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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 19 March 2025

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

Portfolio Question Time

Constitution, External Affairs and Culture, and Parliamentary Business

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): Good afternoon, colleagues. The first item of business is portfolio question time, and the first portfolio is constitution, external affairs and culture, and parliamentary business. As ever, members who wish to ask a supplementary question should press their request-to-speak button during the relevant question.

International Development Fund Impact (Partner Countries)

1. Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government how it is maximising the impact of its international development fund in its partner countries, including any of those affected by high levels of indebtedness. (S6O-04442)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): Campaigners are raising concerns that global debt is at its worst level in 30 years, with 34 countries in Africa in debt distress. The Scottish Government remains committed to equitable partnerships with our partner countries to tackle shared global challenges. Our international development fund has been led by our partners to ensure that our portfolio is aligned with their national priorities in order to maximise impact. That has resulted in our programmes focusing on areas that are often neglected and underfunded, such as inclusive education, non-communicable diseases and tackling gender-based violence, with the money delivered through grants rather than loans. We remain committed to global equity and justice.

Maurice Golden: I am interested in how the Scottish Government plans to engage with international organisations such as the United Nations to advocate the creation of a fairer global debt framework. Does the cabinet secretary share my concern that international aid organisations that are based in Scotland, such as Mercy Corps, could be hit hard as a result of the United Kingdom Government's decision to slash the international aid budget?

Angus Robertson: I give Maurice Golden the assurance that the Scottish Government remains closely in touch with multilateral organisations and our partner countries to address the issues that he has identified.

Maurice Golden's second point requires a lot more attention. In Scotland, we are very fortunate to have charitable organisations and others that do a lot of excellent work internationally. He is right to mention Mercy Corps, which has its European headquarters in Edinburgh. A lot of its grant-in-aid funding comes from countries such as the United States of America and the United Kingdom, so any reductions in overseas development aid budgets are likely to hit such organisations. It is in all our interests to ensure that the talented people and organisations in the sector that are based in Scotland receive the help and support that they need.

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): I understand that Scotland's International Development Alliance has previously raised concerns about grant funding from the Scottish international fund going to multinational for-profit organisations. What assessment, if any, has the Scottish Government made of those concerns? Will it review the issue?

Angus Robertson: I assure Neil Bibby that we keep everything in this policy area under constant review, but I will refer his question to officials to ensure that I provide him with the most up-to-date information. I would be content to meet him, or the organisation that he referred to, to discuss any outstanding issues. There is cross-party consensus on the good work that the Scottish Government is able to deliver in that area, and I want to ensure that it continues to be held in the high regard that it has been thus far.

Historic Environment Scotland (Safe Working Environment for Women)

2. Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what steps Historic Environment Scotland is taking to ensure that women have access to a safe working environment. (S6O-04443)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): We hope for a strong and flourishing Scotland where all individuals are equally safe and respected and where women and girls live free from all forms of violence and abuse.

We are committed to ensuring that working environments are inclusive and safe, including on the basis of the protected characteristics in the Equality Act 2010. The provision of safe working environments for its staff is an operational matter

for Historic Environment Scotland, and I will therefore ask it to write directly to Rachael Hamilton with a full answer to her question.

Rachael Hamilton: An employee of Historic Environment Scotland shared a copy of an article that had been published on the HES internal website, which states:

“Excluding people from places such as changing rooms or bathrooms are all explicit forms of transphobia and considered harassment.”

First, cabinet secretary, can you confirm whether Historic Environment Scotland provides single-sex spaces in all buildings? Secondly, do you agree with the statement—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Speak through the chair.

Rachael Hamilton: Does the cabinet secretary agree with this statement from HES? If he does not, will the cabinet secretary direct HES to remove the article from its internal website and to issue an apology to its employees?

Angus Robertson: I repeat the point that I made a moment ago. I have asked Historic Environment Scotland to write directly to the member with a full answer to her question. I think that she and other colleagues appreciate that it is important that arm’s-length organisations, whether that is Historic Environment Scotland, Creative Scotland or others, answer such operational questions.

I would be grateful to Rachael Hamilton if she could share the correspondence with me, and I give her an undertaking that I will look at that. I expect Historic Environment Scotland to reply to her directly.

Cultural Activities for Children and Young People (Glasgow)

3. Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to support cultural activities for children and young people in Glasgow. (S6O-04444)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): I thank Pam Duncan-Glancy for her question. The Scottish Government has a long-standing history of supporting youth arts programmes, such as the youth music initiative and Sistema Scotland. YMI and Sistema will receive a 3 per cent uplift in 2025-26, which takes our annual investment for those YMI to £9.79 million and for Sistema to £2.68 million.

In 2024-25, Glasgow City Council received £540,644 through the YMI formula fund, ensuring that every primary school child has access to a year’s free music tuition. A further 28 youth arts

projects received YMI funding in the city. Sistema runs Big Noise Govanhill, which works with more than 1,000 local children to provide high-quality music education.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: The cabinet secretary will be aware that, yesterday, BBC Scotland announced that the soap opera “River City” will be decommissioned. Equity, the union, says that the move will have a disproportionately negative impact on Scottish performers and the wider production landscape, including in relation to apprenticeships. What reassurance has the Government had from BBC Scotland that it will replace, like-for-like, the apprenticeships and training opportunities for young workers in Glasgow who want to develop a career in television or film?

Angus Robertson: I commend Pam Duncan-Glancy for her ingenuity in raising yesterday’s announcement by BBC Scotland. My view on the ending of “River City” is that it is to be regretted. Like many people, I have watched it over the past 20 years. I note BBC Scotland’s commitment to three new drama projects. However, I have concerns about the announcement, particularly because of the training opportunities that “River City” has provided over the decades. I have asked the BBC to engage fully with Bectu, Equity and the Writers Guild of Great Britain on that issue. It is important to involve all the trades unions in this. We have a shared agenda of ensuring that screen and television go from strength to strength, and I would be very concerned about anything that might undermine that.

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): The delivery of multiyear funding is a significant development, and many of the organisations that receive funding support children and young people. Can you provide an assessment of the number and range of organisations that run cultural activities for children and young people and which are benefiting from those plans across Glasgow and Scotland?

Angus Robertson: The Scottish Government allocated an additional £20 million to Creative Scotland’s multiyear funding programme for 2025-26. Subject to budgetary processes, we will increase the available budget by a further £20 million to £74 million in 2026-27. This is a foundational moment for Scotland’s culture sector, including many organisations that support children and young people. More than 150 organisations—61 per cent of the portfolio—will deliver activity for children and young people, 27 of which we consider to be youth arts organisations. Examples of organisations in Glasgow that will benefit from multiyear funding and which have a focus on youth arts include Scottish Youth Dance and the Children’s Music Foundation in Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members that they should have their Scottish Parliament background on when they join the proceedings remotely.

Question 4 has been withdrawn. Question 5 was not lodged.

European Single Market (Rejoining)

6. Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on what engagement it has had with the United Kingdom Government regarding rejoining the European single market. (S6O-04447)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): The Scottish Government is in regular contact with the UK Government in order to set out Scotland's priorities for its future relationship with the European Union, which includes a return to the single market.

Modelling by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research shows that the UK economy is now 2.5 per cent smaller than it would have been in the European Union. The hard Brexit that was negotiated by the previous Conservative UK Government took the UK out of the EU, the single market and the customs union, and it brought an end to freedom of movement. With independence, Scotland can rejoin the European Union.

Stuart McMillan: The world of 2016, when the Brexit referendum took place, is not the world of today. Security and defence are about much more than weapons and soldiers; energy security and food supply are also vital issues. What actions will the Scottish Government, working with our European partners, undertake in order to increase maritime security in Scottish waters?

Angus Robertson: Stuart McMillan is right to identify the importance of working together with the European Union, its member states and neighbouring countries such as Norway and Iceland that are not part of the EU, as they are all countries that have an important security dimension around our shores.

Defence is a reserved matter, but notwithstanding that, in the areas in which the Scottish Government has responsibilities, such as the marine sphere and energy sector, it is legitimate to make sure that we have the appropriate levels of security in place. I note, with some concern, that the Royal Navy does not have a single ocean-going conventional patrol craft that is based in Scotland.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): United States President Donald Trump is currently threatening trade tariffs against the EU, which we

might avoid in the UK because we are no longer part of the EU. Those tariffs would be immensely damaging to key export sectors, such as food and drink, in Scotland. Is it not reckless to talk about rejoining the European single market while such a threat hangs over us?

Angus Robertson: No, but I take the opportunity to agree with the member that a trade war has no winners, which is why it is incumbent on all of us, across all parties, to use the good offices that we have to communicate that point to those who choose to introduce trade tariffs.

Let us take the example of the Scotch whisky sector in which American companies own Scottish distilleries, American barrels are imported to Scotland to produce Scotch whisky and French or Italian-headquartered companies own significant parts of the sector. We are not immune to tariff decisions, whether we are in the European Union or not. For all of us, the key issue at hand is to persuade decision makers that tariffs are not the best way to ensure economic success, whether that is in the European Union, Scotland and the UK outside the European Union, or the United States of America.

Historic Sites

7. Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government how it is working with the heritage sector to conserve historic sites. (S6O-04448)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): The Scottish Government delivers support through our sponsorship of Historic Environment Scotland, which is the lead public body that is responsible for the historic environment. The Scottish Government budget for 2025-26 allocates more than £74 million to Historic Environment Scotland, which will enable the organisation to invest in fair staff pay, operate and maintain its properties, deliver grants to the heritage sector, continue research on climate change and fulfil its advisory and regulatory functions.

Sue Webber: Historic Environment Scotland has acknowledged that Scotland has a heritage skills crisis and it has proposed a new register to combat that. Can the cabinet secretary outline what discussions the Scottish Government has had to boost traditional heritage skills provision in Scotland? Can he outline how the Government is working with the college and apprenticeship sectors to make heritage skills an attractive career path for our young people and resolve the crisis in our sector?

Angus Robertson: Not long ago, I had the good fortune to visit Historic Environment Scotland

at Holyrood palace—just across the road from the Parliament—where outstanding apprentices, craftsmen and craftswomen have developed their traditional skills on site. They do remarkable work at the palace, the cathedral and Edinburgh castle.

