residents can get support from Advice Direct Scotland and trading standards services. Issues about site licensing can be raised with the local authority.

Mr Fraser and I will be discussing the issue of transferring disputes under the Mobile Homes Act 1983 from the sheriff court to the First-tier Tribunal. Mr Fraser has lodged an amendment on that, and we will discuss it next week.

On the 10 per cent commission chargeable under the implied terms that govern the sale of a home, research in England has suggested that a reduction could have an impact on the viability of smaller parks. The point that Mr Ross made on that is very important. We have to strike a balance. It, of course, concerns the viability of the parks, but it is also about protecting residents.

I thank Murdo Fraser for securing today's debate, and I thank members for what I think has been a very consensual debate. I commend SCOPHRA for its support to residents, and I look forward to meeting its representatives again. I also thank SCOPHRA for its proactive and collaborative work with stakeholders. It has worked with the Scottish Government—for example, in meetings with the Law Society of Scotland and in feeding back to local authorities on licensing issues—and I was pleased to contribute to its conference last year. I look forward to meeting Mr Fraser later this week and to working with SCOPHRA in the future.

13:44

Meeting suspended.

14:30

On resuming—

Portfolio Question Time

Education and Skills

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): Good afternoon. The first item of business this afternoon is portfolio questions on education and skills. I remind members that questions 2 and 7 have been grouped together, so I will take any supplementary questions after both substantive questions have been asked. Any member looking to ask a supplementary should press their request-to-speak button during the relevant question.

Mobile Phones in Classrooms (Guidance)

1. **Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what plans it has to update its guidance on the use of mobile phones in classrooms. (S6O-04370)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Jenny Gilruth): The Scottish Government published updated mobile phone guidance in August. The guidance empowers headteachers to take the steps that they see fit to limit the use of mobile phones in their schools. That includes implementing full bans if they feel that that is required. A number of schools have updated or are reviewing their policies in the light of the national guidance, which has now been in place for seven months.

Pam Gosal: I thank the cabinet secretary for that response. Parents from my area of Bearsden have reached out to say that current guidance on the use of mobile phones does not go far enough, as phones can be used to distribute harmful content and distract pupils during class time. Even more shockingly, a teacher that I spoke to said that phones were used to film female pupils using unisex toilets.

Parents do not get to choose what school their children go to and what policy is in place on mobile phones. I have stood here many times asking the Scottish Government why it is unwilling to act on that, why it refuses to listen to the voices of the many concerned parents and why it seems content to fail Scotland's pupils—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Your question, Ms Gosal.

Pam Gosal: I will once again ask the cabinet secretary if she will listen to reason and ban the use of mobile phones in schools—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary.

Pam Gosal: —and make sure that schools—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary.

Pam Gosal: —have single-sex toilets.

Jenny Gilruth: As cabinet secretary—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Hold on, cabinet secretary.

Ms Gosal, it was quite clear that I had asked you to come to your question. You were well over the time limit for questions. I had called the cabinet secretary to speak. At that point, I would be grateful if you resumed your seat.

Cabinet secretary, please continue.

Jenny Gilruth: Thank you, Presiding Officer. It is because, as cabinet secretary, I have listened to parents and carers and teachers that we updated our mobile phone guidance in August last year, only seven months ago. In that updated guidance, I have gone as far as I am able to towards a full-scale ban. I remind the member that the Scottish Government cannot unilaterally ban mobile phones. Scottish ministers do not have the power to do that.

I hear the passion from Ms Gosal on the subject of the use of mobile phones in schools. I had to contend with it myself as a teacher. I recognise the challenge. I invite the member to interrogate the updated guidance that was published seven months ago.

A range of schools across Scotland already have a full-scale ban, but some headteachers argue that a more nuanced approach is more suitable for their school. Fundamentally, my position as cabinet secretary is that I trust Scotland's headteachers to get it right for the children whom we entrust to their care every day. If Ms Gosal has a specific concern in relation to the updated guidance that we published in August, I would be more than happy to correspond with her or to meet her on that point.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will need briefer questions but also briefer responses, cabinet secretary.

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): I acknowledge the updated guidance. Where is the voice of young people in the debate and how should schools, local authorities and Governments listen to young people, who are most impacted by the misuse of mobile phones in schools?

Jenny Gilruth: It is hugely important that we listen to the views of young people in relation to this issue. The school at which we launched the updated guidance in August had taken a dynamic approach to involving the children—and their

classroom teachers—in mining their own mobile phone use to analyse the amount of time that they all spent online. As a result of that process, the school got buy-in from the pupils, the parents and carers, and the teaching staff. Consulting children on changing policies that will ultimately impact them is hugely important.

Ash Regan (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba): In the light of the remarkable improvements at Berwickshire high school, where banning mobile phones in all school buildings has led to rising attainment, better behaviour and a significant reduction in bullying, does the minister not agree that mobile-free learning environments have clear educational benefits? I believe—and I think that many across the chamber agree—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call the cabinet secretary.

Ash Regan: —that it should be the national policy—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary.

Ash Regan: —on mobile phones.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ash Regan, please resume your seat. I make the same point to you as I made to Ms Gosal: when I have called somebody else to speak, you need to resume your seat.

Jenny Gilruth: I agree that having a mobile phone-free learning environment can have educational benefits, but I remind Ms Regan, as I have reminded Ms Gosal, that the Government cannot unilaterally ban mobile phones. The guidance that we published in August goes as far as we are able to at the current time. If Ms Regan would like to correspond with me on the issue, about which she feels passionately, I am more than happy to write to her or meet her.

Dyslexia Support (Schools)

2. Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what plans it has to expand dyslexia support in schools, to remove any barriers for children who need the right support to thrive. (S6O-04371)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Jenny Gilruth): We are committed to improving the experiences of children and young people with dyslexia. The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 places duties on education authorities to identify, provide for and review the additional support needs of their pupils. Our national approach to dyslexia focuses on early identification. We are working with Dyslexia Scotland and local government to continue to improve the frequency and consistency of early identification through the use

of the addressing dyslexia toolkit and the dyslexia identification pathway. The 2025-26 budget also sets out an additional £29 million of investment for ASN, which I hope will be welcomed by members.

Rona Mackay: Investment and meaningful support for dyslexic individuals and young people with additional support needs are fundamental to getting it right for every child, which is an important commitment made by this Government. However, too many dyslexic children are slipping through the net. That has been highlighted in a report that was published by Dyslexia Scotland in collaboration with the University of Glasgow. Can the minister confirm whether the recommendations in that report will be considered?

Jenny Gilruth: I agree that the findings in the recent report are concerning, and we agree that those with dyslexia should be supported in educational and professional settings. At the end of last year, I visited Roseburn primary school to see how enhanced support for learners with dyslexia from teachers and pupil support staff with the right skills and knowledge has made a huge difference in ensuring that children and young people with dyslexia are supported appropriately.

We are currently exploring options to strengthen the existing opportunities for our education staff to take part in professional development on additional support for learning, including on dyslexia. We have also committed to undertaking an analysis of the learning hours that are attributed to additional support for learning content in our initial teacher education programmes across Scotland.

Dyslexia Support (Pupils)

7. Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to support school pupils with dyslexia. (S6O-04376)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Jenny Gilruth): As part of our partnership approach to improve the educational experience of children and young people with dyslexia, we work closely with Dyslexia Scotland and Education Scotland to support their work with local authorities and schools. The Scottish Government provides grant funding of £200,000 a year to Dyslexia Scotland to deliver work that has a positive and enabling impact on educational provision for children with dyslexia and those who support them.

Fulton MacGregor: I recently joined the cross-party group on dyslexia, and I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the work that it does. I have also had some positive discussions with Paul McNeill, who is an ambassador for Dyslexia Scotland, about the need for further supports for children in

schools. On that note, will the cabinet secretary consider convening or being part of a round-table discussion including Dyslexia Scotland, Education Scotland, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland and any other relevant stakeholders to agree on a framework solution to support dyslexic children better in our education system?

Jenny Gilruth: I very much recognise that more work needs to be done to ensure that consistent, appropriate and timely support is in place for our children and young people with dyslexia across Scotland. Following my meeting with Dyslexia Scotland in January, I discussed the matter with COSLA, and I have agreed to issue a joint letter to all education authorities on best practice for supporting children and young people. That will include information on the value of adopting the agreed Scottish working definition of dyslexia, the dyslexia identification pathway within the toolkit, the free professional learning modules that are available for teachers to enhance their knowledge and skills and the professional recognition programme on dyslexia and inclusive practice. I would be happy to keep members and the cross-party group informed of the progress in that area.

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): Today's Audit Scotland report on additional support for learning sets out a pretty challenging picture for teachers and schools. The report states that the Scottish Government and councils must fundamentally rethink how they plan, fund and staff additional support for learning as part of core school education in Scotland. Does the Scottish Government accept the recommendations in the report, and will ministers urgently come forward with a plan on how the recommendations will now be actioned?

Jenny Gilruth: I welcome Audit Scotland's report on additional support for learning. It is challenging to the Government, and I accept that challenge as Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills. I want to meet the Auditor General alongside COSLA to ensure that we have a partnership approach to responding to the challenge that is put to the Government.

I hope that Miles Briggs recognises the seriousness with which I take the report in relation not only to our investment in additional support for learning but to the experience of parents, carers, children and young people on the ground. To my mind, we need to better understand that, and that is one of the critiques in the report.

There is an issue about the transparency of the spend and the granularity of how we quantify that. I am interested in pursuing that issue further with the Auditor General, because he raises a really important point about public spending, and, of

course, significant funding is being provided to support additional support needs in our schools.

I welcome the challenge, and I will continue to engage with the Auditor General on it and will be more than happy to engage with Mr Briggs on the matter, too.

University of Dundee

3. Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what recent discussions it has had with the Scottish Funding Council regarding the University of Dundee. (S6O-04372)

The Minister for Higher and Further Education; and Minister for Veterans (Graeme Dey): Along with my officials, I have been in regular contact with the Scottish Funding Council on the situation at the University of Dundee. In recent weeks, I have also met the senior management team at the university.

I fully understand that this is an anxious time for staff and students, but it is imperative that the university brings forward a robust financial recovery plan and that it does so in close and on-going engagement with staff, in line with fair work principles.

The Funding Council will undertake detailed expert analysis of the university's financial recovery plan once it is finalised, and will provide advice to the Scottish Government on the next steps to support the university.

Mr Marra will, of course, be aware that the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government set out the Government's commitment to support our universities, including the University of Dundee, with £15 million of financial transactions that will be available to the SFC.

Michael Marra: What Parliament and the people in Dundee really need to know is the status of the £15 million loan that was set out in the chamber by the cabinet secretary. From my engagements with the university, I know that that money will not touch the sides of the black hole. Can the minister lay out clearly what figures he has seen that led his Government to announce that particular sum of money to Parliament on Tuesday?

Graeme Dey: Right now, it is difficult to be definitive on the way forward for the University of Dundee, for a variety of reasons—not the least of which is the finalising of the financial recovery plan, which, as I indicated, the SFC will consider. The SFC is actively engaged with the institution on receiving, in the first instance, a high-level and working draft that can be examined.

I understand absolutely the frustration and anger of staff and students about the time that it has taken to provide transparency on the scale and nature of the financial problems, how they arose and how it is proposed that they will be addressed.

Equally, it is important that the picture that emerges is entirely accurate, and that the proposed recovery plan has the potential to restore the university to a sustainable position and minimise redundancies, as far as possible. The plan should also seek to ensure that the institution's significant contribution both to the local economy and to the overall higher education and research offer in Scotland is maintained.

I am conscious of the time, but this week's announcement in the budget of the provision of additional funding to the SFC for the purpose of supporting institutions such as the University of Dundee is a clear sign that the Government is prepared to support provision of assistance that will enable the SFC to help the University of Dundee through its immediate challenges, and afford it breathing space to shape a recovery plan that is credible in terms of delivery. The SFC will assess matters further as the information that I mentioned earlier comes forward.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: A number of colleagues want to ask supplementary questions, so they will need to be brief. On the back of that latest response, the minister's answers will need to be a bit briefer, too.

Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee City West) (SNP): Unlike Mr Marra, I not only welcome the £15 million funding, but I voted for it. It is really important that we develop a recovery plan that supports the University of Dundee's reputation as a global centre of excellence in teaching and research. That has to be done in collaboration with the staff and workforce. Does the minister agree?

Graeme Dey: I do agree with that. Mr FitzPatrick will recognise that a process is being worked through. I actively encourage the university and trade unions to engage constructively in dialogue in order to seek a resolution in all that is happening. To be clear, consultation should include being open to considering any credible alternative cost-saving measures that are brought forward as part of the process.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): The SFC loan will go almost entirely to the University of Dundee. This week, Steve Olivier of Robert Gordon University warned that institutions face a "major existential threat" due to "significant" underfunding. Neil Cowie at North East Scotland College—NESCol—said:

"We're constantly being asked to do more with less, and that is simply not sustainable."

What help will be announced for such institutions? Will the minister risk the "existential threat" becoming reality?

Graeme Dey: In his question, Liam Kerr did not mention Sir Peter Mathieson of the University of Edinburgh, who made a number of points about the challenges that his institution faces. He particularly highlighted the contribution that previous Tory United Kingdom Government policies and immigration rhetoric have made to the fall in international student numbers, which is exacerbating the problems that our institutions face. There is a raft of challenges.

In answer to the specific question, I say that the SFC and the Scottish Government are alive to the challenges and are engaging with the university sector on the challenges that it faces.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): To follow on from Michael Marra's question, I am interested in how the £15 million amount was alighted on. If the plan that is developed by the university indicates that more money is required in order to secure a smooth transition, will the minister make the argument to the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government and the First Minister that more money should be made available to avoid big job losses?