Sue Webber is right to underline that there has been a crisis in the traditional skills area, but I can give her an absolute assurance that the Scottish Government, the college sector and Historic Environment Scotland are seizing that as an issue. I am keen to keep her apprised of developments in the near future, which I am sure that she will welcome as much as I do.

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): Can the cabinet secretary provide an update on what assessment the Scottish Government has made of the impact on the heritage sector of the United Kingdom Government's increase to employer national insurance contributions, and of the implications that it will have for the sector's ability to conserve historic sites?

Angus Robertson: The Government has strongly raised our concerns with the UK Treasury about the impact on public services of the increase to employer national insurance contributions. Regarding the impact on the heritage sector, the increase equates to an additional £1.6 million of costs to Historic Environment Scotland.

However, Historic Environment Scotland's commercial income continues to grow. Reflecting that commercial success, our on-going public service reform work has delivered, with Historic Environment Scotland, a revised business model that will allow it greater financial freedoms to manage its commercial income in the year. That reinvestment into our historic environment, alongside our grant-in-aid funding and HES's philanthropic and fundraising activities, will provide it with a sound platform to continue to develop for Scotland and to maintain our historic sites.

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): Dumfries and Galloway is being disproportionately affected by public access restrictions on Historic Environment Scotland buildings. Seven are fully closed, four others have visitor restrictions and almost none of them have plans in place for what work needs to be done, never mind a date to reopen. Local tour companies tell me that it is becoming difficult to tell the story of our region's history, given that poor access. Will the Government intervene to speed up the process to safely reopen our historic and cultural heritage sites in Dumfries and Galloway?

Angus Robertson: I very much agree with Mr Smyth: he wishes for those sites to open when they are safe, and I think that we all agree that that should be the case. I commend everybody who is

working for Historic Environment Scotland and doing their level best to ensure that that happens as quickly as possible right across the country. I acknowledge, however, that there will be parts of the country where significant closures are in place.

I will ask Historic Environment Scotland for an update on the region and the sites that Mr Smyth asked about in order to get a better understanding of when any work is likely to be conducted and when sites are likely to open. I am sure that HES will be listening very closely to his concerns, and I am sure that we all want to ensure that our sites of historic interest throughout Scotland are able to open as quickly and as safely as possible.

Foysoil Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): Earlier this month, pilots for national 5 qualifications in roof slating and stone carving started in Edinburgh. Given the skills shortages across the heritage sector, with only 6 per cent of the key traditional building skills that have been defined by Historic Environment Scotland having formal training provision in place, would the cabinet secretary support similar efforts to improve qualifications in traditional skills across Scotland?

Angus Robertson: I would welcome any initiatives that help in the traditional skills area to ensure that we have the next generation of stone carvers, stonemasons and those with all the other skills that are required to maintain and repair our historic sites. I will look closely at the developments that the member has updated Parliament on, and if he or other colleagues have suggestions on how skills can be developed in the heritage sector or how that could be speeded up, I will be happy to look closely at them.

As I mentioned to Sue Webber, I am optimistic that there will be announcements in the near future, and I think that they will give Foysoil Choudhury, Sue Webber and me assurance and confidence about the future in this area.

Independence (Work in 2024-25)

8. **Ash Regan (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba):** To ask the Scottish Government what work it has carried out in 2024-25 to further the case for Scottish independence. (S6O-04449)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): In 2024, the Scottish Government, as part of the "Building a New Scotland" series, published a further four papers covering the topics of culture, our place and role in the world, education and lifelong learning, and justice. In 2025, we will publish a final overview independence paper to complete the prospectus series.

Ash Regan: Young Scots who voted yes at 16 will be approaching 30 at the next Scottish

election. A political generation has therefore passed with pro-independence parties winning mandates at election after election, but Scotland is no closer to independence. Polling today shows an independence majority in 2026 of 66 seats across three parties. Will the Government take instruction from the people of Scotland, and not Westminster, by committing to put a clear democratic vote for independence on the list ballot next May?

Angus Robertson: I agree with Ash Regan that the people of Scotland should be able to determine their future.

She is absolutely right about the length of time that has passed since the 2014 referendum. She did not mention, although she could have, that a mechanism exists for there to be a border poll for Northern Ireland, and it is suggested that that might be able to be held every seven years. If it is possible for Northern Ireland, I do not see why it is not possible for Scotland.

This Government remains seized of making the case that people in Scotland, regardless of whether they support or oppose independence—and this Government support it—should be able to decide as quickly as possible. We require to have a mechanism in place, and we will do everything that we can to ensure that we have a legal and respected process that is recognised around the world so that Scotland can take its rightful place as a member state of the European Union and the international community.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): What is the full direct and indirect cost to the taxpayer of the work that has been done and is still to be done? Given the cabinet secretary's constant refrain that there is not enough money, from which bodies was that money taken?

Angus Robertson: I cannot give the member the answer that he asks for. However, I regularly update Parliament and colleagues—perhaps even him—on that in answers to written questions, and I will be happy to update him on it.

I think that Liam Kerr appreciates that this Government was elected with a mandate to inform the public about Scottish independence, and that that policy position is supported by the majority of MSPs. It is absolutely right and proper that we do the necessary work. I will be happy to update the member on the work that is done to inform the public about independence, which is, of course, the normal status of countries in the international community.

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. In my question earlier, I referred to the Scottish international fund. I should have referred to the climate justice fund. I wanted to clarify that at the earliest opportunity.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Bibby. That is now on the record.

That concludes portfolio questions on constitutional affairs. Before we move on to the next portfolio, there will be a brief pause to allow the front-bench teams to change.

Justice and Home Affairs

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next portfolio is justice and home affairs.

Again, if members wish to ask a supplementary question, they should press their request-to-speak button during the relevant question. There is quite a bit of interest for supplementary questions in this portfolio, so brevity in those questions and responses would be welcome.

Police Officers (Mental Health Support)

1. **Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to support the mental health of police officers and ensure that they have access to the appropriate specialist services. (S6O-04450)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): Although that is an operational matter for the chief constable, I am pleased that Police Scotland has signed up to the mental health at work commitment, which prioritises mental health in the workplace. In addition to trauma risk incident management assessments and occupational health counselling, Police Scotland has invested £17 million to enhance welfare provision. That includes a new 24/7 employee assistance programme, direct access to occupational health services, and a greater focus on mental health.

Oliver Mundell: I understand that this potentially strays into operational matters, but I am worried about the signal that is being sent out when serving officers are telling me that the wellbeing team is being diluted and that specialist roles are being removed. Does the Government at least recognise the anxiety that that will cause hard-working officers, who are facing very challenging situations in their front-line roles and are struggling to access dedicated, experienced and suitably qualified support at work?

Angela Constance: I very much appreciate Mr Mundell's concern. We should all recognise every day the role of police officers in serving this country, who very often put themselves in danger to keep us safe.

The day-to-day demands of the job can, of course, take their toll. I hope that the actions that I highlighted to the member highlight the priority that Police Scotland places on supporting the health

and wellbeing of the workforce, and how that is supported by the health and wellbeing action plan, which underpins delivery. What is happening is an enhancement of support to officers.

However, I will look into the very specific point and get back to Oliver Mundell.

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): As the cabinet secretary knows, the Criminal Justice Committee spent a considerable amount of time considering the mental health of police officers, and it expressed concern that specialist counselling services were not available. I appreciate that counselling is provided. However, has the cabinet secretary had the opportunity to look at the issue? Is it included in the action plan?

Angela Constance: I recall the evidence that I gave to the committee, which was about the role of police officers and how that needs to be refocused on criminal justice matters, as well as the need for better linkage with health services in relation to their work to signpost and support some of the most vulnerable people in our society.

I have outlined various mechanisms through which police officers can access specialist counselling through Police Scotland. I very much welcome, for example, the post-trauma support that is offered to all police officers and staff who are directly involved in potentially very traumatic incidents, and the enhanced employee assistance programme, which provides direct access to occupational health services and has a greater focus on officers' mental health.

The Thistle (Community Safety Measures)

2. Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what community safety measures it plans to prevent antisocial behaviour, including improper needle disposal, in the area surrounding the Thistle drug consumption facility. (S6O-04451)

The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Siobhian Brown): The Thistle operates like any other national health service facility and works closely with community safety partners to prevent and address antisocial behaviour.

Through the Thistle oversight group and community engagement forum, the community safety partnership, the alcohol and drug partnership and other stakeholders support the local community and encourage reporting of any concerns.

The CSP reports that there has been no increase in antisocial behaviour and that there has been a decrease in drug paraphernalia. Police Scotland reports that there has been a reduction in local drug dealing. Glasgow City Council collects

discarded needles when such needles are reported.

Local policing actively responds to reports to deter criminal activity and enhance public safety. Public support is vital, and Police Scotland encourages the public to report concerns to it or to Crimestoppers.

Annie Wells: Approximately two weeks ago, discarded needles and burnt spoons were discovered in a car park across from the Thistle drug consumption facility. Local community representatives have raised serious concerns about the facility's impact and, in particular, about the risk of children coming into contact with discarded syringes. The finding of that material contradicts official statements, which have downplayed the issue of drug-related litter.

Will the minister clarify how the Government intends to address those reports and outline its plan to maintain a safe environment for residents and visitors? I have seen the situation at first hand, and it is not getting any better in the places that I have visited.

Siobhian Brown: I know that public injecting around the car park to which Ms Wells referred has been an on-going issue. The Thistle facility is specifically aimed at addressing that issue. The Glasgow health and social care partnership has acknowledged the issue, and it continues to engage with the community to tackle it. A spokesperson stated:

"We are aware of the public injecting near the Thistle facility, which has been an on-going concern. This is precisely why the facility has been established in this location. Orion kits are available through all needle exchange services in Glasgow, and providing clean needles and injecting equipment is one of the harm reduction interventions offered by the Thistle."

In addition, a community engagement forum has been established to address those local concerns. It had its first meeting on 25 February. As the facility establishes itself, regular engagement with the community and businesses will continue. The focus remains on strengthening partnerships with stakeholders before implementing any new actions.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will allow a brief supplementary, but it will need to be brief, as will the response.