Graeme Dey: As I said to Michael Marra, the announcement earlier this week was predicated on an approach that seeks to provide the University of Dundee with breathing space to produce a credible plan for its recovery. As I also said to Michael Marra, on the back of that information—I have other information coming forward—the SFC will assess what is put in front of it and consider how we will proceed from there.

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): Fair work principles are central to good workplace conditions and culture, but with trade unions continuing to be excluded from meaningful engagement and participation in development of the recovery plan, the university executive group is not upholding those principles. Is it the minister's expectation that staff will be involved in development of the recovery plan and not just presented with it after it has been drawn up by others?

Graeme Dey: As I said earlier, I expect that a draft recovery plan will come forward. At that point, I expect staff representatives to be afforded the opportunity to make what will, I hope, be credible alternative proposals, which should be given appropriate consideration.

Additional Support Needs (Motherwell and Wishaw)

4. Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it is supporting pupils with additional support needs in the Motherwell and Wishaw constituency. (S6O-04373)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Jenny Gilruth): Local authorities oversee the delivery of education and have a statutory duty to identify, provide for and review their support for pupils with additional support needs.

Spending on additional support for learning by local authorities reached a record high of more than £1 billion in 2023-24. In addition, the 2025-26 budget sets out a further £29 million of additional investment for ASN. Funding from that will go to councils across Scotland, including North Lanarkshire Council, and it will support local and national programmes that are focused on recruitment and retention in the ASN workforce.

Clare Adamson: I thank the cabinet secretary for her answer and for underlining that the onus is on the local authority to identify the pupils.

However, casework that is coming through my office indicates that many parents and carers in Motherwell and Wishaw are not aware of co-ordinated support plans. They are being offered a personal plan, an education plan or a getting it right for every child plan—any plan that does not have the statutory underpinning of a co-ordinated support plan. Will the cabinet secretary outline the importance of the local authority making CSP arrangements a priority for children and young people with additional support needs in my constituency? How can parents address the issue?

Jenny Gilruth: Our education authorities have a legal duty to have arrangements in place to identify children and young people with additional support needs who require a co-ordinated support plan. Arrangements for a CSP need to be put in place to enable the crucial individual support and interventions to be planned in a co-ordinated way, where we have multiple agencies working together to support a child or young person.

Members will be aware that the Education, Children and Young People Committee carried out an inquiry into additional support for learning last year. In response, I committed to including in the refreshed additional support for learning code of practice further clarity on the relationships between the CSP and other plans within a staged intervention model. That is hugely important in relation to communication with parents and carers.

As part of our work through the ASL action plan, we are also developing for children, young people,

parents and carers a national professional learning resource and accessible information and guidance on CSPs.

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): Today's Audit Scotland report said of the Government's project board that it has made "limited progress" and that the action plan

"does not address resourcing issues".

Predictably, the cabinet secretary has just passed the buck to local authorities; however, on that, the report said that funding allocations

"for councils do not reflect the ASL legislation, the presumption of mainstreaming and the continued growth in recorded additional support needs."

What on earth is the cabinet secretary and her team doing, and when she will take responsibility for dismally failing Scotland's children with additional support needs?

Jenny Gilruth: I regret the tone of that question. There are real challenges in Scotland's schools at the current time, and it would be far more beneficial for Scotland's children and young people if parties were able to work together to respond to the challenges.

I heard Pam Duncan-Glancy complain about resources. I remind her that she and her party chose to abstain on the motion on the Scottish Government's budget, which provided for—*[Interruption.]*—an extra £29 million of investment for additional support needs. If she wants to come to the chamber and complain about resourcing, she might want to change her vote in the future to support for extra investment in order to ensure that it goes to those who need it most.

Forth Valley College Skills Transition Centre

5. Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what role the skills transition centre at Forth Valley College will play in protecting and redeploying the skills base, and providing further training opportunities for a just transition of workers in the Grangemouth chemical cluster. (S6O-04374)

The Minister for Higher and Further Education; and Minister for Veterans (Graeme Dey): We have been clear that every measure must be taken to support the workforce at Grangemouth. The skills transition centre is the first project to be delivered through the Falkirk and Grangemouth growth deal, with £4 million of investment from the Scottish Government.

The centre will provide state-of-the-art equipment and facilities for Forth Valley College to provide training, both now and for future generations, to respond to the needs of Grangemouth and the emerging sectors as part of the net zero transition. The college is a critical

partner for us as the provider of the skills intervention funding for the refinery workforce.

Michelle Thomson: Given the leading role of Forth Valley College in the skills transition process, it will be vitally important that the college can assess capacity and ensure that it is in place to deliver on demand and at pace. How is the Scottish Government supporting the college to ensure delivery?

Graeme Dey: Forth Valley College was identified as the lead partner for the skills transition centre because of its ability to deliver in response to the transitioning workforce. We look forward to continuing to develop that offering in the months ahead. We are actively working with Forth Valley College and wider partners across the Grangemouth future industry board to understand what additional skills-focused activity is needed and exactly how it can be provided, because we must ensure that whatever is required is available.

Violence in Schools

6. Sharon Dowe (South Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on what action it is taking to deal with violence in schools. (S6O-04375)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Jenny Gilruth): Violence towards pupils or school staff is completely unacceptable. We published our joint action plan with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities last August. The plan sets out 20 actions to be taken by 2027, including a number of actions to reduce violence in our schools.

We have published new guidance on gender-based violence, updated our mobile phone guidance and our anti-bullying guidance, and provided extra funding to help support the training of support staff, who often deal with the most challenging behaviour in our schools. We committed to report annually on progress of delivery against the plan. The first progress report will be published in the coming weeks.

Sharon Dowe: Although violence in schools is rising, the Scottish National Party has left teachers, parents and the police feeling powerless to help young victims, whereas violent pupils feel safe in the knowledge that they are unlikely to face significant consequences.

At a recent summit on youth violence, young people who were victims told us that they felt forgotten. They had to change classes, restrict their movements and change their subject choices, while the perpetrators faced no consequences for their actions.

Schools should be places of learning, not places of living in fear. What specific actions has the

Scottish Government taken since that summit to improve the safety of our youngsters in schools and to give teachers the power that they need to remove those who are causing disruption?

Jenny Gilruth: I thank Sharon Dowe for her question. She and I attended the same summit and heard the same stories, and I very much recognise the challenge. I absolutely agree with her that our schools should be places of learning. Most schools are places of learning, every single day, but I accept that there are challenges in some of our schools and classrooms. We need to respond to that challenge as a Government, but also at local level.

Sharon Dowe's point relates to consequences. I want to put on the record that our existing policy framework, including our national policy on exclusion, does not prevent the use of consequences. However, we have heard consistently, including at the summit that she and I both attended, that that is not necessarily people's experience on the ground.

As I alluded to in my initial response, in the coming weeks we will provide an update to the action plan that I published in August, and it will address consequences. I think that that will give Sharon Dowe greater clarity on consequences. However, I am happy to meet her on the issue, because the challenge that she and I heard about at the summit was very real. It is important that the Government and local government respond accordingly to that challenge.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I apologise to those who are seeking to ask supplementaries on that question—we do not have time.

Employer NICs (Early Learning and Childcare)

8. Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the impact of the rise in employer national insurance contributions on local authority partnership early learning and childcare settings. (S6O-04377)

The Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise (Natalie Don-Innes): Through my regular engagement with the childcare sector, I am keenly aware of the concerns about the United Kingdom Government's changes to employer national insurance contributions. Our estimates indicate that those changes will add £5 million per year to partner providers' costs for the delivery of funded ELC.

The First Minister and the president of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities welcomed the support of childcare sector representatives when they wrote to the chancellor in January, calling again for the Treasury to meet the costs for Scottish public services in full. The Scottish

Government will continue to advocate for the interests of funded ELC providers at every opportunity.

Clare Haughey: A partnership nursery in my Rutherglen constituency has estimated that the impact of changes to national insurance, coupled with wage rises that its staff deserve, will cost approximately £2,500 per employee. Does the minister agree that it is deeply regrettable that the Labour UK Government voted specifically to exclude an exemption from the rise in employer national insurance contributions for early learning and childcare settings—thereby adding significantly to their costs—especially given their vital contribution to the education of Scotland's children?

Natalie Don-Innes: Absolutely. I fully agree that there is much to regret in the UK Government's increase in employer national insurance contributions and fully appreciate the concern among providers in relation to that rise in costs.

Early learning and childcare is only one of many vital public services that are delivered in the public, private and third sectors, and we estimate that the UK Government's increase could add more than £700 million to the costs of public services in Scotland. The Scottish Government has been clear that the Treasury must fully fund those costs, but the Treasury has indicated that we will instead receive a much lower-value Barnett share of spending in England. We maintain that additional support must go beyond a simple Barnett share and recognise the differing size and configuration of public services in Scotland.

Given the potential impact on charities, the health and care sector and businesses, the UK Government should have looked across the range of tax powers that are at its disposal before pushing through that increase to employer national insurance contributions.

Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Urgent action to tackle underfunding in the sector—in which staff turnover rates are far higher than they should be—is desperately needed. Will the minister tell us what more she is doing with the private, voluntary and independent sector to address the continuing disparity between private and state nurseries?

Natalie Don-Innes: As set out in the draft budget, we will provide an additional £9.7 million to local authorities to support an increase in the pay of childcare workers in the private and third sectors.

Over and above that, the member will be aware of continuing work in relation to the sustainable rates review. Full implementation of those changes will be reliant on a cost collection exercise that will be undertaken in spring 2025,

which will look at things such as bringing the rates that are paid to childminders into line with those for other types of provision, setting a higher rate for two-year-olds, staffing ratios and separating payments for free meals.

I am more than happy to continue discussing with the member other ways in which we are supporting the PVI sector if she so wishes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I apologise to the members whom I could not call for supplementaries.

That concludes portfolio questions on education and skills. Before we move to the next item of business, there will be a brief pause to allow members on the front benches to change over.

Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2025 [Draft]

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-16489, in the name of Ivan McKee, on the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2025. I invite members who wish to participate to press their request-to-speak button, and I call Ivan McKee to speak to and move the motion.

14:58

The Minister for Public Finance (Ivan McKee): The motion on the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2025 seeks Parliament's approval for the guaranteed allocations of revenue funding to individual local authorities for 2025-26. It also seeks agreement on the allocation of additional funding for 2024-25 that has been identified since the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2024 was approved on 28 February last year.

We cannot, of course, ignore the challenging circumstances in which we have had to agree the Scottish budget this year. The Scottish Government's block grant funding for 2025-26 represents a 1 per cent real-terms increase for resource funding following the welcome reset of budgets in 2024-25. That first step to address 14 years of United Kingdom Government austerity measures is welcome. However, the challenges that our public services face can be addressed only by longer-term investment plans and commitments.

In response to the UK Government's changes to employer national insurance contributions, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government announced that the Scottish Government will provide an additional £144 million for local government, which is equivalent to a 5 per cent national increase in council tax.

However, the UK Government must fully fund the cost of the increase to Scotland's public sector and not the much lower Barnett share of the funding that is provided in England. With our partners in the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, ministers will continue to press the UK Government to fund the additional costs in full, and I would welcome support from across Parliament in that respect.

The 2025-26 budget that Parliament passed earlier in the week is a budget that delivers for the people of Scotland. It invests in our public services, lifts children out of poverty, supports jobs and the economy and responds to the climate emergency. The budget will deliver record funding

of more than £15 billion to councils in 2025-26; we are providing revenue funding of more than £14.2 billion and almost £800 million of support for capital expenditure. The 2025-26 local government finance settlement provides an additional 8 per cent, which is a real-terms increase of 5.5 per cent compared with 2024-25.

The outcome of the Scottish budget provides demonstrable evidence of our actions to deliver a fiscal framework between the Scottish Government and local government. More frequent and meaningful budget engagement has been fundamental in the decisions that underpin the budget, including the real-terms protection that is applied to general revenue grants. The budget also baselined a further £525 million of funding, following the £1 billion of funding that was baselined across health, education, justice, net zero and social justice in 2024-25.

We hope to publish a version of the fiscal framework in the coming weeks and we continue to work with COSLA to develop the assurance and accountability framework that is critical to further substantial baselining of funding.

The presentation of figures in the Scottish budget comparing the autumn budget revision or the spring budget revision with the budget was requested by the Finance and Public Administration Committee. However, the presentation of the local government settlement has been consistent in recent years, and table 4.12 of the budget confirms that, by the conclusion of the 2025-26 spring budget revision, the local government settlement will be more than £1 billion larger than it will be at the conclusion of the 2024-25 SBR.

It is important to note that the total funding package is already finalised, following the passage of the Budget (Scotland) (No 4) Bill. Today's motion simply seeks Parliament's approval for the distribution of that approved funding total to individual local authorities.

The order seeks approval for the distribution and payment of £13.9 billion of the revenue total of £14.2 billion, with the balance mainly made up of specific grant funding, which is administered separately. That £13.9 billion is the combination of general revenue grant of more than £10.8 billion and the distributable amount of non-domestic rates income, which has been set at £3.1 billion.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): How is the 85 per cent floor calculated now? Does it include council tax? Does it exclude the biggest beneficiaries of the revenue system? Changing the formula in previous years has caused significant disadvantage to areas such as Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire and Edinburgh. Is that still the case?

Ivan McKee: I recognise the member's specific local interest in how that calculation is done. Of course, it is COSLA that does the work to assess how to distribute that funding. If the member wants anything more specific on that, I would be happy to write to him.

Willie Rennie: Will you take a further intervention?

Ivan McKee: Sure.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Through the chair, Mr Rennie.

Willie Rennie: The 85 per cent floor is specified in the Scottish public finance manual, which is produced by the Scottish Government, so it is Government policy.

Ivan McKee: That work is done with COSLA. However, if the member wants to address specifics, I am happy to pick those up separately with him.