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): All of us in the Parliament have a responsibility to ensure that we do not inadvertently spread misinformation about a service that seeks to address an issue by using a method that international evidence demonstrates works.

Given that the location for the Thistle project was chosen because community injecting was

already happening there, can the minister outline what, if any, substantive evidence has been provided by Police Scotland that suggests that there has been an increase in injecting in the community or, indeed, an increase in the discarding of paraphernalia?

Siobhian Brown: No evidence has been provided to suggest that there has been an increase in injecting or in discarding of paraphernalia. I agree with Audrey Nicoll that we must ensure that accurate information is communicated, both in the chamber and to the local community.

As I said, the Glasgow health and social care partnership has confirmed that it has not been alerted to any specific incidents of antisocial behaviour. Additionally, I point out that no concerns about increased injecting in the community have been raised by stakeholders, including by community representatives at the first community engagement forum meeting, which was held on 25 February.

Rural Crime

3. Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to tackle rural crime. (S6O-04452)

The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Siobhian Brown): Rural crime impacts individuals, communities and businesses, and the Scottish Government fully supports efforts to tackle it. The Scottish Partnership Against Rural Crime, which is chaired by Police Scotland, brings together key justice and rural sector partners to provide a robust multi-agency approach to preventing rural crime and to support actions that are taken at a local level.

In 2025-26, the Scottish Government will increase police funding to £1.62 billion, including £57 million in additional resource funding to strengthen front-line services. That investment will allow Police Scotland to enhance community policing, thereby ensuring that communities receive the best possible service from Police Scotland and its work to prevent criminal activity.

Finlay Carson: In the minister's contribution to my colleague Rachael Hamilton's member's debate on rural crime and equipment theft, she referred to statistics that had been provided by Scotland's national rural, acquisitive and business prevention team as part of a regular SPARC update. Although those figures provide a snapshot of rural crime, they are not official police statistics.

Why were official figures not used? Does that not suggest that the Scottish Government does not take the rural crime issue as seriously as it should do?

Siobhian Brown: The Scottish Government absolutely recognises the harm that is caused to individuals and communities by rural crime. I wrote to Rachael Hamilton this morning in response to her letter on the issue.

The information that I used in that debate was provided by Police Scotland's national rural, acquisitive and business prevention team as part of the update that it gave to my officials. Although such updates provide snapshots of rural crime over a period, they are issued to my officials by that team, and the numbers that were quoted are not official police statistics. You may want to get in touch with that team, which can give the statistics to you.

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

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): What preventative work has the Scottish Partnership Against Rural Crime been doing, particularly in relation to disrupting serious organised crime groups that target rural communities across the United Kingdom?

Siobhian Brown: The link between crimes such as equipment theft in rural areas and serious and organised crime is well recognised across the whole UK. Preventing equipment theft is one of the priorities in the current SPARC strategy. The partnership aims to mitigate its effects by sharing intelligence on organised crime groups that operate across the UK and by providing specific information to the rural and farming communities on how best to secure property and prevent it from being stolen.

The work of SPARC also makes a valuable contribution to Scotland's serious and organised crime strategy. I am pleased to say that, in SPARC's January update, both the incidents of rural crime and their associated costs to businesses and communities were down, compared with figures for the same point in the previous year.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): Earlier this month, I held a drop-in rural crime session, which was generously attended by many cross-party colleagues, the Association of British Insurers, NFU Scotland and the national rural crime unit. After what the minister has just said to Finlay Carson, which repeated verbatim what he just asked her, will she agree to hold a round-table discussion with those organisations and the victims of rural crime to discuss how serious the matter is?

Siobhian Brown: I am happy to sit down and discuss the matter in the first instance with you, Ms Hamilton. I received your letter and I was not aware of the proposed bill that you mentioned in that letter.

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

Siobhian Brown: I am happy to speak to the member in the first instance.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority Applications (Determination Times)

4. Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government, in light of the potential impact on victims of crime in Scotland, what discussions it has had with the United Kingdom Government regarding the time taken to determine applications made to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority. (S6O-04453)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): I recognise that timely compensation under the criminal injuries compensation scheme can help victims in their recovery, both practically and emotionally.

The Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority is an executive agency of the Ministry of Justice. The Scottish Government provided a total of £18.6 million in funding to the CICA in the past financial year and has budgeted £22.9 million for next year.

Scottish Government officials regularly meet the CICA, and performance is discussed. We understand that the majority of applications are decided within 12 months. However, each case must be decided on its own facts, based on available information, and the process very much relies on other agencies. Some applications will take longer to decide due to on-going court proceedings or the complexity of an injury.

Douglas Ross: I am dealing with a young victim whose case was sent to the CICA in July 2023. His solicitor had not heard anything by January 2024 and now, in March 2025, the case has not progressed at all. The family has been told that the CICA will now not routinely update victims on the progress of their case. Does the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs agree that that approach does not seem to be very victim centred, and will she make representations to the Ministry of Justice and the CICA that the latter should regularly update victims on the progress of their case?

Angela Constance: The short answer is yes.

I recently had a look at the CICA's customer charter and was somewhat surprised that the body contacts applicants only when it needs information or has made a decision. Bearing in mind that, through the Victims, Witnesses, and Justice Reform (Scotland) Bill, the Parliament has focused on trauma-informed practice, I will raise the issue with the MOJ.

For completeness, I am also aware that the CICA is currently reviewing all its contact with applicants and is exploring mechanisms to provide applicants with more regular updates and enhanced information.

Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (Planning Guidance)

5. Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to ensure that the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service is sufficiently resourced to provide appropriate planning guidance or able to respond to planning consultations when required. (S6O-04454)

The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Siobhian Brown): The Scottish Government has allocated to the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service £412.2 million for 2025-26, to ensure that it is properly resourced to keep Scotland safe and exercise all its statutory functions. The budget is £18.8 million higher than the budget for last year. Although, clearly, decisions on how that budget is spent are a matter for the SFRS board and the chief fire officer, the SFRS will continue to respond to planning consultations when required.

The SFRS aims to review planning documents if it is appropriate to do so for firefighting and fire safety operations, and it will continually review and develop its operational response to any new and emerging technology or site, to keep communities safe and ensure the highest level of preparedness.

Brian Whittle: As the minister will be aware, the number of applications for battery energy storage systems across Scotland has increased dramatically, and many communities have expressed concern about the potential implications for fire safety. Developers currently have to rely on the fire service in England for guidance on their plans, as the SFRS has not issued any such guidance. Does the minister consider that to be acceptable? If not, will she instruct the SFRS to produce Scotland-specific guidance on fire safety for battery energy storage sites?

Siobhian Brown: I know that, through regulations, the issue is both devolved and reserved, but the SFRS provides guidance under the National Fire Chiefs Council's grid scale planning guidance.

The Scottish Government is aware of calls for guidance and further advice on battery energy storage systems, including in relation to fire safety. The Scottish Government's planning department is in the process of commissioning independent consultants to prepare planning advice on BES systems. That work has progressed with input from Heads of Planning Scotland and the industry.

The intention is that the advice will set out information on the relevant regulatory regimes that are applicable in Scotland and on their interface with the planning system, recognising the long-established principle that the planning system does not seek to duplicate other regulatory controls.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There are a couple of supplementary questions, but they will need to be brief.

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): What assessment has the Scottish Government made of the impact of the United Kingdom Government's employer national insurance hike on the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and other emergency services?

Siobhian Brown: I have met the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service in recent weeks. The rise in national insurance for its staff is a huge concern, and I am looking at having on-going conversations with the service in that regard.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): The minister will be aware of the Health and Safety Executive's identification of contraventions in health and safety at the Walls, Hillswick and Bressay fire stations in Shetland. How will the Scottish Government support the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and ensure that it is sufficiently resourced to address the HSE improvement notice and its deadline of 22 August 2025?

Siobhian Brown: Last week, I met His Majesty's chief inspector and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service on that point, and I was reassured by both of them that work will be progressed. I am happy to keep the member updated on that.

Drug Use Harm (Criminal Justice and Public Health)

6. **Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government how the criminal justice system applies its public health approach to reducing the harm caused by drug use. (S6O-04455)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): Through the national mission on drugs, the Scottish Government continues to invest in a wide range of evidence-based measures to save lives and reduce harms. We are implementing a range of public health responses to tackle the harms that are caused by drugs. For example, naloxone has been rolled out across the prison estate and to front-line police officers, who used it more than 580 times up to December 2024.

We are well aware that people in the justice system can have very complex needs and may be vulnerable, which necessitates working holistically

and focusing on prevention and appropriate interventions. That is why "The Vision for Justice in Scotland" recognises the importance of justice partners working together to apply a public health approach.

Patrick Harvie: Nearly two years ago, the Government published a document called "A Caring, Compassionate and Human Rights Informed Drug Policy for Scotland", which set out pretty clearly the limitations that devolved powers put on us in the application of a public health approach to harm reduction for drugs. There will always be more that we can do in the criminal justice system with devolved powers, but can the cabinet secretary update Parliament on what discussions have been had with the new United Kingdom Government about giving this Parliament the power to change aspects of the criminal law on drugs to enable the fuller implementation of that policy from 2023?

Angela Constance: I assure Mr Harvie that the Government's position remains that the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 and other relevant legislation should be devolved to the Scottish Parliament, not least so that we can be fully powered to follow all the international evidence that tells us what works to save lives at the end of the day. The Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 is almost as old as me, and it has more holes than some cheese—I was going to say Swiss cheese, but I did not want to offend the Swiss. It is an outdated piece of legislation. Forgive me, Presiding Officer, because I know that this is a serious matter. We want to be able to implement what works to save lives.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We have a number of supplementary questions, so they will need to be very brief, as will the responses.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): On my recent visit to HM Prison Low Moss, I was concerned to hear about the ever-increasing use of technology to smuggle drugs into prisons. What preventative work is being done by the Scottish Prison Service to ensure that prisoners do not take drugs in our prisons?

Angela Constance: I have visited Low Moss prison and will do so again next week. During my visits to all our establishments, I have seen at first hand the strong and committed recovery agenda in our prisons. It is clear that on-going work with partners such as the Scottish Recovery Consortium and the Scottish Drugs Forum is having a positive and sincere effect on the individuals in custody who are on their own recovery journey.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): To reassure Mr Harvie, here is something that we can do under devolution. For decades, the USA has had positive results on regression, recidivism and

public safety using continuous drug abstinence monitoring technology. Australia and New Zealand have moved ahead with that, and England has it in its family law courts. Will the cabinet secretary consider a trial of that technology in Scotland to see whether the positive outcomes that have been seen elsewhere happen here?

Angela Constance: I am very open to developments in technology and will consider how any advancement could play a role in the management of offenders, including those in custody. We have the Management of Offenders (Scotland) Act 2019, and, of course, the electronic monitoring commercial contract in Scotland allows for new technological capabilities.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Foysoyl Choudhury—very briefly.

Foysoyl Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): Given that drug use is an issue that crosses portfolios, what discussions has the cabinet secretary had with ministerial colleagues on ensuring that there is wraparound support for offenders in cases where drugs have played a role, particularly those with drug treatment and testing orders, leading to lower reoffending rates?

Angela Constance: I hope that I have managed to convey to Parliament that as the Minister for Drugs Policy, which was my post before I became Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs, cross-Government and cross-portfolio working was at the heart of all my endeavours, and it is still an endeavour that I maintain. I engage closely with education and health colleagues. It is important that we work with our colleagues in local government and health services—particularly with those in local government who have a responsibility for the supervision of drug testing and treatment orders, which most certainly have a very important role to play.

Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission

7. Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government whether it plans to review the Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission. (S6O-04456)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): The Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission is an independent public body, which, since its inception in 1999, has investigated and reviewed alleged miscarriages of justice in Scotland. The commission's aim is to investigate all cases efficiently without undue delay and to a consistently high standard, and to strengthen public confidence in the ability of the Scottish criminal justice system to address miscarriages of justice.

The Scottish Government regularly meets the independent Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission to discuss the commission's operation, including its delivery of its strategic objectives. At present, we have no plans to review the commission's operation.

Willie Rennie: I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests as a director of the Miscarriages of Justice Organisation Scotland—MOJO. Following the quashing of the conviction of Andrew Malkinson in England, there has been extensive criticism of the performance of the Criminal Cases Review Commission in England, and the chair of that commission has resigned.

The referral rate in Scotland is similar to that in England at roughly 4 per cent, and people who are involved in appeals believe that the Scottish system is not working. I am aware of a case in which the commission acknowledged someone's innocence but still refused to refer to appeal. How has the justice secretary assured herself about the performance of the Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission?

Angela Constance: I appreciate Mr Rennie's question. I point out that the referral rate from the Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission is nearly 5 per cent, which is almost double that for the equivalent body in England and Wales. When the review that is being undertaken by the Law Commission is complete, we will, of course, consider what applicability, if any, it has for Scotland.

I put on record that applicants have the right to request a review if they are unsatisfied by the decision of the Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission.

Pro-Palestinian Demonstrations (Policing)

8. Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to reported claims that policing of pro-Palestinian rallies and demonstrations has been disproportionate and heavy handed. (S6O-04457)

The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Siobhian Brown): The operational policing of protests and demonstrations is rightly a matter for Police Scotland. We support Police Scotland, as a rights-based organisation, to take appropriate and proportionate action in response to any criminal offences and maintain public order at or around those events.

Police Scotland's priority will always be public safety. The right to peaceful public assembly and freedom of expression are important rights that the Scottish Government is committed to uphold. That is why we have funded the Centre for Good Relations to run training courses to upskill

stewards and marshals involved in facilitating marches, parades and protests. That training is available free of charge and has received very positive feedback.

Maggie Chapman: Last month, six protesters were arrested for protesting against a supermarket stocking Israeli-produced goods. One of those people, a woman in her 60s, remains on remand. Firearms officers turned up at that protest, as they have done at other protests where there has been no public safety threat at all.

That follows instances of protesters being denied their right to assembly and protest, and people of colour being treated differently from white people. Does the minister agree that a review of Police Scotland's guidance on the policing of protests to ensure the facilitation of the rights to protest and freedom of expression would be helpful? Does she believe that firearms should not be deployed for such incidents and that, at a time of overcrowding in our prisons, remanding people for peaceful protest is not appropriate?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: As briefly as possible, minister.

Siobhian Brown: I know that Scotland has a proud tradition of activism and peaceful protest. I am concerned to hear what Maggie Chapman has stated, and I will write to her on that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions on justice and home affairs.

West Coast Ferry Services

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-16845, in the name of Claire Baker, on reforming Scotland's west coast ferry services. I invite those members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak button.

14:52

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Since I took on the role of Labour transport spokesperson, barely a week has gone by in which I have not been asked to comment on the latest development in the ferries fiasco. Time and again, there are reports of failings in the network, and the cracks—literal and figurative—are clear to see.

The cost to taxpayers of the Government's mismanagement has been significant and the impact on those who rely on the services continues. Delays to the completion of the MV Glen Rosa mean that it will be eight years late. The four new ferries that are being built in Turkey are also delayed, and just this week there has been another blow, as the preferred bidder for the contract for the small vessel replacement programme is a shipyard in Poland rather than the shipyard in Port Glasgow.

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Claire Baker: If it is brief—I do not have much time.

Stuart McMillan: Is Claire Baker aware of the reasons why the ferries in Turkey are late?

Claire Baker: It is recognised that the ferries in Turkey are late due to a multitude of issues. The issue in Scotland, however, is that the constant drip, drip of delays and problems with the ferry network mean that any delay in any part of the system has a significant impact on islanders.

With each press story, some people might have become hardened to the failings—as has been demonstrated by members in the chamber so far. However, for our island communities, they are not just headlines but lived realities. When a ferry service is cancelled, it is not just an inconvenience—it is damaging to the local economy, to businesses and to families. People miss hospital appointments; businesses lose customers and stock; and communities are effectively cut off. That lack of connectivity is not a minor inconvenience.

For too long, the Scottish Government has failed to plan properly for the renewal of the ferry fleet. The ageing vessels in the fleet are repeatedly out

of service for costly repairs and there has been no long-term plan to replace them. That is not accidental—it was a political choice. The decision to not have a rolling renewal programme was taken in full knowledge of what the consequences would be. That neglect has deprioritised the programme and led to the situation that we are in, and island communities are living with the results.

Two years have passed since the Public Audit Committee's damning report on the delivery of new ferries for the Clyde and Hebrides. It highlighted failures in governance, transparency, accountability and communication. Now, the decision to award preferred-bidder status for the small vessel replacement programme contract to a Polish shipyard has dealt another blow to the Scottish shipbuilding industry. Ferguson Marine had included that contract as a key part of its five-year business plan. Yes, other work is taking place and will be bid for, but the loss of that work risks undermining the future of the yard and the workers who rely on it.

What message does that send to the skilled workers and apprentices at Ferguson Marine? In all the committee inquiries, BBC documentaries and newspaper columns, the workers have rightly been recognised for their skills and commitment—they are not at fault.

Although the Ferguson Marine bid was rated highly for quality, that was not enough for it to secure the work in the face of price competition from overseas. That the procurement process focuses more on cost than on the wider value could and should be looked at. Scottish shipbuilding has long been a source of pride as a strategic industry that creates jobs, supports communities and preserves vital skills. The outsourcing of the contract is a wasted opportunity to invest in domestic skills and infrastructure.

The 10 per cent fare hike for passengers, which operators did not ask for, adds insult to injury for islanders. In her letter to the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, the Cabinet Secretary for Transport argued that it was necessary to fund future vessels and infrastructure investment, but that only exposes the Scottish Government's past failures to plan adequately. The burden of mismanagement is being shifted to passengers, who are now paying more for services that remain unreliable. That is a recurring theme across public transport.

We all want a public transport system—that includes ferries—that is accessible, available and affordable, but the Scottish Government cannot continue to repeat that message while taking actions that go against it. Affordable fares are essential to encouraging more people to use ferry services. The fact that the increase comes after a previous freeze is little comfort to those who rely

on those services in order to live their lives. We need to look at how the fare structure is working, including the road equivalent tariff, and the potential for concessionary schemes that will increase the use of ferries among underrepresented groups.

If we want a ferry network that works for island communities, we also need to fix the governance structure. The split between Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd, Caledonian MacBrayne and Transport Scotland is chaotic and confusing, and it has allowed for the evasion of responsibility for failings. It does not provide accountability for the communities that are most reliant on ferry services and are most impacted when things go wrong.

Scottish Labour supports a direct award to CalMac for the Clyde and Hebrides ferry services contract, but we also seek assurances that that will not prevent any progress to improve governance. I know that, this morning, the cabinet secretary was due to meet unions, passenger groups and local authorities, and such engagement is to be welcomed. In her speech, I ask the cabinet secretary to provide an update on when a decision will be reached on the contract.

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I hear that Labour will now support the direct award of the contract, but at a meeting of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, at which the Labour Party was represented, it was agreed that there would be a direct award only if the islanders approved that. Are you ignoring the islanders now?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Members should always speak through the chair.

Claire Baker: I hope to hear from the cabinet secretary on that. I understand that she has had a meeting with passenger groups, local authorities, unions and islanders, and that there is support among some islanders for a direct award. I recognise islanders' frustrations with the ferry service, and possibly with CalMac, but I believe that that is a result of the Government's mismanagement of the ferry service. If people had a reliable, affordable service that they were happy with, there would be more support for a continuation of the contract.

We need to involve island communities and workers in decision making and ensure that proper, efficient and transparent procedures are in place. Island communities deserve more than apologies and excuses—they deserve action. Workers and communities must have a say in how the network is run.

The Government's amendment sets out a position of openness to more fundamental reform, but progress needs to be made. Project Neptune recognised the complex arrangement of the

tripartite arrangement, its perceived lack of accountability and the impact of that delivery and cost. The Audit Scotland report underlined the weaknesses in governance arrangements, but what actions have been taken to improve the areas that were identified as needing improvement? Is work taking place to explore the potential for more fundamental reforms?

Reliability issues are a huge concern, which is reflected in the responses to the consultation on the islands connectivity plan: 88 per cent of respondents said that the first priority should be improving reliability and increasing resilience. The Government's amendment points to the high percentage of services that have been delivered. I ask that the cabinet secretary confirm whether those figures take into account all routes and include services that have been removed in advance. We know that previous analysis by the Highlands and Islands Transport Partnership—HITRANS—found that statistics included services that had been removed and, as a result of vessels being sidelined for long periods, the published figures did not reflect the lived reality of passengers.