There remains a further £155 million of revenue funding that will be notified to local authorities once the distribution has been discussed and agreed with COSLA. That, alongside the £144 million for employer national insurance contributions, will be included for approval in the 2026 order. Specific revenue funding, amounting to more than £271 million, is paid directly by the relevant policy areas under separate legislation. The 2025 order also seeks approval for more than £618 million of changes to funding allocations for 2024-25. The full list of changes can be found in the report to the 2025 order.

The Government recognises the financial challenges that local authorities across Scotland—and indeed, the whole public sector—are facing. The fiscal constraints that we share emphasise the need to focus urgently on improving the delivery of public services, designed around the needs and interests of the people and communities of Scotland. We must also continue to press the UK Government for additional funding for our shared priorities and pressures, including full funding for the changes in employer national insurance contributions.

The Budget (Scotland) (No 4) Bill, which Parliament passed on Tuesday, ensured that total funding from the Scottish Government to local government next year will increase in cash terms and real terms. The order confirms the distribution to individual councils, and the proposals reflect the crucial role that local authorities and their employees continue to play in our communities.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2025 [draft] be approved.

15:05

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am pleased to speak on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives in the debate on this year's local government finance order. The motion before us today is necessary in order to allocate funding to each of Scotland's 32 councils. The Scottish Conservatives will not oppose the motion.

However, it is important that this parliamentary time is used to highlight the current state of local government finances and the fact that councils are experiencing pressures from several different directions. A recent report from the Accounts Commission made for concerning reading. More than a third of councils made unplanned use of their reserves in 2023-24 to manage budget pressures, and more than half of councils do not have in place a long-term financial plan.

Councils are also facing pressure from the increase in employer national insurance contributions as a result of the UK Government's tax grab. We welcome the additional £144 million of funding to address that, which was announced by the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government earlier this month. However, COSLA has warned that that still leaves a gap of £96 million, which councils will have to find from their own budgets. Discussions with the UK Government on that issue continue, and the Scottish Government should stand ready to pass on any additional funding that the UK Government at Westminster makes available.

More generally, it is clear from engagement with local government that many councils have difficult decisions to make. In many cases, those will involve reducing or cutting important local services. I trust that, if the minister has engaged with councils throughout the budget process, he will be fully aware of all that.

As the weeks roll by, councils will finalise and set their budgets for the coming year. Some of them have agreed council tax increases that are higher than 10 per cent. In my region, there will be an increase of 9 per cent in Stirling and of 9.5 per cent in Perth and Kinross; the increase is as much as 13 per cent in Clackmannanshire.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): Does the member agree that it is profoundly ridiculous to have a council tax system whereby most people are paying the wrong rate and that, regardless of what system any of us might wish to replace it with, the first step is revaluation, so that we have the data with which we can make the decision?

Alexander Stewart: I agree with the member that revaluation is the first step in that direction. I hope that that can be looked at.

I referred to the gaps in funding. The Scottish Government claims that the budget should help councils. In reality, the lack of flexibility means that council tax is the only lever left for councils to use to deal with that. It is disappointing to see many councils using that lever, but taxpayers can understand the concerns that councils have, given what they need to do. Councils have spent a decade in this situation.

On that issue, SNP ministers would do well to listen to the Scottish Parliament information centre—our internal research centre—which said:

“the Scottish Government could find itself being blamed just as much as the councils themselves”

for the tax hikes. That SPICe report talks about how local government funding has fallen as a percentage of Scottish Government spending since 2016. In other words, council funding has not kept pace with total Government spend. Although the Government claims to value local government and the important contributions that it makes to communities, and it claims to stand up for that, in reality, its actions do not speak to those claims.

An improved long-term relationship needs to develop and evolve between central and local government in Scotland. The Verity house agreement brought them together to take steps to build a relationship. Although there has been some progress, such as on a small reduction in ring-fenced funding, many councils are still concerned that the agreement will have few benefits for them in the long term.

The agreement was supposed to support “shared priorities”. We want there to be “shared priorities”, “mutual trust” and “Improved engagement”. In reality, none of that has really happened. A huge amount of information is still required and there is still no trust between national and local government in Scotland. That must be looked at as a priority.

More than 18 months on from that agreement, there is still a huge amount to be done to fix that relationship. It is clear that local government cannot continue being treated as such a low priority by this SNP Government. Councils are making difficult decisions to get their budgets over the line and many of them are running out of flexibility within those budgets to manage that process. If Scotland continues with the review, it is important that there is a deal for local government. I hope that the new relationship will acknowledge just how important our councils are to communities in Scotland. They want to be treated with the respect that they deserve. They have a huge amount of work to do in supporting our communities, constituencies and regions, but that

can be done only if there is a relationship between the Scottish Government and councils.

15:10

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): The Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2025 is a step in the right direction, but we should look more closely at the claim that it represents a success for the Government. It provides a modest, real-terms increase in the budget for local authorities, but that increase must be taken in context. The 2024-25 council tax freeze alone resulted in a shortfall of £417 million, according to COSLA, and that does not include shortfalls caused by unfunded freezes in previous years. COSLA has also estimated a £392 million projected budget gap for Scottish local authorities in 2025-26, rising to a cumulative gap of £780 million by 2026-27.

Within those figures, the funding gap that is most striking and alarming is the one in health and social care partnerships, which has increased by 187 per cent since 2022-23. Local government has also been given just £777 million of capital to support £55 billion-worth of assets. There are clearly gaping holes in our public estate, which will persist under the settlement.

All that is no one's fault but the SNP Government's. Its decisions in successive years have stripped local authorities of their financial resources, but the Government keeps using spin and sleight of hand to try to convince Scotland that others have caused the problems. The truth is that the SNP has been given a record funding agreement by the UK Government, with £5 billion more for this financial year but, because of their choices, that money—

Ivan McKee: Will the member take an intervention?

Mark Griffin: Yes, I will.

Ivan McKee: The member said that there is £5 billion for this financial year. Will he clarify, for the record, that it absolutely is not, but that it is spread over two years, that it includes revenue and capital and that the real-terms increase between this year and next is only 1 per cent?

Mark Griffin: The UK Government has provided the Scottish Government with more than £5 billion extra. Only this SNP Government could complain about an extra £5 billion and somehow portray that as being negative. We often hear in this chamber about voting positions: the SNP voted against that £5 billion increase for the budget of this Parliament and Government, but we never hear anything about that.

I welcome the record funding settlement from the UK Government, but it is impossible to fully

reverse the impact of years of SNP mismanagement, billions of pounds in cuts and years of stripping back of council finances.

There is an absolute abundance of evidence to show that local services have suffered hugely in those 18 years. The services that are provided now are practically unrecognisable when compared with those that were provided in 2007. Swimming pools and community spaces such as the Beach leisure centre in Aberdeen or Perth leisure pool, which were used by thousands of people a decade ago, are now closed or threatened with closure. More than 20 public libraries are threatened with closure because of significant funding pressures, with the worst-affected areas covering much of rural Scotland.

Ross Greer: Does the member agree with me and with Alexander Stewart that it is farcical that most people are paying the wrong rate of council tax and that, whatever we agree to do next, revaluation must be the first step in that process in order to give us the data set that is required to make decisions?

Mark Griffin: It is absolutely ridiculous that we have a valuation system that was set up when I was in primary 1. I am not sure whether Ross Greer had even been born when that valuation exercise was undertaken. The Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee is looking at a revaluation exercise being a first step in reform of the council tax system, and I think that there is broad consensus across the political spectrum on that.

We are seeing councils across the country putting up council tax. It is a hugely unpopular tax, but councillors are making decisions to increase it because the alternative is absolutely unpalatable. The cuts that they would need to make to services would go beyond what they are willing to consider, so they are making unpopular decisions on council tax to cover for those cuts. However, there is a real risk in the fact that, because of successive years of SNP cuts, councils are now making impossible choices and increasing council tax to try to prevent their residents from having to pay more money for worse services as a result of Government choices.

15:15

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): The Scottish Greens set out two red lines at the start of the budget process. One was about climate and nature spend and the other was a real-terms increase in local government funding and an end to the council tax freeze. I am pleased that we were able to achieve both. However, as this afternoon's debate has made clear, none of us thinks that that is enough. None of us believes that

local government is sufficiently resourced, and a process of annual haggling in this Parliament over a block grant that is allocated to local government is never going to solve that problem. It puts Scotland well outside the European mainstream that our local government can raise directly only a very small fraction of its overall finances. In most European countries, certainly in western and central Europe, local government raises the majority of its budget directly.

We have made incremental progress in recent years. The visitor levy is an obvious example for local authorities such as the one whose area we are in now. The City of Edinburgh Council estimates that it will raise more than £50 million a year from its levy, and Highland Council will be another major beneficiary. We have given councils the power to double council tax on second and holiday homes, which both raises revenue and acts as a direct lever in relation to the housing crisis, in particular in areas such as Arran, which I represent. Today, the Scottish Government launched the consultation on the cruise ship levy, which my colleague Lorna Slater announced when the Greens were in government. That will be particularly valuable to areas such as Inverclyde, in my region, which will, with the best will in the world, never benefit significantly from the existing visitor levy.

All that progress is welcome, but it is no substitute for a genuine, full replacement of the council tax. I spend a lot of time talking about that, as do other members. I note that we do not talk enough about non-domestic rates as the other key lever of local taxation, but that is because they are not really local. They are nominally local, but they are also set from here. That brings me to the point that what we have at the moment is 32 regional service delivery bodies, and not genuinely local government. It is not local, which is a separate issue from the finances, and its ability to govern is massively restrained, in significant part because of its lack of financial powers.

As I mentioned in my interventions, revaluation is a key first step. It seems that we all agree that that is necessary, so the question becomes why we have been unable to complete a revaluation exercise in the 26-year history of this Parliament. I believe that Wales has completed three in that time. There is clearly a need to make progress, and there is an appetite for it both in this Parliament and among our colleagues in local government. I hope that we do not get to the end of the current session of Parliament having failed to at least begin a process of revaluation. It is absurd to have a system of tax that is based on valuations from 1991, which has resulted in most people paying the wrong rate. There are probably roughly equal numbers of people paying too much

and people paying too little, and the system is certainly broken.

We can debate the reliefs that will be necessary in a new system, what formulas it should be based on and the transitional arrangements that will inevitably have to be brought into place, either for a few years or for a longer time, but we need to have an accurate data set first. There is no point in progressing with a replacement to the council tax if it is based on the 1991 valuations as well. The Scottish Greens want the replacement to eventually move into the space of a land value tax as well as property taxation, but it is critical that we do not micromanage that from Parliament.

Those matters are of huge significance to our constituents, because although it sounds abstract and is very technical, in practice we are talking about how we fund our schools, social care services, bin collections, libraries, roads and pavements, leisure centres, libraries and so much more. I do not want us to get to the end of the parliamentary session once again wringing our hands about our lack of progress on one of the areas that most significantly affects our constituents.

15:20

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I love Ross Greer's eternal optimism about the reform of local government finance. He and I have sat through numerous working groups and consultations where absolutely nothing has happened but there has been lots of talk. I hope that one day I will share his optimism and that we will get a true reform of the system, because it is outdated—there is no doubt about that.

The minister knows that local governments have, for many years, been starved of necessary funding. He will see that in his constituency casework and in his local community. Local governments have been retreating to their statutory responsibilities. The spend-to-save element and preventative measures are increasingly put to the side as they try to meet their legal obligations, but even then they struggle to do so. We see that in relation to additional support needs, looked-after children and care-experienced children and in many other areas.

We also see it on our streets. Look at the state of Glasgow. My son is now a student in Glasgow and I see the state of Glasgow's streets. I see the closure of libraries across the country and leisure facilities that are in desperate need of investment, with many closing, including in Perth. There are a number of different problems. The minister sees all of them.

The issue that I will raise is the age-old problem of the disparity in funding between one local

authority and the next. Some councils, such as Aberdeen City Council, Aberdeenshire Council and City of Edinburgh Council, have struggled for years to even reach the 85 per cent threshold that the Government promised years ago, back in 2012. When John Swinney was finance secretary, he and I had repeated discussions about that, and he went through various contortions to explain to me that the 85 per cent floor was being met when it was not. In fact, the formula was changed to include council tax and then the councils that received the most were chopped, so of course, the 85 per cent floor was possible after all of that. However, the effect is that Aberdeenshire, Aberdeen, Edinburgh and some other councils are being short-changed by the formula. I urge the finance secretary to use his charm and skill to persuade those in the Government and in COSLA to change the formula so that we have fairness in the system.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Does Mr Rennie recognise that the problem that he set out regarding Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Aberdeenshire has been exacerbated by the fact that we have not had a revaluation since 1992?

Willie Rennie: I think that it was 1991, but yes—absolutely. The system has been exacerbated by that issue; there is no doubt about that.

I hope that the minister takes that into account and seeks to change the system. I have seen the effect in Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire and in Edinburgh, where local government has struggled to even keep up with other local authorities.

In saying all that, we will support the order today because we managed to negotiate a budget that secured some significant investment into local authorities, including social care support through the national health service in Orkney and Shetland and employer national insurance compensation, which will help. We also need to get money to local authorities because they need it. Even if it is not sufficient, they need it. We will support the order today, but it is a qualified support. I hope that the minister takes into account the long-term funding issues and the disparity between some local authorities and others.

15:23

Ivan McKee: The 2025 local government finance order that is before us today seeks parliamentary approval for the guaranteed payment of £13.9 billion in revenue support to be paid to Scotland's 32 local authorities.

Next year, the Scottish Government will provide local authorities with a total funding package that is worth more than £15 billion, delivering an increase of more than £1 billion—or 8 per cent—

which is a real-terms increase of 5.5 per cent, despite the challenging circumstances that I outlined in my opening statement.

In addition, almost £867 million of further Scottish Government support is provided outwith the local government finance settlement. That includes the funding that is paid to local authorities for the attainment Scotland fund, the schools for the future programme, area-based schemes, regeneration programmes and city deals. That brings the Scottish Government's total investment in local authorities to almost £16 billion.

We have listened to the requests of COSLA and others, and we acknowledge that a council's decision on tax provides important financial and administrative accountability to its local electorate. As well as accounting for local needs, we expect councils to consider the impact of council tax increases on local people and their household finances.

Along with COSLA, we have announced a joint programme of engagement to build consensus on reforms to make council tax fairer. Because there are differing and competing views on what that reform should look like, we will engage transparently, through our partnership approach, to build a consensus on a modernised, fairer local taxation system that can support the local services that communities across Scotland expect and deserve.

The settlement also provides continued fiscal certainty through our policy of guaranteeing the combined general revenue grant plus non-domestic rates funding that is set out in the order. That means that any loss of non-domestic rates income will be compensated for by increased general revenue grant, which, in effect, underwrites that critically important revenue stream.

Bearing in mind that the overall quantum was confirmed when the Budget (Scotland) (No 4) Bill was passed by Parliament, Opposition members should note that failure to approve the order would result in Scotland's local authorities and, as a consequence, all our local communities, being deprived of more than £618 million of additional funding in this financial year and more than £1 billion of additional Scottish Government investment next year.

I encourage Parliament to unanimously support the local government finance order before us today.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes that item of business. There will be a brief pause before we move on to the next item of business, to allow front-bench members to change places.

Increasing Investment

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-16595, in the name of Kate Forbes, on increasing investment in Scotland. I invite all members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons.

15:27

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic (Kate Forbes): Increasing investment across the Scottish economy is a defining challenge for our times. For many years, persistently low levels of investment in Scottish businesses and Scottish projects have held back improvements in productivity and limited our economic growth. That problem is not unique to Scotland—the same has been true for the United Kingdom as a whole over an extended period.

However, increasing the levels of private investment in our economy is essential for everything else that we want to achieve. It is essential for growth and prosperity, for tackling the climate and nature emergencies, for eradicating child poverty and for improving the public services on which we all depend. Without a step change, we will not succeed.

If the challenge in front of us is daunting, the opportunity is enormous. UK investment institutions manage nearly £11 trillion in global assets. Scotland-based firms alone manage some £490 billion. If we can secure more of that capital for Scottish businesses and Scottish projects, the effect will be truly transformational.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Does the cabinet secretary agree that the regulatory framework that is set by the Scottish Government is absolutely essential with regard to the signals that it sends to the marketplace about investment? In that respect, does she share my concern about the fact that, according to experts in the finance and housing sector, we have lost more than £3 billion-worth of investment in the build-to-rent sector because of the Government's policy on rent caps and rent controls?

Kate Forbes: I agree with the principle that the regulatory and policy environment is critical in giving investors certainty. I am in no doubt that investors have no obligation to invest in Scotland—it must be attractive for them to do so. That is why we have listened to the concerns of investors and have adjusted our position. We are currently consulting on the best way of ensuring that the system strikes the right balance between vital protection for tenants during a cost of living crisis and the need to attract investment that will

deliver new and improved rented housing, the supply of which we have to increase.

In addressing the challenge that I have set out, Scotland has a wealth of strengths and advantages to build on. We have innovative and dynamic businesses, world-class research and technology capabilities, strong financial services and food, drink and tourism sectors, sustained success in attracting foreign direct investment and unrivalled potential to be a global leader in renewables.

However, we also have a Government that is committed to doing what it takes to make Scotland a more globally competitive, investor-friendly nation. Our approach has been guided by the First Minister's external investor panel, which reported just over a year ago. It challenged us to be clearer in our strategic direction, more sure-footed in engaging with investors, and swifter and more decisive in acting to support delivery.

That is why, last summer, we published the green industrial strategy and, in our programme for government in September, committed to delivering a co-ordinated programme to attract private capital investment at scale in three priority areas—net zero, housing and infrastructure—and to align the whole of the Government and its agencies in support of that goal. The First Minister asked me to lead the work across the Government to meet that commitment. That work is well under way, and I welcome the opportunity to update members on it today.

However, before I explain the substance of the work that we have done, I extend an invitation to cross-party spokespeople to have a meeting with me and officials who can answer any questions on the programme. I know that we all have an interest in attracting investment and in making Scotland a great place to work, and we all have the opportunity to amplify the positive message about Scotland. I am happy to get in touch shortly after the debate to arrange such a meeting.

Our programme of work has three main strands. First, we are creating a single national pipeline of strategic investment opportunities. Secondly, we are improving the approach to investor relations across the public sector. Thirdly, we are examining how we can use financing models and instruments in the most effective way to de-risk projects.

Work on the internal pipeline is proceeding well, drawing on detailed, on-the-ground intelligence held by delivery bodies. When fully operational, it will give us a single source of truth on the most important opportunities, enable us to take a more targeted and proactive approach to engaging with major investors, and help us identify and tackle potential barriers and blockers to investment.

Over the coming months, we will launch a new outward-facing investor portal as a single shop window for current opportunities across the country. In parallel, we will continue to roll out our strategic investment of up to £500 million to leverage additional private investment of £1.5 billion in the infrastructure and manufacturing facilities that are critical to growth in the offshore wind sector. Activity is gaining pace, following on from last year's landmark commitment by Sumitomo to build a £350 million cable manufacturing facility at Nigg and Haventus's groundbreaking £400 million plan to redevelop Ardersier port. I visited the port last week, and I have to say that it took my breath away. Seeing is believing. I am sure that Haventus could accommodate visits from interested members from across the chamber, because nothing that I say today can truly convey the scale of the facility or what it can achieve for Scotland's supply chain. I am also particularly delighted that it is located in the Highlands.

However, the opportunities are national. Last month, the Scottish National Investment Bank announced an investment of £20 million in subsea cable manufacturer XLCC, which is part of a wider transformation at Hunterston.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Hear, hear.

Kate Forbes: I hear cries of delight at that from Mr Gibson, who is sitting behind me. Two weeks ago, Highlands and Islands Enterprise announced £5 million for the Scapa deep water quay project, and just this morning, SNIB announced an investment of £6.7 million for Subsea Micropiles, alongside £2.5 million from Japanese investor Marubeni, to develop technology that will unlock opportunities in floating offshore wind. Over the coming weeks, I expect that pace to pick up further still. The momentum is there, spurred on by this Government's willingness to support investment, the clarity of our policy and our regulatory environment.

At this point, I want to emphasise the bank's wider contribution. As Scotland's impact investor, it plays a critical role, not just on offshore wind but right across the economy. To date, its investments of some £700 million have crowded in £1.4 billion from others, and support from our enterprise agencies for businesses and infrastructure is leveraging significant private sector investment. Alongside development of the pipeline, we are working to improve the way in which we engage with investors to deliver a more agile and seamless response to them, especially when they want to discuss specific opportunities.

To achieve that, we are reviewing roles and responsibilities across the public sector ecosystem, we have improved information sharing

and co-ordination and we have established a new approach to relationship management. Within the Government, we have focused resources to co-ordinate activity across portfolios, to identify and tackle problems and to work across organisational boundaries to ensure that the system delivers more than the sum of its parts.

To make a difference, we need to understand investors' needs and priorities. In recent months, I have been engaging personally with major investors with an interest in our priority areas, and that activity will continue to intensify. Next month, the First Minister and I, together with ministerial colleagues, are hosting a global offshore wind investment forum here in Edinburgh, bringing together 100 senior investors and developers to discuss specific opportunities and to further highlight what we have to offer.

Alongside having a strong pipeline and improving investor engagement, we need to ensure that we have at our disposal a full range of financing models and instruments that can be used to de-risk projects. Perhaps I can give just two examples: we are working with the bank and others to consider how public sector guarantees can best be used, and we are taking forward at pace the work on a Scottish bond.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): The Deputy First Minister might note that other countries have a model by which they take strategic equity investments in key firms to secure them for the long term. Is the Government considering developing such a model?

Kate Forbes: We look to our enterprise agencies and the bank to invest in high-growth-potential companies in the most appropriate way. A range of options is available to them, but, in short, we would generally work through arms such as the enterprise agencies and the bank to do something like that.

I have outlined what we are trying to do, but it requires close and effective collaboration with the UK Government, especially on regulatory issues, where many of the levers lie, and strong partnerships with bodies such as the National Wealth Fund, Great British Energy and the Office for Investment. Early signs from the UK Government are encouraging. We need to build on that and make co-operation systematic, and we need to do that quickly. We will play our part, and we look to the UK Government to do likewise.

In conclusion, there is much to be done if we are to meet the investment challenge for the benefit of the health and wellbeing of our people and planet. We have a plan, and although success never comes overnight, we are beginning to make a difference. I would welcome colleagues across the chamber joining us so that we can, as I have said,

answer any questions that they might have. More than that, I ask them to amplify the opportunities for Scotland and to attract the investment that is needed to make them a reality.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that increasing the level of investment in the Scottish economy is critical to delivering on the Scottish Government's priorities of improving public services, supporting a thriving economy, tackling the climate emergency, and eradicating child poverty; recognises that the Scottish Government's programme of public investment, particularly in the priority areas of net zero, housing and infrastructure, is vital for leveraging private investment across the Scottish economy, to stimulate growth in key sectors, improve productivity and create jobs; welcomes the annual EY survey, which shows that Scotland is outpacing the UK as a whole when it comes to securing Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) projects, and three Scottish cities ranked in the UK's top 10 locations for FDI outside of London, and believes that Scotland's strengths and expertise in areas such as technology, financial services, food and drink, tourism and the energy transition make Scotland the ideal place to invest and deliver projects that bring wider benefits to the Scottish economy.

15:38

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I remind members of my entry in the register of members' interests. I derive some income from a private rented property and I have received hospitality from the Scotch Whisky Association.

The Scottish Government is correct to recognise the value of investment in driving forward Scotland's economy. Economic growth is vital to us all, both as a good in itself and as a generator of the tax revenues that we all want to see to fund our vital public services. As we know, our growth has been too low for too long. Even the relatively historically low levels of growth in recent times at a UK level have not been matched by the performance of the Scottish economy, and that has to change.

That is where the cabinet secretary is quite right to say that there is a role for investment—that said, the Scottish Government's motion is, for us, as ever, simply too self-congratulatory. There are substantial issues in relation to the level of investment that we need to attract to deliver the faster economic growth that we all want.

I will break my remarks into two parts. First, I will talk about the investment by the public sector. Public spending has a vital role in investing in the infrastructure that our economy needs to succeed. For too long, we have been waiting for the promised delivery of the dualling of the A9. That project is of vital importance to my constituents in Mid Scotland and Fife, the Deputy First Minister's constituents, others across the Highlands, and the vital Scotch whisky industry, which relies on both the A9 and the A96, for which dualling is on the

back burner, to get their goods to market. The point that has been made regularly by representatives of the whisky industry is that those two infrastructure projects are vital.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

Murdo Fraser: Let me finish this point and then I will give way. Those infrastructure projects are absolutely vital in terms of their ability to expand their businesses.

Daniel Johnson: Will Murdo Fraser reflect that it is not just about getting goods to market but about integrating supply chains? The whisky coming down the A9 will very often be bottled in the central belt, so roads provide a vital link between rural and urban economies. Does he think that we need to refocus on road infrastructure in that way?

Lorna Slater (Lothian) (Green): Will the member take an intervention?

Murdo Fraser: Oh my goodness. They are coming from all sides, Presiding Officer.

I agree with Mr Johnson. Let us hear what Lorna Slater has to say, which might not be so agreeable.

Lorna Slater: We all want infrastructure so that we can move goods and people around the country, but there is no particular reason why those goods could not be moved by rail if our rail system was upgraded. Investing in roads this late in a climate emergency is not a sensible use of money.

Murdo Fraser: I simply disagree with Lorna Slater on that last point, but I agree that, where there is the capacity to move goods by rail, we should take that opportunity. Many companies, Tesco being one of them—we often see its goods moving by rail—use that facility. However, for products that are produced in places that are not close to a railhead, such as the products of the Scotch whisky industry, that would burden industries with substantial additional costs. Rail is not a panacea, but the general point is fairly made.

While we are talking about rail, let me say that we still have a substandard service. I have raised the service and connectivity that my constituents in Fife get between Fife and Edinburgh in the chamber so many times. The situation is holding back economic progress. As we are talking about whisky, let me also mention ferries. When the cross-party group on Scotch whisky visited Islay the summer before last, we heard that the biggest brake on the expansion of the whisky industry on that island—which is already seeing substantial additional investment and new facilities being formed—is the reliability of the ferry service. That

is the biggest concern there and, again, something that is entirely in the Scottish Government's gift.

Connectivity is not just about transport. We were promised that every address in Scotland would be connected to superfast broadband by 2021. That is another promise that has been broken.

Kate Forbes: Will the member take an intervention?

Murdo Fraser: Yes, if she will tell me what will happen on that point.

Kate Forbes: I will just make a comment. The member talked about our motion being too self-congratulatory. He is anything but congratulatory about the strengths of the Scottish economy. We make points in our motion about an EY survey saying that Scotland is “outpacing the UK” as a whole, and about the ranking of three Scottish cities in the UK's top 10 locations for FDI outside London. Even if he does not credit the Government with that success, will he not at least recognise the success of the Scottish economy in attracting investment, or will his speech entirely downplay our potential?

Murdo Fraser: I am pleased that the Deputy First Minister has raised the EY survey. I read a very interesting quote from Ally Scott, who is the managing partner of EY Scotland. He said:

“We still hear frustrations from clients and the market that Scotland's tightening economic policies, including the latest income tax hikes and issues around city and infrastructure quality, are causes for concern.”

I am happy to give praise where there is good progress, but there are still issues.

I return to the point on broadband. Constituents have told me that they are now expecting that it will be the end of the current decade before they get superfast broadband—nearly 10 years after it was promised—and that that is holding back economic progress.