Scotland's ferry network is crippled, and island communities and Scottish shipbuilding are paying the price. Chronic mismanagement, poor planning and a lack of accountability have left communities cut off and workers without certainty. We know that delivering a modern, affordable ferry network is essential. That requires a proper fleet renewal plan, fair fares and a governance reform that gives communities and workers a real say.

I move,

That the Parliament deplores the continuing economic and social damage inflicted on Clyde and Hebrides communities through the Scottish Government's failure to provide adequate ferry services; calls on the Scottish Government to reconsider its decision to impose a 10% increase in fares on Scottish Government funded ferry services, contrary to the recommendations of the delivery companies; is concerned that no Scottish yard has been selected to deliver any of the ferries in the Small Vessel Replacement Programme; believes that the governance structure for west coast ferry services has failed, and calls for the award of a new Clyde and Hebrides ferry contract to be accompanied by a fundamental reform of governance, which puts island communities and workers at the heart of decision making and accountability.

14:59

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport (Fiona Hyslop): This debate allows the Opposition to attack the Government, but it also provides an opportunity to highlight the significant progress that this Government is making to enhance and improve ferry services in Scotland.

We recognise that there are challenges in the network—those mainly relate to issues emerging

from annual overhauls and the delayed return of the MV Caledonian Isles—and I apologise to communities that are impacted by them. All members in the chamber should acknowledge the commendable work of the CalMac crew and port teams in continuing to deliver services. In the previous reporting period for contract year 8, they delivered 95.8 per cent of scheduled services.

We expect MV Caledonian Isles to return to service in April, when she will operate from Ardrossan following requests from the local MSP, Kenneth Gibson, and local communities for that service to continue for as long as possible. A parallel service will run from Troon, with MV Glen Sannox.

The budget that has been agreed for 2025-26 means that we will be investing up to £530 million in the delivery of ferry services and ports works. That is £530 million investment for our island communities that the Labour Party and the Conservative Party refused to support in the budget. The Government provides around two thirds of service running costs, which, remarkably, means that we can keep many fares cheaper now, in 2025, than they were in 2006-07, when Labour was in power.

We have the MV Glen Sannox operating on the Arran route, and we will see delivery of the MV Glen Rosa and the four new vessels that are under construction in Turkey. CMAL continues to work with the yard to ensure that those vessels are delivered as soon as possible. I regularly meet and receive updates from CMAL, and I discussed the matter with the chief operating officer earlier today, stressing the importance of getting those vessels into service. That will enable us to increase capacity and reliability in the fleet as well as splitting the Little Minch routes into a two-vessel service and providing a resilience vessel in the major vessel fleet.

CMAL has, of course, also moved to lead-bidder stage on phase 1 of the small vessel replacement programme, which will bring a further seven new electric ships into operation across the network. That is a live procurement, so I cannot comment on it, but I can say that those seven new vessels will improve connectivity and resilience for island residents, business and communities, and their electric operation will contribute to reduced carbon emissions and make ferry travel more sustainable.

As the Deputy First Minister told the chamber yesterday, Ferguson Marine will understandably be disappointed by the outcome of the current procurement. However, the yard continues to be supported by the Scottish Government in considering future investment and is actively pursuing a number of commercial opportunities, and its business strategy does not rely on solely on one contract.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): What weighting was social value given in the tender procedure?

Fiona Hyslop: We are currently in a standstill position on that procurement, so, quite clearly and quite responsibly, I cannot comment on the procurement process at this time.

We are also progressing the business case to replace the MV Lord of the Isles. Taking all those investments together, around 37 per cent of the CalMac fleet will be replaced with new vessels in the next few years. Further, we are also progressing the business case and procurement of two new freight vessels for the northern isles, meaning that we will be placing orders for 10 new ships in under 12 months. That will bring a step change to fleet replacement.

On ports, work is well under way in advance of tenders for new port facilities at Gasay, for Lochboisdale and at Port Ellen. Work on other ports continues. The potential purchase of the Ardrossan port is in commercial negotiations.

The direct award of the Clyde and Hebrides ferry services contract, on which we are making good progress, provides considerable flexibility for input from communities and workers. Indeed, only this morning I attended a round-table event with the ferries community board, trades unions, CalMac, CMAL, Transport Scotland and local authorities that was set up to further harness that essential input and hear stakeholders' priorities and ambitions for the direct award. The eventual contract will be public service focused and structured with a direct role for islanders.

There are current challenges in the network, but with six new large vessels being delivered, 10 new vessels to be procured in the next 12 months and extensive ports and harbour works, supported by £530 million investment this coming year alone, this Government is working hard to provide the resilience, reliability and sustainability for the future that people, businesses and island communities need and deserve.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary is concluding.

Fiona Hyslop: I move amendment S6M-16845.2, to leave out from "deplores" to end and insert:

"recognises the challenges that have faced a number of island communities with ferry service disruptions but notes that CalMac crews delivered 95.8% of services in the last recorded contract year; welcomes the provision of over £530 million in 2025-26 for maintaining and improving ferry services, replacing vessels, upgrading ports and harbours, and investing further in low-carbon inter-island ferries, with at least £21 million to progress phase 1 of the Small Vessel

Replacement Programme; acknowledges that the delivery of six new large vessels, providing fleet resilience, and the procurement of seven new small vessels, which is currently in the 10-day 'standstill period', and the replacement for the MV Lord of the Isles, will provide 37% of the total fleet with new vessels, helping to reduce emissions and create more sustainability, resilience and reliability for residents, businesses and communities; notes that public engagement is being undertaken in Orkney and Shetland to inform the procurement of two new freight vessels for the Northern Isles services; acknowledges the work underway to make a direct award for the next Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Services contract, and the roundtable with all stakeholders, including the Ferries Community Board and trade unions, to collectively discuss ambitions for the contract, including putting public service delivery and accountable key performance indicators developed with communities at its heart, and agrees that delivery of the award will then provide the space and opportunity for more fundamental reform of governance."

15:04

Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con): I will speak to the amendment in my name and make it clear that we will be supporting the Labour motion before us this afternoon.

Scotland's ferry network has been run into the ground by the Scottish National Party, with timetables being cancelled and long-promised vessels repeatedly delayed and running over budget by millions. Islanders have been left stranded by the SNP Government, and its failure to deliver lifeline ferries is damaging communities and businesses.

The social and economic impact of ferry disruptions is causing significant harm to Scotland's islands. The ferries are a lifeline service for communities, which rely on them to access vital medical care and education and to visit their friends and families, yet SNP ministers have let them down time and again, with repeated delays and spiralling costs.

The SNP ferries scandal has lasted for more than a decade and has cost us millions. The cost of the MV Glen Sannox and the MV Glen Rosa has spiralled from an initial £97 million to £360 million. Not only are taxpayers in Scotland funding a publicly owned yard on the Clyde, but those incredible costs are compromising the ability to invest in new infrastructure and to maintain affordable ticket prices.

The procurement process for the ferries was launched on 15 October 2014, and the ferries were meant to be delivered in late 2017 and early 2018. MV Glen Sannox only set sail in January and it has a leaky hull three months later. It remains unclear whether MV Glen Rosa will be completed by the promised deadline of September this year.

Just when we think that the ferries scandal cannot get any worse, the SNP manages to outdo

itself. This week, we have learned that Ferguson Marine has lost the contract for the small vessel replacement programme. The ferries procurement agency, CMAL, has instead named a Polish firm as the preferred bidder for the programme. The contract was a key part of Ferguson Marine's five-year business plan, following delays and cost overruns in the construction of the two much larger ferries for CalMac. The announcement is devastating for Ferguson Marine and could prove to be the death knell for the yard.

It should be a given that a nationalised shipyard could win a Scottish Government contract, but it is a measure of how badly the SNP has mismanaged Ferguson's that ferries that should be built in the west of Scotland are instead to be made in eastern Europe. The blame for that lies squarely with SNP ministers, who have put the final nail in the coffin of the once world-leading shipyard.

Fiona Hyslop: Will the member give way?

Sue Webber: I am afraid, cabinet secretary, given the timings for the debate, I do not have the opportunity to do so.

Fiona Hyslop: The language!

Sue Webber: Fine—I will give way.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ladies, please.

Fiona Hyslop: I ask the member to be very circumspect in talking down Ferguson's at a time when it is seeking commercial contracts.

Sue Webber: I am not sure what I do in this chamber that gets under the skin of SNP ministers. Yesterday, my legitimate questions were treated with equal disdain by the Deputy First Minister.

The patronising attempt to play down the scale of the ferries scandal has only highlighted the Government's complacency and failure. Despite the years of misery that the SNP has caused islanders and the huge expense that it has imposed on taxpayers, it still has the affront to complain that I have referred to the Government's "catastrophic mismanagement" of the ferry network.

The decision not to award the contract to Ferguson Marine is a hammer blow for the yard, and the warm words and blind optimism do the workers no good whatsoever. SNP ministers cannot pass the buck any longer on this scandal—they must immediately explain to Parliament why this decision was made and what steps they are taking to ensure that the yard has a viable future. Enough is enough.

We would secure a well-equipped modern fleet of ferries and ensure that future ferry procurement puts the needs of islanders first. Islanders have

been repeatedly let down by the SNP Government. SNP ministers need to show some common sense and provide a reliable ferry network that delivers for our island communities.

I move amendment S6M-16845.1, to insert at end:

“; believes that the social and economic impact of ferry disruption is causing existential harm to Scotland's islands; shares the frustrations of Scotland's islanders and ferry passengers, who believe that their needs are not being prioritised by the Scottish Government; notes that the increasing maintenance repair bill for the ageing fleet has hit £98 million in the last decade, which compromises the ability to invest in new infrastructure and maintain affordable ticket prices; agrees with the Audit Scotland report that the five-year business plan for Ferguson Marine Port Glasgow was overly reliant and predicated on winning the Small Vessel Replacement Programme contract; is concerned with the repeated awarding of ferry-build contracts to numerous overseas shipyards whilst taxpayers in Scotland are funding a publicly owned yard on the Clyde; notes the Scottish Government's plan to purchase Ardrossan Harbour and urges Scottish ministers to ensure that the much-needed infrastructure upgrades to the port that were promised are delivered in a timely and cost-effective manner, and calls on the Scottish Government to be clear about its long-term intentions for Ferguson Marine Port Glasgow, and the future of Scottish shipbuilding, in light of an apparent lack of faith in it shown to date.”