Let me turn to private sector investment. We are losing out on private sector investment that is going elsewhere. I commend to ministers—if they have not already listened to it—the evidence that we took yesterday in the Economy and Fair Work Committee in which Jane Wood of Homes for Scotland, among other witnesses, highlighted the key question that is being asked by investors, which is: how easy is it to do business in Scotland? We are in competition for capital with other parts of the UK and other parts of the world, and, unless we have a more business-friendly environment, we will continue to struggle to attract that level of investment.

I will give just one example of where private investment is being deterred that was given to us by Homes for Scotland. The average decision time for a major housing application in Scotland today

is 59.8 weeks, against a statutory timetable of 16 weeks. If that sort of issue is not tackled, we will continue to see challenges in attracting investment.

In the housing sector more generally—I made this point in an intervention a moment ago—we have seen investment driven out of Scotland due to the moronic policies that Patrick Harvie put forward when he was the minister with responsibility for tenants' rights in the coalition. The rent freeze, the rent cap and, now, the proposed rent controls in the Housing (Scotland) Bill have had a disastrous impact on inward investment to Scotland in the build-to-rent sector.

We know that there is a housing emergency, and the Scottish Government has accepted that there is, but its choices have contributed to that situation.

Lorna Slater: Will the member take an intervention?

Murdo Fraser: No, I need to make some progress.

According to experts in the world of finance and property, we have lost more than £3 billion of investment that could have gone to providing homes for rent but which has instead gone elsewhere. That £3 billion could have helped to solve the housing crisis, provided affordable places for people to live and provided jobs in the construction sector. According to the Scottish Property Federation, it will take more than a decade for investment in rented property in the build-to-rent sector to recover from the mistakes that have been made by this Government. Further, if the policy of rent controls continues, it will not recover.

Let me give one more example of where private investment is being deterred.

Kate Forbes: Be nice.

Murdo Fraser: I am being invited by the Deputy First Minister to be nice, but I am simply encouraging her to make a few minor tweaks to policy. Money would flow into Scotland if only she did so, and one minor tweak to policy could be made in relation to the Scottish Government's approach to civil nuclear technology. We have in Torness a plant that, for half a century, has delivered reliable, affordable energy to homes across Scotland.

Paul Sweeney: Will the member take an intervention?

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

Murdo Fraser: My apologies, Mr Sweeney.

There are investors who are prepared to fund a replacement of Torness. It is only the short-sighted policies of this Government that are preventing that from happening.

The Acting Minister for Climate Action (Alasdair Allan): Will the member take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is about to conclude.

Murdo Fraser: Investment will come when there is an attractive regulatory and tax environment. As we saw in the budget that was passed by Parliament on Tuesday, creating such an environment is not an ambition that the Scottish Government seems to share.

There is much more that we need to do in terms of public spend and attracting private investment to deliver the economic growth that we need. Those are the points that are made in my amendment, which I am pleased to move.

I move amendment S6M-16595.2, to leave out from "on the" to end and insert:

"economic growth; believes that public sector investment in infrastructure is essential in facilitating growth and therefore notes with alarm the delays to, and uncertainty around, the project to dual the A9 from Perth to Inverness and the Scottish Government's temporising on dualling the A96; recognises that private investment is necessary to maintain a supply of core goods and services, and therefore condemns the severe damage done to the build-to-rent housing sector by rent cap schemes; acknowledges that success in attracting foreign direct investment is measured as much in project value as in project count; urges the Scottish Government to reverse its opposition to nuclear energy, which limits both investment in energy projects as well as the long-term supply of reliable energy near where it is in demand; emphasises that investment is intrinsically linked to the availability of skilled labour, and notes, therefore, with concern that the Scottish Government's highest-in-the-UK income tax rates are limiting industry access to skilled workers, thereby undermining investment and economic growth."

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I advise members that, at this point in time, we have a bit of time in hand, which is why I was able to be a bit generous with Mr Fraser in the light of his generosity in accepting a number of interventions.

15:47

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): This afternoon, we have heard the Government's overly positive view and Murdo Fraser's very negative view, so, once again, it falls to me to provide something of a third way.

I genuinely welcome this debate, which the Government has brought to the chamber, and I accept the challenge from the Deputy First Minister. The challenge for all of us is to focus on what needs to be done to attract investment in this

country. I think that the Deputy First Minister is absolutely correct in her analysis that Scotland, along with the United Kingdom, suffers from low levels of investment. Whether we are concerned with economic growth or how we tackle the challenges of net zero and demographic change, we need investment to address those issues and ensure that we maintain prosperity for as many Scots as possible. Investment is the only way through that.

I welcome and accept the Deputy First Minister's offer of cross-party talks. I very much believe that they would be constructive, because we need to find points of consensus and provide a team Scotland approach. If we are serious about attracting international investment, we need simplicity and clarity, but, importantly, we also need to show something of a united front across the political spectrum.

Let me address the three themes that the Deputy First Minister's investment approach will take. I hope that members will forgive me because I only heard about it in her comments, but I agree with the pipeline. We need to focus on that. My one comment on the pipeline is that, having spoken to a number of investors, it is not necessarily about identifying individual projects. When I speak to investors and investment firms, they tell me that they are seeking clarity on our national objectives and on the planning and regulatory framework that supports them. I am not sure that Government should be in the business of identifying individual projects, although it should potentially do so for large ones. It is absolutely vital that we have clarity of objectives and stable, clear and consistent policy across not just the economic policy domain, but all Government policy.

The Deputy First Minister's other points were also clear. The engagement point is absolutely correct, but we have to question whether we can provide that. We have a cluttered landscape and I recognise that that is not an easy challenge to fix, but, when we talk to people globally, we hear that they find a complex array of different agencies and organisations to speak to in Scotland.

I welcome Ms Forbes's comments about investment models. We can look at investment in infrastructure in other parts of the world, particularly in northern Europe, where tunnels have been constructed in the Faroe Islands, which have been vital not just to supporting growth but to repopulation. There are interesting models there. We need to look at those collectively, because those are the sorts of things that need a degree of political consensus so that investors can have the confidence to invest in them.

I very much appreciate the Deputy First Minister's comments, and there is much to build

on. However, although we will support the Government motion, I believe, a little like Murdo Fraser, that we need to take account of the broader context. The Deputy First Minister is quite right to highlight the points in the EY report, but she omitted a key comment. The report says:

"There's a growing sense that Scotland's cities may be losing out to rivals like Manchester".

Likewise, although she is correct that Scotland fares very well in the EY report, if we look at other data, such as Office for National Statistics data, and at inward investment on the basis of numbers of jobs created and the value of projects, we see that Scotland lags behind the north-west of England and the West Midlands by some margin. Indeed, when it comes to the fundamentals over the past 10 years, growth in gross domestic product per head in Scotland has been around half of that in Manchester. Although GDP per head in Scotland is higher than that in Manchester and the north-west, we just need to look at what is going on.

We have more levers in Scotland, but the question is whether we are using them as effectively as we can.

Kate Forbes: I am interested in the point about cities attracting investment. Daniel Johnson made a point about Manchester, and we had an exchange about that at committee. Without putting words in his mouth, I imagine that he would suggest that it has been Manchester's leadership that has delivered the success and not necessarily the Conservative Government in London. My point is that cities have powers. What makes the difference in cities being able to buck the trend?

Daniel Johnson: The structure of the combined authority in Manchester allows the constituent borough local authorities to unite around a clear plan. The secret to the success in Manchester is the degree to which the combined authority provides a point of unity and co-ordinated action rather than an additional structure.

We need to look at the barriers to investment. I have already mentioned the enterprise agencies. The real question is whether they focus on the right things. They do a great deal that is positive, whether that is Scottish Development International or the co-investment funds. Those are areas where they do well, but I question whether their focuses are correct. All too often, businesses in key sectors, such as tourism, that are important to the economy get turned away because they are not in the right sector.

There is a question whether the agencies should focus purely on initial investment or whether they could do just as much by winning repeat investment. For example, in Scotland, we have 25 per cent of Pernod Ricard's globally

invested capital, but that is as a result of repeat investment. Likewise, I have heard from financial services firms that have invested here despite the lack of help from Scottish Enterprise rather than because of its help.

I fear that I need to close, but I will say that there are points around skills, and I agree with the Conservatives' points about infrastructure and connections. I also agree with their point that we need to remove build-to-rent properties from the rent restrictions.

Finally, in the budget debate the other day, I misquoted a number. Kenny Gibson challenged me, and he was absolutely correct to do so. I have taken the opportunity to correct the record on that point in the chamber.

I move amendment S6M-16595.1, to insert at end:

“; recognises the best practice that is happening across the UK, including in Greater Manchester, where joined-up working across the public and private sector, investment in infrastructure, and an industrial strategy have boosted investment in the region; notes Department for Business and Trade statistics showing that Scotland comes seventh out of 12 for jobs created by inward investment projects, compared to fourth for the North West of England, and believes that the Scottish Government and Scottish Enterprise have failed to maximise Scotland's economic potential and provide support to sectors that are key to Brand Scotland and attracting inward investment, including tourism, food and drink, and financial services.”

15:55

Lorna Slater (Lothian) (Green): I am delighted that we are having this discussion today, because it means that we have shifted the Overton window away from the view that was prevalent in the early days of the Conservative Government at Westminster, which was that economic growth could be achieved by throttling back public investment on the false premise that public investment drives out private investment. We are now in an evidence-based space where we are listening to experts again and where we recognise that public investment draws in private investment and gives private investors and business owners and managers confidence in the direction of travel. When the Government puts its money where its mouth is, it sets out a vision for the future, and when that vision is full of opportunity, people will sign up to it.

This week, the Confederation of British Industry has reported a 10 per cent increase in the UK's green economy—double-digit growth. That is what we have all been looking for, right? Green businesses in the UK collectively generated £83.1 billion of gross value added in 2024. The CBI report calculated that, for every £1 of that GVA, an additional £1.89 of GVA was created for the wider economy. In other words, the economic benefits,

including that ripple effect, exceeded £157 billion. The future is green. If we are looking for growth, we will find it in the green economy.

The CBI report makes it clear that green industries are primed for further rapid growth if policy makers create the right regulatory environment for them. The CBI warns the UK that, should it

“fail to capitalise on this opportunity ... it risks losing out to international competition”.

The CBI's chief economist, Louise Hellem, said:

“It is clear, you can't have growth without green ... 2025 is the year when the rubber really hits the road—where inaction is indisputably costlier than action. We are approaching critical points of no return for achieving essential outcomes in energy security and emissions reduction. Long-term sustainable growth is unattainable without a future powered by clean, affordable, and secure energy.”

Members have heard it from the CBI, even if they do not like hearing it from me.

There is no contradiction between being ambitious in decarbonising and having a thriving economy. Indeed, the risks come from moving too slowly, from falling behind other countries and from letting them take innovation and technology developed in Scotland and build industries based on them. That happened with wind turbines to the point that, although jackets are fabricated here, wind turbines are not manufactured here. I worked on the first tidal turbine in Scotland that generated green hydrogen—both technologies in which Scotland is a world leader.

Kate Forbes: The member has touched on the most pressing issue of this year, which is how we invest up front in the supply chain so that we do not have a repeat of the notion that our wind is generating a lot of economic opportunity for other countries, which are producing the turbines. What are her views on the fact that that will require up-front public investment in private enterprise, in many cases, to de-risk projects and to attract the jobs into the supply chain so that they are ready when the developments get their consents?

Lorna Slater: That is absolutely what is needed. Members will know from my entry in the register of members' interests that I used to work for Orbital Marine Power on a project that was funded in exactly that way—with a mix of funding from the Scottish Government and private investors. That is absolutely the way to move the technology forward.

Under the Conservative Government, contracts for difference removed tidal energy, for example, for years. That is now back in place, thanks to the Labour Government. Some of these matters are reserved, so hopefully the new relationship between the Governments means that we can

overcome the regulatory hurdles to move this forward.

However, to do that we need to make a strong pivot towards those technologies, and that means clearly turning away from old, declining technologies in declining industries, such as oil and gas. If we want growth, we need to invest in growing industries, not in declining ones. We are risking losing the lead and watching other countries get the jobs and the factories.

I am out of time, so I will finish my remarks in my closing speech.

16:00

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I welcome the hard-nosed focus that the Government is bringing to the debate—it is long overdue. We need to celebrate our great assets in Scotland. Nobody in the chamber would deny those great assets. The pipeline, the building of relationships and the de-risking approach that the minister has set out are welcome steps.

However, there are two real priorities that need to be central to the Government's thinking, one of which is caution with regulation and taxation. If we are going to increase those things, we need to make sure that we know where the end point is, so that people have confidence in the Government's relationship with taxation, and equally so with regulation.

We also need long-term consistency. Businesses do not have the time to follow every in-and-out of politics. They want to know what the direction of travel is, and they want the Government, by and large, to stick with it. I have heard Ivan McKee speak about that before. Every press release that comes from the Government must signal very clearly what is new, what is different and what people or businesses need to pay attention to—that is, what businesses need to do today in response. There should be no more puff press releases that are dressed up as something new when they are not. We need long-term consistency and caution on regulation and taxation.

Some of the sectors that I will cover have been covered already, though others have not. One of those is renewables, both onshore and offshore. We should not forget onshore renewables, because a lot of developments are still taking place—with onshore wind in particular—and there are also pumped storage facilities.

A huge surge of work is coming. Are we ready for it? We need to be ready for a number of things, some of which have been mentioned. First, there is the consenting process. We need to have enough planners with enough skill to process the

applications quickly and get them approved, so that the companies can see that the licences that they have secured will result in an output quite soon.

Secondly, there is infrastructure, by which I mean roads but also housing. There is no point in developing opportunities for work in remote parts of the country if there is nowhere for the workers to live. Equally, having facilities for pumped storage will require a significant upgrade to the roads in those communities. I would argue that we should look to use some of the community benefit that is coming from those projects to invest in them, just as the Faroe Islands have done in developing tunnels and other infrastructure.

Thirdly, there is skills. We ensured that a college skills programme was included in the budget, because that is an essential part of the programme. Some of it is about reskilling and upskilling in the move over from oil and gas, but, first and foremost, it is about skilling.

Then there is the supply chain. We cannot repeat the mistakes of BiFab and Harland & Wolff, whereby workers in Methil can see the turbines from their houses but there is no work in the yard just down the road to build those turbines. That is my deep concern about Liberty Steel, which I mentioned to the First Minister at lunch time. The Government had better have a plan for what is coming, because I can see Gupta collapsing quite soon and that plant, which has already had no production for several months, being in significant trouble. It supplies the foundations for onshore wind farms, so we must pay attention to that.

Paul Sweeney: Will the member take an intervention?

Willie Rennie: I am almost out of time.

I have deep concern about investment in universities. They are centres of innovation, but there is a decline in the funding arrangements for those institutions. That is having a direct impact on our research performance, which used to be among the best in the UK but is now sliding. That research is important for spin-outs for licensing but also for ensuring that there is an ecosystem of businesses around those institutions.

On that point, I conclude.

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

16:04

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): The UK economy is not delivering for the average Scot. The costs of basics—food, energy and housing—have gone up much more quickly than inflation has risen, and wages are not keeping up.

The problem has reached breaking point with the cost of living crisis, but it has been a long time in the making.

A large part of that is down to how the UK has run our economy. It has overseen deindustrialisation. It has handed key industries to the private sector. It has isolated us with Brexit, which has closed off markets and locked out skilled workers. It has allowed a situation to arise in which we now talk in the chamber about in-work poverty. The UK economy does not work for our workers.

The north-east is one of the few exceptions to that deindustrialisation, and that has served everyone well. The oil crash aside, industry has supported jobs and has underpinned our local economy in Aberdeen. On a UK level, it has provided energy security, and North Sea revenues have propped up Governments of every shade. If the vast wealth from Scotland's oil had been reinvested in Scotland, we would perhaps be having a different debate. However, we need to deal with what is in front of us. Whether the oil runs out or is phased out, we are moving into a new chapter in Aberdeen's story. The just transition and the global move to net zero offer a golden opportunity for the north-east and Scotland as a whole, but we need the investment to make that work.

The Scottish Government has already stepped up to the plate with a £500 million just transition fund. With another £500 million to develop the offshore wind supply chain and a range of other investments, such as £100 million for digital infrastructure, £200 million to fund the Scottish National Investment Bank and £320 million for enterprise agencies, the Scottish Government is putting money where it is needed to support existing industries and nurture new ones. The UK Government would do well to step up to the plate and at least match the just transition fund.

Beyond direct investment, our Scottish Government is doing a great job of marketing Scotland. I accept that that might not seem like a hard job at times, as we have an awful lot to offer, but that work is bringing in investment and creating jobs. When it comes to inward investment, Scotland is outperforming every part of the UK except London. When it comes to foreign direct investment, Scotland outpaced both the UK and Europe in FDI growth last year. Aberdeen was the eighth-best city outside London for FDI, with Edinburgh and Glasgow also in the top 10.

Since 2007, when the SNP came to power, gross domestic product per person in Scotland has grown by 10.5 per cent, compared with growth of just 6.5 per cent in the UK. I want that success to continue in spite of Labour's shambolic

approach to the economy. Labour is risking north-east jobs with an extended windfall tax, taxing work with a national insurance rise for employers and refusing to break down trade barriers by rejoining the single market. However, I am pleased that, whatever barriers the UK Government puts in Scotland's way, whatever shade of UK Government we have and for as long as we have a UK Government, the Scottish Government is continuing to bring in investment and is getting on with the job of making Scotland a fairer and more prosperous nation.

16:08

Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con): The Scottish Conservatives will always support increased investment in Scotland and believe that it can be enhanced through our commonsense plans to drive economic growth and cut taxes for workers and businesses. However, the SNP's high-tax, low-income budget continues its 17 years of failure. Those failures are endless and range from a failing economy, a decline in education standards and a national health service that is in permanent crisis to the highest drug deaths rate in Europe.

Investment is key to Scotland's future, but businesses are about to be hammered by the UK Labour Government's national insurance hike and hindered by the SNP's high-tax, low-growth agenda. The budget this week should have cut taxes for hard-working Scots and businesses; instead, the SNP's proposals will stifle the economic growth that is vital to the future of public services in Scotland. After Labour's crippling national insurance jobs tax, we needed a budget based on common sense and sound finances.

Investment is linked to the availability of skilled labour, yet the SNP has made Scotland's income tax rates the highest in the UK, limiting industry access to skilled workers and undermining investment and economic growth. Economic growth should be front and centre of the policy agenda, and tone matters when investors are looking at where to put their capital.

Lorna Slater: Will the member take an intervention?

Sue Webber: No.

There is a risk that a lack of policy alignment across other areas of Government will undermine that clear message. Rent caps are a good example. The damage done to the build-to-rent housing sector by the Scottish Government's rent cap schemes is severe—£3.2 billion of private rented sector investment has been halted since rent control measures were put in place. Rents in Scotland have increased faster than anywhere else in the UK as a result. Concerned constituents

here in Edinburgh constantly write to us about that very fact and the crippling impact that it has on them.

Transport is key to tackling inequalities across our country. Good transport links connect communities to schools, colleges, general practitioners, hospitals, dentists, shops, leisure facilities and people's jobs. Whether it is 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 the economy.

Public sector investment in infrastructure is essential, as it facilitates the movement of goods and people, enabling businesses to operate efficiently, access wider markets and contribute to overall economic growth by increasing productivity, attracting investment and creating jobs. The need for investment in our roads has been glaring for years. The improvement of roads such as the A9, the A96, the A77 and the A75 is essential for sustainable economic growth as well as the protection of the communities on those routes.

That is why the delays to and uncertainty around the project to dual the A9 from Perth to Inverness and the Scottish Government's temporising on dualling the A96 are alarming and anti-growth. Rural communities who depend on the A96 deserve better.

Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Sue Webber: Apologies—I have only four minutes.

We were promised that that lifeline road would be dualled all the way to Inverness by 2025, yet here we are in February 2025 and the promise has been repeatedly broken. We must also think about the A9—the backbone of Scotland. The failure to fully dual that key road has tragically resulted in far too many serious injuries and deaths.

More locally, simple improvements to rail infrastructure would bring obvious economic benefits. I am talking about improvements such as building a train station at Winchburgh to put a booming town of more than 3,400 new homes on the main Edinburgh to Glasgow line, and building the short Almond chord link to turn the Edinburgh Gateway station from a white elephant into a hub for the new west town that would be as busy as Haymarket.

As usual, the Scottish Conservatives are the party of common sense, which was clear from our budget proposals to cut taxes for workers and businesses. We believe that every penny of taxpayers' money must be spent carefully to

address the real concerns and needs of people up and down Scotland.

16:13

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): In 2023, the Fraser of Allander Institute said that Scotland's economic future depends not just on its ability to attract investment but on the strategic vision to shape its own destiny. Fortune does not just favour the bold; it backs ambitious and prudent planning. I trust that the debate will spark discussion on ways in which we can enhance our investment potential.

Currently, Scotland stands at a crossroads. There is no shying away from the long-standing impact that Brexit and the 2008 crash have had on investment, as laid bare by the Institute for Government. However, Scotland is not sitting quietly in the back row of progress and has never been content to do so.

In renewables, Scotland provides 60 per cent of UK offshore wind capacity; that success is attributable not only to location but to forward-thinking policies and investments that are aimed at achieving net zero emissions by 2045—the Seagreen offshore wind farm alone is poised to become one of the world's largest, with a staggering 1.1GW capacity.

Renewables are merely the tip of the iceberg. Scotland's tech scene is thriving, particularly in artificial intelligence, software development and quantum computing. Our cities benefit from foreign-backed tech start-ups, which are fuelled by institutions such as CodeBase and the Scottish technology ecosystem fund.

In financial services, global heavyweights such as JP Morgan and Barclays are expanding their operations, drawn by Scotland's exceptional talent pool and investor-friendly landscape. Those successes are worth celebrating, but Scotland's ambitions should not stop there. The potential for economic growth is far greater and now is the time to push even further.

We must forge better ties with Brazil, India, China and South Africa, which collectively account for almost 30 per cent of global GDP and may drive the next wave of economic expansion. Deepening Scotland's engagement with them will open the door to fresh investment and consolidate our place in the fast-evolving global economy. India's booming tech sector could dovetail with Scotland's strengths in fintech data analytics and software development. Brazil and South Africa, with their rich natural resources, present fertile ground for Scotland's expertise in offshore wind, hydrogen and carbon capture technologies.

Another key opportunity for Scotland lies in our proven ability to nurture unicorn start-ups: Edinburgh-born giants such as Skyscanner and FanDuel are prime examples. By placing greater emphasis on incentivising high-growth companies to scale globally while they remain rooted in Scotland, we can strengthen our position as a leading hub for innovation and entrepreneurship. The Fraser of Allander Institute recommends that the Scottish National Investment Bank take on a more ambitious role as a co-investment partner for global venture capital firms, using targeted financial strategies to reduce risk in early-stage investments.

Meanwhile, Scotland's international offices, which are often a target of criticism from Tory politicians who fail to grasp the value of soft power and economic diplomacy, must be scaled up in order to improve Scotland's global footprint. As recommended in the 2023 Scottish Government international trade report, offices in Mumbai, São Paulo and Singapore will improve our presence in emerging markets and provide launch pads for investor engagement, business summits and partnerships.

Scotland has a huge opportunity to draw inspiration from other global economic powerhouses, such as Singapore and Ireland, both of which have expertly levered cutting-edge infrastructure and Government-backed innovation to create more dynamic and investment-friendly environments. For example, Singapore's precisely designed innovation districts and Ireland's aggressive research and development strategies have catalysed waves of investment and technological breakthroughs. By significantly scaling up our R and D funding, strengthening university-industry collaborations and expanding targeted support for high-growth start-ups in key sectors such as artificial intelligence, fintech and green tech, Scotland could follow suit.

On Wednesday 12 March, I will host a reception with more than 200 guests from Scotland's critical technologies supercluster, which involves photonics, quantum and semiconductor technologies, to highlight its vital role in enabling our industries of the future, including on net zero, health, security and space. Members will hear about ambitions to grow the sector from generating £4.2 billion a year to generating £10 billion a year by 2035, generating 17,000 highly skilled jobs for Scotland. I urge all colleagues to attend.

Scotland has a strong track record of attracting investment and driving innovation. We must strengthen ties with global economic leaders, expand international trade and support high-growth industries. Reaching our full potential demands bold forward-thinking policies and the

economic freedom to shape our future. By embracing ambition and seizing new opportunities, Scotland can build a more prosperous, competitive and resilient economy that benefits businesses, communities and future generations alike.

I thank Daniel Johnson for his fair-mindedness earlier this afternoon.

16:17

Foyso Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): Many of the strategic challenges that we face—reaching net zero, tackling poverty and funding our public services—depend on driving investment for growth. In our globalised economy, in which competition for investment is fiercer than ever, we must ensure that Scotland remains an attractive prospect for business.

I welcome Edinburgh being named one of the UK's top cities to invest in outside London. We have great strengths in finance, technology and life sciences. In a report on FDI attractiveness from law firms Wright, Johnston & Mackenzie and Irwin Mitchell, Edinburgh's infrastructure and public transport were named as key factors in attracting investment. That includes Edinburgh airport, which has undergone massive expansion in recent years, and a publicly owned tram network, which has just had a record year for passenger numbers. If we want to drive investment in our economy, there has to be investment in infrastructure.

We also have strengths in our tourism and culture sector. Edinburgh's festival season attracts more people each year than the football world cup does every four years.

Those areas are key to our economy and support hundreds of thousands of jobs, and they need to be more integrated into our economic strategy in order to attract investment. Collaboration between the private and public sectors can play a huge role in that regard.

We can learn a lot from Greater Manchester, which has the Media City creative cluster and has recently developed six growth locations to attract billions of pounds in business investment. A cluster that meets the needs of Scotland's creative industry could be transformational in bringing private sector investment to an area of the economy that is often defined by Government support, increasing growth in the film and TV sectors, broadcasting Scotland worldwide and further developing brand Scotland. We should not discount Manchester's combined authority system, which allows for a long-term regional strategy, and its great mayor, Andy Burnham, who can represent the city on the biggest of stages.

Lastly, I will touch on private equity investment, because 2024 was a record year for such investment in Scotland. Although those companies can create economic growth and reinvigorate business, they have faced criticism for unsustainable business practices and even asset stripping. We must be sure that foreign investment leads to jobs and sustainable growth.

We have many pull factors to attract investment, but the Scottish Government must not squander those by not investing sufficiently in our cities and infrastructure or by failing to partner with the private sector to deliver in our growth areas. If that happens, we will fall short in the race for global investment.

16:21

Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): I direct members to my entry in the register of members' interests, which shows that I am a member of Unison.

If we are to fully deliver on our priorities of improving Scotland's public services, eradicating child poverty and tackling the climate emergency, increased investment in the Scottish economy is critical. In the short time that I have available, I will cover how two particular budget commitments are good for our economy.

The Scottish Government budget includes significant investment to support the economy. We know that the economy suffers when poverty thrives, which is why we have given more than £1 billion through the Scottish child payment since it was launched in 2021. Unlike the Labour and Tory parties, we know that the two-child cap must go. Investing in social security is not only the morally right thing to do; an investment in our people is an investment in our economy. Tackling poverty and growing the economy go hand in hand.

In our moves towards reaching net zero, we have provided opportunities across the economy that are vital for our future. In its budget, the Scottish Government is committing about £4.9 billion in capital and resource funding for activities that will have a positive impact on the delivery of our climate change goals. Capital funding of £150 million will be used to continue to anchor our offshore wind supply chain, which is part of a five-year commitment to invest more than £500 million in the sector. That investment by the Scottish Government is expected to leverage £1.5 billion in private sector investment and support thousands of jobs.