15:09

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): I am grateful for the opportunity to discuss ferries in the chamber. They are crucial to the people I represent across the Highlands and Islands, so it is vital that islanders' concerns get a proper airing.

The motion that we are debating contains sentiments that I applaud, such as the call for the Scottish Government to rethink its decision to hike fares by 10 per cent and the call for island communities and workers to be at

“the heart of decision making”.

Likewise, I welcome the acknowledgement in the Government's amendment that islanders have been subjected to too much disruption, but I am concerned that it makes no reference to the planned fare hike, which is completely inappropriate given the current state of ferries and the fact that household finances are still recovering from a major cost of living crisis—a crisis that has hit islanders harder than most.

I also applaud some of the points that are expressed in the Tory amendment, especially the point that our island communities face an “existential” threat from historical underinvestment in ferries and harbours. As a result, those communities have been treated like second-class citizens.

One of the biggest issues faced by the island communities that I represent is the unreliability of the ferry services that they receive. I am frequently contacted by constituents about the poor communication and relentless disruption that they have to endure. Vessel faults and breakdowns prevent islanders from heading to the mainland, ferries are assigned to routes that they are not properly suited to, and entire services are cancelled at short notice because of poor management decisions.

The consequences of those failings have been severe for the people I serve. A hospitality business owner in Tiree has lost thousands of pounds because a lack of capacity has stopped them from shipping in fresh produce and has prevented tourists from getting to the island. A person on Lewis, who was trying to do the right thing for the planet by using public transport to get to work, ended up losing several hundred pounds on buses and a hotel because a technical fault with the MV Loch Seaforth meant that they could not get to the mainland. Crofters cannot get their animals off the islands as a result of last-minute cancellations.

The failings of west coast ferry services highlight the underinvestment and the complete lack of regard for the human rights of people who live on the islands. Everyone should have access to food, but ferry cancellations mean that islanders face empty shelves. Everyone should have access to healthcare, but a lack of ferry capacity means that people cannot make vital health appointments. Everyone should have freedom of movement, but the unreliability of ferry services confines people.

The Scottish Greens have worked hard to deliver ferry services that work for, rather than against, islanders. In the budget, we got the Scottish Government to expand free ferry travel to under-22s on northern isles interisland ferries, and we pushed for ferries to remain in public hands, so that they operate for the benefit of the Scottish people instead of shareholders. We also made the case for investment in all-electric ferries, and we are pleased that the Government has followed through on that.

The Government needs to ensure that the new fleet that it is procuring is delivered on time and on budget and, most of all, is of a high enough quality to meet the demands of west coast crossings. The Government also needs to ensure that the new Clyde and Hebrides ferry contract puts islanders and workers front and centre, and it must not consider raising fares until a new and improved fleet and service are up and running.

Overall, I would like the Government to put islands and rural communities first when it comes to infrastructure and public service design. If we

get that right for islanders and rural communities, we will get it right for urban communities.

15:13

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I suppose that it depends on the starting point, but I think that the cabinet secretary had some nerve to begin her speech by saying that progress has been made. There has not been one inch of embarrassment or shame about this whole episode—delayed ferries that are over their budget, painted-on windows, a leaking hull and short cables, with it being cheaper to scrap the ferries and start again. How embarrassing has this whole episode been?

Not one minister has resigned as a result of the series of catastrophes over many years. The people who have been let down are the yard workers, taxpayers and islanders. Even though ministers owned the yard and, before that, their favourite industrialist was brought in to save the yard, no minister has accepted any responsibility.

It was striking that, at the Finance and Public Administration Committee yesterday, the permanent secretary commented, in passing, that we need to learn the lessons from the past on procurement. What could he have been talking about?

We need cast our minds back only a few years to the BBC documentary that exposed the procurement process for those two infamous ferries. This afternoon, the cabinet secretary refused to say what proportion of the bid related to social benefit, but it is interesting that, in the previous procurement process, the bids were assessed 50 per cent on price and 50 per cent on quality. This time, bids were assessed 65 per cent on quality and 35 per cent on price. Therefore, the percentage of the assessment that was based on price was lowered, and yet Ferguson's did not win the contract this time. It won it the time before, when the assessment was 50:50 on price and quality.

The previous process involved a 424-page document being provided to Ferguson's, rather than to any other bidder, and design support being given to the company. It is clear that the previous process was rigged, but that has never been admitted by the Government and still no minister has resigned.

The reality is that the Government is more interested in chasing the headlines than it is in building a proper industrial strategy. Just look at BiFab: the Government wasted £50 million with no benefit whatsoever. The company collapsed, no jobs were saved, and the minister said,

"you win some, you lose some."

Dalzell steelworks was, in effect, mothballed—that has been the case for months. There has been no benefit, and the money involved represents considerable exposure for the Government. The Trump tariffs pose a considerable threat to the Lochaber smelter, and we have seen none of the 2,000 jobs that were promised. And now Ferguson's. All that because the Government has been more fixated on chasing the headlines than on building a proper industrial strategy. The Government should be ashamed.

I supported the budget this year, and we worked with the Government because we were building in more support for the northern isles, but the rest of the strategy is an embarrassment. I wish that the Government would be honest about that, because, as the permanent secretary said only yesterday, we need to learn the lessons from the past. This Government seems to be completely incapable of doing so.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We now move to the open debate, with back-bench speeches of up to four minutes.

15:17

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): Thank you, Presiding Officer, for the opportunity to speak about the continuing economic and social damage that is being experienced as a result of poor decision making in relation to our ferry services. I will focus particularly on the situation of the ferry service between Ardrossan and Arran. That route was chosen for the Glen Sannox and the Glen Rosa, which were originally estimated to cost £97 million. That has now risen to £380 million. As has been said, the Glen Sannox was brought into service only earlier this year, although I saw a plaque on the ship on Monday that says that it was launched by Nicola Sturgeon in 2017. As Claire Baker said, we still await the Glen Rosa.

Ardrossan has been the main port for Arran for 190 years. That is because it is the fastest and shortest route. It is the most convenient route for people on Arran, and the infrastructure around the Ardrossan port, which includes the railway stations, has benefited the local community. However, as a result of Government decisions, no ferries have been running from Ardrossan since January, which is devastating for both the town and islanders on Arran. Both communities now have active groups to save Ardrossan harbour.

I have repeatedly asked the Scottish Government to put together a package of support for businesses that are affected by cancelled ferries and by the ferry moving to the port of Troon. So far, however, those pleas have fallen on deaf ears. I hope that the Scottish Government will

commit today to providing support to local businesses in Arran and Ardrossan.

Eight years ago, it was decided that Ardrossan would retain the Arran route. However, eight years on, we still do not have certainty on whether the lifeline ferry service will continue from Ardrossan harbour, due to the disastrous failure to commence work there. Despite both ferries having been delayed for many years, the harbour work has not started, and no tender process has been put in place to ascertain costs. The Scottish Government decided to commission the Glen Sannox and the Glen Rosa with a design that would require Ardrossan harbour to be reconfigured and upgraded to enable the vessels to berth. The Scottish Government knew that the port and fuel infrastructure was not in place, but it decided to proceed with its chosen design.

The port is owned by Peel Ports, and it was obvious to those with experience of that owner that there might well be problems in coming to a decision to proceed. I welcome the news that negotiations have taken place and are on-going to potentially purchase Ardrossan harbour, which many have been calling for over a number of years. However, we now need a viable plan for upgrading work to take place as a matter of urgency. I hope that the Scottish Government will make it very clear today that it prioritises bringing Ardrossan harbour into public ownership, developing a compensation plan for Ardrossan and Arran and learning lessons from this fiasco.

15:21

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): I remind the Parliament that my wife works part time for CalMac.

In response to Claire Baker's comments regarding Turkey, I put on the public record at the outset that colleagues genuinely need to realise and recognise why there are delays there. More than 50,000 people lost their lives in an earthquake, and shipyard staff went back to their communities to try to help them. I do not think that it is fair to attack the Scottish Government because of an earthquake that took place in a different country.

I want to touch on the road equivalent tariff, which the SNP Government brought in in 2008. Almost every fare on every route, barring the Orkney and Shetland routes, is cheaper than when the SNP came to power, even after 18 years of inflation.

Scottish Labour's motion talks about the "governance structure for west coast ferry services".

As Fiona Hyslop, the present transport secretary, and Jenny Gilruth, the previous transport minister, will know, I offered my considerations on project Neptune, which Claire Baker referenced. To me, the project offered little apart from proposals that would damage Port Glasgow. I accept that having three organisations, which all have different boards and chief executive officers, is not perfect and costs money. However, decimating Port Glasgow town centre by removing jobs would cost a lot more.

Putting CMAL back into CalMac would inevitably lead to 50 jobs leaving Port Glasgow and returning to Gourock. Jobs staying in the constituency is a good thing, but 50 jobs leaving Port Glasgow would damage the town. It would lead to CalMac staff going around the network. That has been argued for by Alasdair Allan MSP and by David Stewart when he was a member of the Scottish Parliament—

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): Will the member take an intervention?

Stuart McMillan: Sorry—I only have four minutes.

They were rightly doing what they thought was right for their constituents, but I am doing what is right for my constituents and my community. I do not think that the 50 jobs leaving Port Glasgow and going to Gourock is the right thing.

During one of the project Neptune briefing sessions that Jenny Gilruth offered, more than 10 MSPs were in the room, including Kenneth Gibson, Jenni Minto, Katy Clark, Paul Sweeney, Edward Mountain and others. Paul Sweeney proposed to close Ferguson Marine and move its operations to Inchgreen dry dock in Greenock. To say that I found that objectionable would be charitable, to say the least.

Mr Sweeney now appears to have tempered his view. He supports Ferguson Marine remaining open at Port Glasgow, with Inchgreen dry dock in Greenock operating at the same time. I do not disagree with Mr Sweeney on Inchgreen, because it has been sorely underused for many years, so we are on the same page on that. However, his initial proposal to move the yard from Port Glasgow would have decimated Port Glasgow town centre and taken 300 jobs from the community. It would also have gone against the Scottish Government's 20-minute neighbourhood proposal. I have undertaken a lot of work with the local shopkeepers, and one shopkeeper in particular said to me that, if the yard leaves Port Glasgow—whether under the proposal that was made or due to the yard being shut because it did not have work—the town would be like it was in the 1980s all over again.

That brings me to Monday and the issue of the small vessels. Last night, at the cross-party group on maritime and shipbuilding, which Paul Sweeney chairs, Kevin Hobbs gave a presentation about what happened on Monday, with a focus on the 65 per cent and 35 per cent split. As I said in the chamber yesterday, the management and the board need to listen to their workforce and engage with them because, if they do not, the yard will struggle. The workforce have a lot of the answers, and it is up to the board and the management to listen and engage fully.

15:25

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands)

(Con): I thank Claire Baker and the Labour Party for their motion, which allows us to discuss a subject that I have been involved with for nine years on various committees that I have sat on.

For me, the debate is split into two parts. I hope that I will have time to get to the second part, but let me start with the first part, which is the delivery of ferries. During the nine years in which I have been involved, I have seen two owners of the yard, four CEOs or turnaround directors, three different chairs, goodness knows how many ministers and goodness knows how many cabinet secretaries—I have lost count. What have we got from that? Not a huge amount. We have one boat, which is seven years late and is costing far more than anything else, and we have a yard that is waiting to deliver the Glen Rosa.

If the cabinet secretary wants to stand up and tell me when the Glen Rosa will be delivered, I will be delighted, because neither the committee that I sit on nor the Parliament has been told a date, despite the promise that we would be told a date before the end of January. We are now told that we might get it by the end of March if we are lucky. I will take an intervention on that if the cabinet secretary wants to respond.

The yard should be the pride of Scotland and it should be delivering ferries for Scotland, but at the moment there is no CEO and the chair has never built a ship in his life, having been involved in aircraft for a lot of it. The yard is costing Scottish taxpayers £20 million a year in unrecoverable costs just to stay open. We have an admission from the past CEO and the previous CEO that, every time we build a ferry there, its cost will be 25 to 30 per cent greater than the cost in any other yard in the world. That information was given to the committee in evidence.

It is therefore unsurprising that the small vessels replacement programme could not go to Ferguson Marine. I wish that it could have done. However, the board signed off on an investment plan, which was also signed off by the Deputy First Minister,

saying that the matter would be solved with the direct award of the small vessels replacement, for which the yard would get £14 million to help it to build, knowing fine well that the permanent secretary had said that a direct award of the small vessels replacement programme would likely be illegal.

How do we sum all of that up? Is it incompetence? Is it inexperience? Was it a gamble? I do not know. It is probably all those things. What we do know is that the Government appointed the board and the turnaround director and approved the appointment of the CEOs. I am sorry to say this, but I believe that the Government has sold the workforce down the river. It is a disgrace. I am disappointed that I have to stand here in the Parliament and say that, but it is a fact.

I turn to the west coast ferry services. Ms Hyslop sat on the very committee that took evidence on ferry services for the Western Isles, and we heard very clearly during an evidence session that there should be a direct award only if islanders supported it. I have had no evidence presented to me—or to the committee that I sit on—that islanders now approve of a direct award.

The Government is now talking about a direct tender process, but it has not done the one thing that it has been asked to do, which is to sort out the whole procedure. We have CMAL, Transport Scotland and CalMac—a plethora of organisations—but we have no one in control, and the whole thing is tumbling out of control.

I am sad to be standing up in Parliament saying this. I am sad that the Government cannot give me a date for delivery of the Glen Rosa, because no one seems to know that, and I am sad that the Government has sold Ferguson Marine Port Glasgow down the river. It is a disgrace.

15:30

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): Presiding Officer,

“Britain is an island nation—a nation of islanders and shipbuilders”.

So proclaimed the opening sentence of the 1961 film “Seawards the Great Ships”, which was the swan song for Clyde shipbuilding. At that time, the country still held a global share of around 10 per cent of the world market for shipbuilding; now it is less than 1 per cent. John Grierson and Hilary Harris produced Scotland’s first Oscar-winning film—at that time, great achievement was celebrated in the industry. It is a great tragedy that, in more recent years, the islanders and shipbuilders have been in conflict—unnecessarily so—as a result of the incoherent policy of this Government.

Reflecting on yesterday’s announcement about the award of the small vessel replacement programme, it is clear that the public procurement strategy for Scotland is incompatible with an industrial strategy—and that has not been unpredictable. The Government made a reasonable conclusion that it would be too risky to pursue a direct award of the contract—fair enough—so it decided on an open procedure. However, when I met representatives of Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd, who kindly came to the cross-party group last night—as Mr McMillan, the member for Inverclyde mentioned—they were clear that, according to the public procurement strategy for Scotland, there was to be a split of 65 per cent technical weighting and 35 per cent financial weighting. Independent teams checked the procedures in relation to the different tenders and then came together to make a decision, which is how they arrived at the award to Remontowa of Gdansk.

What has been missed in all of that, of course, is social value. In every UK nation, there is a minimum requirement for a 10 per cent social value weighting—apart from in Scotland. That seems like a glaring omission in the procedure. Indeed, if the ministers had been paying any attention to the recommendations from Maritime UK—and, indeed, the views of the cross-party group—on the refresh of the national shipbuilding strategy, they would have recognised Maritime UK’s recommendation 3, which stated:

“Despite welcoming the minimum 10% social value weighting, the UK shipbuilding enterprise urges the UK and devolved governments to show more ambition in their use of social value, in line with the practices of competitor shipbuilding nations, and raise the threshold for UK content.”

No wonder the contract went overseas, if we are not prepared to put in place the fundamental basis for our yards to be competitive. I do not think that anyone here wishes to see public expenditure in Scotland support the social value and economic multiplier of a foreign nation and its economy.

At the heart of the public procurement strategy for Scotland is surely community wealth building, but that is not translating into a demand signal that is then able to be captured by Scottish industry. That is at the heart of the problem.

Regardless of whether it is a direct award or an open procedure, we need to make sure that our procedure is competitive. We know that there is a cross-Government shipbuilding pipeline across the UK of more than 150 new vessels, but we are seeing those vessels flowing overseas to Turkey, Spain, in the case of the Northern Lighthouse Board’s vessel, and now Poland, with the latest contract going to Remontowa. We need to address that matter. It is clear to me that the

Government must engage with the issue of social value.

Edward Mountain: Will the member give way?

Paul Sweeney: I am happy to give way, if I can have the time to do that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Briefly, Mr Mountain.

Edward Mountain: The whole issue could have been resolved if, as part of the contract that was given to the overseas yard, two ferries were built in Scotland. That would have spread the risk and maybe enabled Ferguson's yard to stay open. Does Paul Sweeney agree that that might have been a sensible way of doing it, rather than just walking away from the situation, as the Government has done?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will give the member an extra 30 seconds.

Paul Sweeney: I appreciate that point. There were many ways to structure the contract that would have allowed more work share to happen in Scotland. It is clear that no subcontract opportunities will be available to Scottish shipyards, unlike, for example, in the Liverpool combined region, which was able to structure the Mersey ferry contract to allow for Cammell Laird to take a work share, despite the main contract originally being awarded to Damen of the Netherlands. More can therefore be done there.

Furthermore, I encourage ministers to consider the common user facility model developed by Australia in both Adelaide and Perth, where the infrastructure—the shipyard itself—is state owned, but is marketed as, in effect, a common neutral facility that any contract winner can then utilise for the purpose of generating social value as part of the fulfilment of a contract. That does not favour any one company, but allows the facility and the economic benefits to come into the local community.

I urge the minister to look at the Australian model and to consider how that could be utilised in a future round of the small vessel replacement programme—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member will need to conclude.

Paul Sweeney: —and for other contracts.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Bob Doris, who will be the final speaker in the open debate.

15:35

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): I want to speak in the debate to raise a concern that I have. In doing so, I do not wish to downplay the clear and evident challenges

that have beset ferry services in recent years or the impact on Ferguson Marine.

The concern that I wish to air is that there has been a perception that our Scottish ferry network is in perpetual turmoil and is wholly unreliable, when that is obviously not the case. As I said, I do not intend to downplay the impact on island communities when things go wrong, and I will return to that later.

However, if we look at CalMac's actual performance for the most recent year for which figures are recorded, we see that its crews delivered a service performance of 95.8 per cent. That means that only around four in every 100 ferry services that served island communities did not run. In general terms, that is a performance that we should be talking up and not seeking to undermine. The white heat of debate and the obvious politicking that goes on aside, I am sure that no member would seek to undermine our ferry services in that way.

Islanders know far better than I do how important reliability is, not only to their communities but to local businesses and to the island economy, which often rely on visitors. Those visitors are absolutely vital.

Katy Clark: Will Bob Doris give way?

Bob Doris: I am sorry, but I am very tight for time.

I suspect that the turmoil narrative, which is not accurate, is deterring many visitors, at a time when we have the summer tourist season ahead of us. Ariane Burgess also mentioned the importance of visitors to island communities.

When ferries are performing reliably and to a high standard, I ask the Scottish Government how it will ensure that we encourage visitors and increase passenger demand so that more people visit our amazing islands and experience all that they have to offer. We must not allow the essential role of conducting robust scrutiny of occasions on which performance and delivery are not up to scratch on our ferry network to get in the way of growing visitor numbers when overall performance is very good. I ask the Scottish Government to say more about how it will seek to carry out that important task, which is vital to many of our island communities.

However, I will not downplay the clear challenges that exist. I acknowledge that although the headline performance figures for our ferry network are excellent, problems with services can still have a disproportionate and detrimental impact on certain island communities. That is obvious, and Claire Baker and Katy Clark made that point.