It is also welcome that more than £168 million will be invested to maximise the power of our land and forests to tackle climate change and protect nature. That spending allows us to protect and restore our natural environment, all while

supporting Scotland's rural economy and creating economic opportunities and green jobs.

Those examples of public investment in our country through social security and net zero spending are not only the right thing to do; they drive investment in Scotland and help our economy.

As a constituency MSP, I engage positively with businesses throughout Clydebank and Milngavie. They know that the most productive workforce is the one that has fair and decent conditions. I welcome the SNP Government's support for measures to promote a work environment that values the workforce and our trade union movement.

Unfortunately, Labour sends mixed messages on that issue. Labour members talk a good game in the Parliament, but the mask slips when they are in power. I see that locally with the Labour-led West Dunbartonshire Council. Just this month, the excellent and well-informed *Clydebank Post* reported that the council has paused its threat to fire and rehire workers over holidays. The article quotes the GMB saying:

"We would like to thank you for your support in helping us get the process paused and we will continue fighting until the threat of fire and rehire is completely removed."

Understandably, the GMB said that it "beggared belief" that a council would behave like that, and I totally agree. Labour cannot be trusted with workers' rights or, more broadly, with our economy.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has jumped deep into the Tory austerity playbook. Despite all that we do, our economic growth will continue to be hampered by the UK Government's decisions and its Brexit policy. Slow growth, job losses and rising prices are direct results of Labour policies such as the national insurance tax increase and the decision to stay out of the European Union single market. Scotland can flourish, as we have so much to offer, but we need to be able to make our own decisions in areas such as immigration policy and rejoining the EU as an independent country. It is now clearer than ever that only with independence will our economy and public services truly thrive.

16:26

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am pleased to be able to contribute to this afternoon's debate. I will support the amendment in the name of Murdo Fraser.

The motion mentions the importance of increasing investment in Scotland's economy and it says that that investment is vital to improve public services, support a thriving economy and

create jobs. There is no doubt that those are all worthy points, but the Scottish public should be surprised to find them at the beginning of a motion that was lodged by the high-tax, anti-business SNP Government. Although it wants to shout about the importance of investment in Scotland, it is hard to believe that it really means it.

The Government talks about investment in housing but, as we have heard, its rent cap policy harmed investment in that sector to the tune of £3 billion, and it will make many of the same mistakes with the Housing (Scotland) Bill.

The Government talks about investment in net zero. However, although it is willing to invest in alternative energy sources such as offshore wind, it has turned its back on nuclear energy—a decision that will cost Scotland billions in long-term investment. In reality, the SNP's insistence on ignoring nuclear power will not only cost Scotland investment opportunities but make net zero harder and much more expensive to achieve.

The Scottish Government is right to talk about the importance of technology in financial services, yet its policies undermine that sector in Scotland. Although the fintech sector has enjoyed impressive growth in recent years, we are now seeing warnings that policies such as higher income tax are making it difficult for the sector to see sustained growth.

Scottish Financial Enterprise has said that its members are finding it harder and harder to attract and retain senior workers. In an SFE survey that received responses from 40 organisations that together employ more than 50,000 people in the financial services sector, 66 per cent of respondents knew of examples where Scotland's business and tax environment was harming and having a negative impact on business decisions.

At the same time, leading headhunting companies have reported difficulties in attracting top talent to Scotland, particularly since the introduction of the advanced rate of income tax. The chief executive of SFE, Sandy Begbie, has highlighted that cutting taxes to at least the same rates as those in the rest of the UK could lead to greater investment and greater certainty in the Scottish economy. As Conservative members have said often in recent years, high tax does not support business or the economy. If the Scottish Government was serious about increasing investment in public services, it would be willing to listen to the proposals that are being made.

Scotland has the potential to lead the United Kingdom in many sectors, but it will be able to do that only if the SNP Government is willing to unlock that potential. It talks about Scotland being a leading destination for investment, but it is time that it backed up that rhetoric with actions. That

means introducing commonsense policies that will attract investment and send a message that Scotland is somewhere that truly values success and talent. That success and talent will lead to the economic growth, investment and prosperity that we want. However, the SNP Government does little about that.

I support the amendment in the name of Murdo Fraser.

16:30

Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): I hope to be able to cheer us up a little, to be honest. Frankly, I am delighted with the Scottish Government's motion and its recognition—indeed, its celebration—of the importance of investment and of the value of using the Government's ability to leverage in private finance. Of course, I completely agree with the priorities.

Increased investment is vital for growth and productivity, but by itself it is not enough. It has to be in a policy setting that encourages entrepreneurship and innovation, for it is those that create new products, services and businesses, leading to increased productivity. Investments will not deliver as much as they could if they are accompanied by disincentives such as the rise in employer national insurance contributions, which acts against growth and productivity.

I add my voice to that of those who express concern that the UK Labour Government is not now able to confirm the previous funding commitment of £8.3 billion for Great British Energy. I hope that that is not going to be another broken UK Labour Government promise. It is vital that we increase confidence among the business community, and it is disappointing that the Economy and Fair Work Committee heard further evidence yesterday of how the UK Labour Government's tax rise is suppressing it.

Put simply, business investment is much less risk averse than Government investment, with every penny spent by Government scrutinised and every failed project criticised. That is not the case with entrepreneurs and innovators. The role of entrepreneurship cannot be overexaggerated, with businesses being the principal agents of change and growth.

As the late Thomas J Watson, the founder and chief executive officer of IBM, said:

"If you want to increase your success rate, double your failure rate."

In other words, to drive innovation and business growth, business needs to be able to take appropriate risk. However, for businesses to take those risks to drive growth, there must be policy

certainty. I have mentioned several times already this week the need for such certainty to allow for the future work that we all hope for in Grangemouth and the wider area. I am disappointed to hear reports today of further redundancy notices being issued at some of the Ineos companies.

The need for that policy certainty is also backed up by Scottish Renewables, which makes the general point in relation to clean power by 2030, alongside many other points, not least of which are the concerns around zonal pricing affecting investor confidence. It notes the comments of Alistair Phillips-Davies, Scottish and Southern Energy's CEO, who stated that

"zonal pricing would be a political and economic disaster".

That language is not usually used by such a senior business figure, and it correctly recognises concerns that are shared not just by the energy industry but by trade unions and major investors such as Sumitomo.

No speech of mine could be complete without my mentioning the role of women-led businesses, and I welcome the leadership that the Scottish Government and, in particular, the Deputy First Minister have shown in that regard. The policy and the money that is made available are a good step forward, but the challenge remains to ensure in particular that women-led businesses are at the heart of our focus as we move towards net zero.

Finally, I will make a few comments about skills. A major issue is the fashion in the UK and in Scotland for the past decades to emphasise competence-based training. That has downplayed the importance of knowledge, but knowledge is the key to new thinking and innovation. We need to benchmark our skills system against the very best internationally, rather than being too concerned with being in harmony with the rest of the UK.

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

16:34

Lorna Slater: The *Financial Times* noted this week that the Labour Party has what it calls a "Meatloaf strategy" to rejoining the European Union—and I suspect that our Scottish Conservative colleagues share it—which is that it would do anything for growth, but it won't do that.

I would like to pick up on some of the comments of Murdo Fraser and Alexander Stewart on the build-to-rent market. I want to put the issue in context and challenge them on what they said. Build to rent involves institutional funds purchasing sites and building them out to provide rental accommodation. In Europe and America, when such big institutional investors have acted as

mega landlords, they have caused so many issues by buying up such large bits of property that the implementation of rent controls has been required.

At the moment, the build-to-rent market in Scotland is very small. Even with what is in the pipeline, it represents a fraction of the total housing market. It is a very niche part of the housing market in Scotland. Therefore, it seems like a sensible precaution to put in rent controls before the build-to-rent market takes off—it is like putting stable doors in place before buying a horse.

Michelle Thomson: I want to pick Lorna Slater up on what she has said about build to rent. I see it very much as a professionalisation of the market. Surely she is not suggesting that she wants to return to a proliferation of a multitude of small landlords.

Lorna Slater: I would say that social rented housing, which is still a larger market in Scotland than the private rented market, is the priority here. We have covered this ground before. The right to buy gutted social housing in Scotland, and that is what we should be focused on. Rents in the private rented market must be fair for tenants, but that is a discussion that we can get into on another day, because I have only four minutes.

The green industrial strategy was discussed at yesterday's meeting of the Economy and Fair Work Committee, which I attended, along with Mr Fraser and Mr Johnson. Last year, the Institute for Public Policy Research cautioned that the UK was missing out on the economic opportunities that were arising from the transition to net zero primarily because of the absence of a well-defined green industrial strategy. The same could be said for Scotland. Even the Deputy First Minister would acknowledge that the green industrial strategy that was published by the Scottish Government is more of a prospectus than a strategy.

At yesterday's meeting of the Economy and Fair Work Committee, Tony Rodgers, the chief executive of Emtelle UK Ltd, a Scotland-based manufacturer of fibre optic cables and conduit, described passionately what is needed from an industrial strategy. We need to have actual targets for what should be manufactured in Scotland, how much of it and where, how many jobs would be created, how many sites there would be, what supply chain businesses would be involved and what skills pathways would be required.

It requires courage to set out a clear direction at that level of detail. There is risk. However, without a detailed strategy, Scotland is at risk of not having a direction at all and of investors not knowing when oil and gas will be phased out, what size we want the wind industry to be or how much of our energy should come from tidal, and how

much of what is needed to build heat networks should be manufactured here.

Among the ways in which the Scottish Government could provide clarity would be by introducing an ambitious heat in buildings bill before the end of the current session of Parliament. That would give businesses that work in the field of heat networks, heat pumps, home and building insulation and heat storage batteries the confidence to invest and expand.

As Marie McNair did, I would like to highlight the importance of investment in ecosystem services, including nature restoration at a landscape scale. That is vital for the resilience of food production, the tourism economy and protecting the transport network from extreme weather, and it is of particular importance to rural communities, where it must be targeted towards creating employment opportunities and aiding local climate resilience, such as resistance to flooding and water shortages.

Nature restoration is the other side of the coin from emissions reductions. It is the only mechanism for carbon capture and storage that has been proven to work at scale, and it needs to play a key role in Scotland's journey to net zero.

16:38

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): This has been a very interesting debate, which takes me back to my days at university, when I had the privilege to be taught economic history by a noted member of the Scottish National Party, Dr Duncan Ross.

Over the past century, the Scottish economy has faced long-term challenges. Fundamentally, it has been characterised by underinvestment, which has been and remains a chronic issue. I think back to an essay that I wrote on the Toothill report of 1961, which was commissioned by the Scottish Council for Development and Industry. The inquiry was run by John Toothill, who, at the time, was the managing director of Ferranti. That was a watershed moment for the Scottish economy, because the inquiry's recommendations led to a realisation that Scotland's faltering heavy industries should not be reinvested in. The inquiry committee wanted labour to be released from the heavy industries and reinvested in light industry, which would be developed largely through inward investment.

That was the first time that Scotland went in earnest for an explicit policy on inward investment, which at that time usually came from US multinational firms. Employment in US multinationals in Scotland peaked in 1974, when it stood at 92,000 employees. Of course, we know the longer-term story of silicon glen. It did not represent sticky investment; it was what the

economist Turok described as dependent, and not developmental, investment. As we know, it led to a litany of firms closing throughout the 1990s, and a large reduction in Scotland's industrial base in that decade.

We need to learn the right lessons from our engagement with inward investment over the past half century. It is encouraging that the Government has a mind towards how we can deepen the value chain in Scotland. I encourage it to further its ambition in that regard.

Investments that the Government has made in recent years can be characterised as reacting to crisis rather than being proactive in nature. I think of the example of McVitie's, which was a Scottish company founded in Edinburgh and Glasgow and which ultimately became foreign owned by a Turkish company. A couple of years ago, it decided to withdraw the last remnant of that Scottish company from the country in which it had been founded, at the cost of nearly 500 jobs in a poor part of Glasgow. I do not condemn or criticise the cabinet secretary for her efforts in making a counter-proposal. However, it seems to me that the development agency should have been alive to the risks much earlier. It should have been able to work proactively with the firm to anchor that investment in Scotland if it had thought that the factory was at risk of closure in any restructuring round. That is just one example of many cases in which we could have been more proactive.

The Scottish Enterprise account management service does a great job—I used to be an account manager there myself—but perhaps it is not engaging with firms at the right level of decision making to ensure that we are ahead of issues when they emerge.

There are many other such examples. One accidental beneficial investment that the Government made in recent years concerned Prestwick airport. Although, ostensibly, that was done to rescue the passenger terminal service there, it turned the area into what we might call the Farnborough of Scotland, in that it is now largely recognised for its aerospace cluster. State ownership of such real estate assets is beneficial in the longer run. I encourage the Government to seek to develop that rather than dispose of it.

Several members made the fundamental point about there being insufficient investment. We need to find new ways of crowding that in, but we must do so in a way that does not introduce undue risks. The Bank of England has spoken about the risks of private equity investment, in highlighting that the lack of risk management of private equity can present longer-term risks. A number of Scottish companies have been delisted from the FTSE and have gone private. We do not really know what the longer-term implications of that

might be. We have also seen Scotland not fully exploiting opportunities from unicorn companies, which have ended up in foreign ownership. Those are strategic weaknesses that the Scottish Government needs to address.

We need to consider other countries' approaches to taking strategic equity investments and anchoring businesses to Scotland. A good example is Clansman Dynamics in East Kilbride, which is a high-end manufacturing company founded by Dick Philbrick in 1994. The business is built as a workers' co-operative, so it is not possible to sell shares in it to a speculative owner. Dick's concept of ownership was rooted in the idea that the business would be anchored in this country and would be a high-value firm that would develop and grow its business here organically. He did not want it to disappear into General Electric, Philips or Siemens—he wanted to keep it as a Scottish business. Indeed, it is a huge success. It is more productive than its peer firms, does most of its work in exports, and has high levels of engagement with its staff, who are engaged in every aspect of the business's decision making. It is a wonderful example of what we could do more of in Scotland, by emulating the Mondragon co-operative structures that are prevalent in Spain.

A multitude of opportunities exists in Scotland, but the fundamental issue is how we can leverage investment for long-term value creation. I encourage the Government to look more broadly at other models and explore pockets of excellence where that can be achieved. I would hate to see us repeat the mistakes of half a century ago, when we overrelied on fluid capital investments from other countries that were not fully anchored here. We still have weaknesses in that regard. Some major firms that are not fully anchored in Scotland might be at risk of removal in any round of asset restructuring in those businesses. We must consider how we can approach that more effectively so that we do not see ourselves again having to react to corporate closures and then losing out.

16:44

Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con): I start by reminding members of my entry in the register of members' interests regarding property.

I am pleased to close the debate on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives. The cabinet secretary and SNP members have claimed throughout the debate that Scotland is open for business and investment. However, as already extensively stated by my Scottish Conservative colleagues, Scotland under the Scottish National Party is indeed not open for business. Even though, for foreign direct investment in the UK, Scotland is

second to London and is the home of emerging sectors such as renewables technology and life sciences, Scottish industry remains concerned that the SNP Government's anti-business policies, along with the higher income tax rates, will deter investment.

My colleague Alexander Stewart said that the Scottish Financial Enterprise chief executive, Sandy Begbie, highlighted that cutting taxes to at least the same rates as those in the rest of the UK could lead to greater investment and a larger tax base. My colleague Murdo Fraser spoke about the importance of ferries to the growth of the whisky industry, and said that the reliability of the ferry service and the roads linking one place to another are critical for transport. My colleague Sue Webber is absolutely right that investment is linked to the availability of skilled labour, and that the SNP has managed to make Scotland a less attractive place for skilled workers, with its income tax rates being the highest in the UK. It is in the Scottish Government's gift to make a change to address all those issues. The cabinet secretary mentioned a step change, and I hope that those issues and that step change are included in her closing speech.

Last week, we had the privilege of meeting Fiona Campbell from the Association of Scotland's Self-Caterers. She spoke extensively about the damage that will be done by the SNP Government's short-term-let licensing scheme and the visitor levy. Those ridiculous regulations place a burden on small businesses by turning them into tax collectors, with business owners having to do all the work. The smallest mistake could lead to those small businesses breaking the law, resulting in small business owners being fined for unclear Scottish Government regulations. Those absurd regulations have made investment in Scotland extremely difficult. Is that really how we should treat our job creators?

Let me turn to jobs. The SNP's failure to pass down business rates relief will be the death knell for many businesses, while costs for businesses that are lucky enough to survive mean that it will be more difficult for them to employ people. The SNP's damaging high-income tax regime has cost the economy £800 million, because the Scottish tax base has grown at a slower rate than the tax base of the rest of the United Kingdom. A faster-growing economy could raise tax revenues and go a long way in funding better public services and strengthening the economy.

Members of the Government might be congratulating themselves, but it is high time for us to teach the SNP a lesson or two about how growth is created. Wealth and economic growth do not come from Governments—they come from businesses. Nevertheless, businesses need the

proper levers and environment to thrive. No surprise here—nothing changes—that the SNP Government has failed on many levers. It has failed on transport, energy, housing, a skilled workforce and taxation—the list goes on and on. Disappointingly, all those failures by the SNP have stifled growth, but here is a newsflash: not only the SNP is to blame.

Members: Oh!

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Let us hear Ms Gosal.

Pam Gosal: Confidence among the UK's small businesses has fallen to its lowest level since the height of the pandemic. In fact, let us not forget that the small business index hit its lowest point since the pandemic in the October to December quarter, dropping by 40 points, but what occurred during that time? Yes—the UK Labour Government budget occurred. That shameful increase in employer national insurance contributions has put businesses in a difficult position, with many having to cut jobs.

There were great contributions from all members. I cannot, unfortunately, mention them all, because I want to touch on something that Kenneth Gibson said about India, but I will briefly talk about some members' speeches.

From the Labour seats, Daniel Johnson talks about the need to focus on investments into Scotland and maintaining prosperity for Scots. That is rich coming from those benches, especially since it was Labour that raised national insurance—I am not sure that Scots or businesses think that that is prosperous. The future may very well be green, but Lorna Slater forgets that her failed deposit return scheme caused panic among job-creating and tax-generating companies in Scotland. Therefore, the Conservatives will certainly not be taking any lectures from the Greens. I agree with Willie Rennie—

Members: Oh!

Pam Gosal: I agree with him on two points: caution on regulations and taxes, and long-term consistency and certainty. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear Ms Gosal.

Pam Gosal: I want to end by talking about something important that is happening next week that I think that all members will celebrate. Last year, as the founder and convener of the cross-party group on India, I led a delegation of MSPs to India. As a result, next week a memorandum of understanding between Scottish Financial Enterprise and the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry will be signed. The purpose of the MOU is to facilitate meaningful partnership between fintech organisations of India and Scotland to collaborate on mutual interests,

which I hope will bring more investment into Scotland.

Presiding Officer, since today's debate is about increasing investment, please allow me to say this: I have to mention that the very first annual India and Scotland event organised by the Indian consulate will be held in Edinburgh next week. I am very proud to announce that. Kenneth Gibson talked about touching on successes, and the cabinet secretary will be speaking at the event next week. I really hope that the cabinet secretary and the Scottish Government will forge and gel those relationships so that they can grow and so that we can bring success to Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: I call the Deputy First Minister to wind up and take us to 5 pm, please.

16:51

Kate Forbes: It is a great source of comfort to me that the years of the Tories' doom and gloom do not seem to have stopped investors. According to EY's annual independent analysis of inward investment, last year Scotland experienced an increase of 12.7 per cent in the number of FDI projects and had double the rate of growth of the UK, when compared with 2022. Our share of UK FDI projects increased for the fifth year in a row, to 14.4 per cent. Investor perception of Scotland also improved, with 26 per cent of the potential investors that were surveyed saying that they were planning to invest in Scotland—up from 19.2 per cent.

I know that things need to be political, but what Willie Rennie said is the bottom line: investors look for signals, and I think that the signal that the Parliament should send, irrespective of the minor disagreements that we might have, is that Scotland is open for business, that the potential of our economy and our people is huge, that we are operating in a global environment and that we intend to compete to win investment.

Alexander Stewart said—I absolutely agree—that Scotland has the potential to lead the UK. In many respects, we already do. However, our potential and our ambition to realise that spur me on. I am treating this challenge and opportunity by taking the practical approach of recognising that we must have a strategy to get there. I take on board Lorna Slater's point about the need for that strategy to be as granular as possible, so we are actively engaged in that work. Ultimately, for the potential that we know exists and the strategy to get there, we need to create the building blocks and ensure that we take people with us. My invitation to everybody is to get involved with that work.

I want to touch on some other things that members mentioned. Murdo Fraser talked about

the need for a supportive environment and said that investment will come when there is a positive environment. That is true. We did not hear huge amounts of positivity from him, but I agree with that line.

There are three points to make in that regard. One is about regulation: I recognise the need to work on a pan-Government basis on that and not just within the economy team, so that is what we are doing. We have established a Cabinet subgroup, bringing together all the cabinet secretaries to look at what is happening in each part of Government that affects the economy, which helps us to have open conversations.

Secondly, Daniel Johnson asked a question about consenting. Over the past few weeks, we have massively increased the number of workers in the consenting unit. Gillian Martin will keep me right, but I want to say that we have doubled the number of workers in order to reduce the amount of time that it takes to give consent.

Murdo Fraser talked about planning. I want to distinguish between planning and consenting, which is an important distinction to make. The figure that he quoted is distorted by about 40 planning applications, and the average is much lower.

Daniel Johnson: I welcome what the Deputy First Minister is saying. The cross-Government point is very important. The other point that keeps coming up in the Economy and Fair Work Committee concerns international comparisons. If it takes three to five years for a wind project to go through in Norway, we cannot afford for them to take 10 to 15 years in this country. Does she accept the point that we need to be mindful of international comparators?

Kate Forbes: We accept that. Developers tell me that they are juggling a number of key milestones. One is planning, one is the contracts for difference scheme, one is grid connections and there are others, including investment decisions.

We have committed to trying to provide maximum certainty on the things that we can control. On the consenting point, as we have outlined, our target is to get applications through in 50 weeks. Members will appreciate just how complex the applications are. They are huge projects, but we will try to provide certainty.

I have been jumping around my notes, which I have now ditched.

The other fundamental point that we face, even when we get developments through, is the big question that Lorna Slater posed, which was about how we ensure that our great wind and renewables potential is creating jobs in Scotland. The supply chain needs to know that it will have

customers: people in the supply chain are waiting for investment by the developers before they make their investment choices. However, when developers are deciding where to invest, they are looking for the supply chain to be already established and ready to deliver. It is a bit of a chicken-and-egg situation. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Deputy First Minister, if I may interrupt—I am aware of colleagues who are coming into the chamber just now. I would be grateful if, as a matter of courtesy, conversations could be curtailed.

Kate Forbes: I may have somewhat trivialised the issue in saying that, but I have outlined why we need to de-risk investments up front. Some people will ask why we put public investment into private enterprise: the reason why is that investments need to be made now, so that the supply chain exists when developments get consent and building starts.

Paul Sweeney: The point that the Deputy First Minister makes about demand signals is key, and it does not relate only to renewables: shipbuilding is a classic example of an area where such investment must be made. In that regard, Mr Rennie talked about the steel industry in Scotland and the fact that key assets are currently hanging by a thread. A huge opportunity lies in green steel and electric arc furnaces. Could the Government take a more proactive approach to developing those assets?

Kate Forbes: Yes, is the bottom line. We want to take advantage of all the opportunities that come from supporting manufacturing and the supply chain, especially in terms of renewables or shipbuilding, which Mr Sweeney mentioned. If things go as we want them to go, we will have a huge surplus of energy, so how we deploy that in attracting investment will be critical.

I cannot remember how much time you gave me, Presiding Officer, but I think that I am nearing the end of it.

The Presiding Officer: You have until 5 pm.

Kate Forbes: I had many things to say in response to other members, but they will forgive me if I do not go through everything that was said.

I want to make the points that our history has demonstrated that key economic interventions can change the future of a nation, and that backing key industries and introducing new opportunities can totally transform communities. Right now, I argue that the opportunity that we face as a country outstrips anything that has gone before.

We have more than 40GW of offshore wind energy in the pipeline. When we look at what is happening in other nations, we can see that we have an early-mover advantage. So that we use

that, we need to support the supply chain in order to secure Scotland-located jobs. Paul Sweeney talked about the need to ensure that that is the case: nothing is more critically important than having the supply chain located in Scotland. If we look at where people are interested in investing right now, we can see that the jobs are very difficult to move away from the country in which they are situated.

We are on the cusp of a huge opportunity. We need to amplify our message to the world that we are open for business, that we welcome external investment and that Scotland will compete to win the market.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

There are four questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that motion S6M-16489, in the name of Ivan McKee, on the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2025, 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.

17:00

Meeting suspended.

17:03

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We move to the vote on motion S6M-16489, on the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2025, in the name of Ivan McKee. Members should cast their votes now.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, 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)
 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)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)

Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (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)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 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)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Abstentions

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (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)

Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-16489, in the name of Ivan McKee, on the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2025, is: For 84, Against 1, Abstentions 24.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Local Government Finance (Scotland) Order 2025 [draft] be approved.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-16595.2, in the name of Murdo Fraser, which seeks to amend motion S6M-16595, in the name of Kate Forbes, on increasing investment in Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (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)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)

Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP) [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)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)

Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-16595.2, in the name of Murdo Fraser, is: For 44, Against 68, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-16595.1, in the name of Daniel Johnson, which seeks to amend motion S6M-16595, in the name of Kate Forbes, on increasing investment in Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Neil Gray): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app did not connect. I would have voted no.

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

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)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

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)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)

Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine 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)
 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)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 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)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central 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]
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 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)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine)
 (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

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)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (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-16595.1, in the name of Daniel Johnson, is: For 21, Against 92, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S6M-16595, in the name of Kate Forbes, on increasing investment in Scotland, 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)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, 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)
 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)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and
 Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)

Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 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)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (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)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-16595, in the name of Kate Forbes, on increasing investment in Scotland, is: For 86, Against 28, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that increasing the level of investment in the Scottish economy is critical to delivering on the Scottish Government’s priorities of improving public services, supporting a thriving economy, tackling the climate emergency, and eradicating child poverty; recognises that the Scottish Government’s programme of public investment, particularly in the priority areas of net zero, housing and infrastructure, is vital for leveraging private investment across the Scottish economy, to stimulate growth in key sectors, improve productivity and create jobs; welcomes the annual EY survey, which shows that Scotland is outpacing the UK as a whole when it comes to securing Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) projects, and three Scottish cities ranked in the UK’s top 10 locations for FDI outside of London, and believes that Scotland’s strengths and expertise in areas such as technology, financial services, food and drink, tourism and the energy transition make Scotland the ideal place to invest and deliver projects that bring wider benefits to the Scottish economy.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Meeting closed at 17:11.

Correction

John Swinney has identified an error in his contribution and provided the following correction.

The First Minister (John Swinney):

At col 18, paragraph 1—

Original text—

This Government has put money in place to support improvement in the lives of young people living in poverty through the Scottish child payment—originally, it was set at £5 for every eligible child; now, it is £26.70—which is helping to lift hundreds of thousands of children out of poverty.

Corrected text—

This Government has put money in place to support improvement in the lives of young people living in poverty through the Scottish child payment—originally, it was set at £5 for every eligible child; now, it is £26.70—which it is estimated is helping to keep 100,000 children out of relative poverty in 2024-25.

This is the final edition of the *Official Report* for this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

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