I also recognise and welcome the Scottish Government's provision in 2025-26 of more than £530 million for maintaining and improving ferry services, replacing vessels, upgrading ports and harbours and investing further in low-carbon interisland ferries. The question to ask is how that investment will benefit those island communities that have been disproportionately impacted. It would be beneficial for the Scottish Government to be crystal clear about that.

In the years ahead, 37 per cent of Scotland's fleet will be made up of new vessels. That will transform the service for our island communities. However, those communities are right to be impatient.

I want to mention the outstanding fact that, despite the recent increase in ferry fares, it is cheaper today, under an SNP Government, to take a ferry in Scotland—leaving Orkney and Shetland aside, of course—because of the road equivalent tariff than it was the last time that Labour was in power. That is delivering for communities, surely.

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

15:38

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): Despite the bluster that we have had in the debate, it is clear that we are on the cusp of major positive improvements in our ferry services. That will be a positive legacy for communities, and I hope that, in the years ahead, the cabinet secretary will be able to reflect on her role in delivering that.

However, I say to the Government that this is the wrong time to increase ferry fares by 10 per cent, just as it is the wrong time to increase rail fares, given that we are in a cost of living crisis. As an occasional visitor to the islands, I would be content to pay an extra 10 per cent on a ferry fare, but for members of island communities who live and work on the islands and who need a daily ferry service for education, work, business or healthcare, a 10 per cent increase in fares will be very difficult to swallow.

Perhaps in the future, ferry fare increases will be more acceptable—once the benefits from the new vessels start to come through and once the new Clyde and Hebridean services contract comes through, and people can see the benefits. At the moment, however, those benefits are not there. Communities are being asked to feel the pain without any particular gain.

Ariane Burgess spoke passionately about the case work that she is doing in her region and the real everyday problems that people living on the

islands have. Katy Clark talked about the long-term frustration of people living on Arran and what they have had to live with over the years. That is the reality. That is what the 10 per cent increase in fares will be seen against: the reality of what services are now, rather than what they will be in the future.

It is clear that a range of factors have got us into this situation. There is the ageing ferry fleet, and all the problems that there have been with procurement. That fleet has operated at full capacity, which means that, when a vessel has been out of action, problems have cascaded throughout the service. There has been a dramatic increase in usage—which is probably partly down to the road equivalent tariff—without the increased capacity to deal with it.

Then, there is the complex administrative set-up: the tripartite arrangement of Transport Scotland, CMAL and CalMac. It is really opaque and you could say that it has made some poor decisions. When the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee looked at the issue, we called out the

“pass the parcel’ culture”

that exists between the members of the tripartite arrangement. There needs to be action on governance.

The biggest area for action is the new ferries. I agree with the cabinet secretary that the replacement of a third of Scotland's ferries, including through the four vessels that are being finished in Turkey under some quite difficult circumstances—I acknowledge Stuart McMillan's point about that—in the next year and a half will make a huge difference. Those vessels will increase service quality, reduce the carbon footprint and improve air quality. Alongside the seven ferries that will come through the small vessel replacement programme—which, I understand, are replacing vessels that have a combined service age of 252 years—that means that the situation will feel very different for island communities in the future.

I join other members in being hugely disappointed that Ferguson's shipyard has been unable to secure the contract. Willie Rennie is right: there are echoes of BiFab here. I have no doubt that the skills and dedication of the workers at the yard are there, but Edward Mountain is right that there are questions about the competence of the management. Stuart McMillan is right that the management and the board need to listen to the workforce about how they make that yard competitive going forward. Although I respect the fact that the cabinet secretary would find it very difficult to make a direct award to Ferguson Marine to build the ships, Paul Sweeney makes an

important point about incorporating social value in to procurement practice.

Although the cabinet secretary is unable to make a direct award to Ferguson Marine, the Government is able to make a direct award to CalMac to run services for the next 10 years. It has the opportunity now to get that right in the next year.

I welcome this debate. However, communities need to see concrete changes coming through in service quality and the new vessels before fare increases take place. That is the context for the debate.

15:43

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): This is another short but sweet debate on ferries—and another one in Opposition, not Government, time. I have only four minutes today, but I would need four hours to go into great detail about the issues that have been raised this afternoon.

In my nine years as an MSP, ferry services is the issue that has caused the greatest amount of upset to my island constituents. Ariane Burgess summed it up best when she said that constituents are sick of being treated like second-class citizens. I agree with that sentiment.

There have been the endless delays to and cost overruns of the Glen Sannox and Glen Rosa. There is the endless time out of service of the MV Caledonian Isles, which has had a year out of service due to its age. There have been delays in awarding the CHFS contract due to legal back and forth, and there have been the promises to rearrange the governance structures of the tripartite alliance between CMAL, Transport Scotland and CalMac. None of those issues is particularly new. In fact, since I joined the Parliament, I have asked 115 questions on ferries—116 if you include today's debate. That is a symptom of a catalogue of endless embarrassments, failures, cancellations and delays.

All that comes at a huge cost to the island communities. Mull, Iona and Arran are all suffering economic loss to the tune of millions of pounds in lost revenue and lost tourism. I say to Bob Doris that, over the past five years, non-weather-related cancellations on the CalMac network have increased by 237 per cent. Have a think about that before you make apologies for the failures of your Government.

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

Jamie Greene: Thank you. I will do that.

I will start with the shenanigans of the past week: Ferguson Marine's interim chief executive has quit. Again, that news was snuck out on a Thursday evening. He is the third chief executive who has left the yard in the past couple of years. I do not blame him at all. He must surely have been given a heads-up about the news that landed on us on Monday—the shocking decision to build seven new small electric ferries in Poland instead of Port Glasgow, which came straight off the back of the Government's awarding of contracts to Turkey. None of that is mentioned in the Government's amendment. None of it is a ringing endorsement of Scotland's ferry-building business, as Paul Sweeney rightly pointed out.

Those of us who were in the Parliament at the time hark back to Derek Mackay's famous claim that he was the minister who had saved the Ferguson's yard. Do members remember that press release? For the sake of people in Inverclyde, I hope that Fiona Hyslop does not go down in history as the minister who oversaw the yard's demise.

What about Ardrossan harbour? Katy Clark mentioned it. Again, as far back as 2018, there was a promise to upgrade it. Seven years later, there is no upgrade and there are no sailings and no ferries. I ask the cabinet secretary: where has that strategy gone?

Twenty per cent of Ardrossan's workforce work in the wholesale and retail sectors. Members should think about how they are affected. Ten per cent work in the transport and storage sectors. Ardrossan's economy was built on and predicated on the ferry. The local economy of Ardrossan is paying the price of endless dithering and delay. As Willie Rennie put it, the whole thing is simply an embarrassment.

I do not have much time. However, although I am often accused of coming to the Parliament to complain about ferries, here are some solutions. First, phase 2 of the SVRP should be awarded to a Scottish yard. Secondly, if the Government insists on owning a shipyard, it must give it some work. Thirdly, the Government should return said yard to the private sector when it is feasible to do so.

Fourthly, there should be a reform of the Government's arrangements for our ferry network's procurement, ownership and management—we should get on with that reform once and for all.

Fifthly, the Government should get on with the investment to upgrade Ardrossan harbour, lest Ardrossan lose the Arran route to Troon for good, which would be devastating.

Sixthly, we need a statement to the Parliament about the future of Ferguson Marine, because we must never forget that our islanders are suffering.

If we get all that right, surely we might have a chance—a smidge of hope—that our island communities will have some faith restored in the Government and the Parliament.

I support the amendment in Sue Webber's name.

15:47

The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie): Mark Ruskell's contribution was the only one that included any balance and consideration of where we are right now. He talked about the hope that, when Fiona Hyslop comes out of Government and goes on to whatever she does next, she will be able to look back and think, "Yes—we did that." Fiona Hyslop has been a member of the Parliament since 1999. She is stepping down. She has been a phenomenal servant to the Parliament, the Government and her constituents. That is worth putting on the record.

The cabinet secretary reflected on the current challenges in the network. We understand that the islanders need reliable and consistent services, and that the lived experience behind the statistics needs to be improved. As part of the new contractual arrangements, we have worked with the ferries community board to develop new key performance indicators to reflect that and to drive improvement where that is needed.

CalMac has put in place a new area management structure to better engage with local stakeholders and to reflect their views and needs in decision making. Although that is in its early stages, it is certainly being welcomed by the communities that are involved. That is a core element of CalMac's enhancement and change plan, which will help to drive improvements in the time leading up to, and throughout, the new contract. The community, workers and other stakeholders will be key drivers in that, and their voices will be heard.

We will, of course, have to ensure that the ferries remain affordable to both the user and the taxpayer. However, the current budget position supports the improvements that we are committed to delivering.

We are about to publish the islands connectivity plan strategic paper and the vessels and ports plan. Those will set out the future for ferries and fulfil our commitment in response to parliamentary inquiries that have called for a clear strategic approach and a commitment to investment in vessels and ports.

As part of that, we are committed to retaining the RET fares for islanders on the CalMac network—fares that have brought down costs significantly since they were introduced. For example, on the Stornoway to Ullapool route, single fares before the RET in 2008 were £15.30 for a foot passenger and £75 for a car, which would now be £25.75 and £128.70, rather than the £12.30 and £66.75 that they cost with the RET.

On the recent fares increase, I absolutely understand that any uplift is unwelcome, but it needs to be set against the previous fares freeze and its having brought fares back to around the level that they would have been at. Nobody wants their fares to go up, but the Government has to take action when the time comes for it.

There have been many calls, including in today's debate, for structural reform. The cabinet secretary has been clear that we will still consider that, and that no option is off the table, but our focus has rightly been on ensuring the delivery of the direct award. However, I assure colleagues that the necessary reform of CalMac to ensure compliance with the Teckal arrangements will also ensure that future reform can be considered once the award is completed later this year.

We remain committed to investing in the delivery of ferry services and new ports and vessels to ensure that services are fit for purpose.

Edward Mountain: Can the minister answer the question that I posed earlier about when the Glen Rosa will be available for sailings? Will it be September, as promised, or will it be six months later? When will it be?

Jim Fairlie: The Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee will be told about that in due course, as is the normal procedure.

As the cabinet secretary did earlier, I reiterate what the Deputy First Minister told the Parliament yesterday. Ferguson Marine will understandably be disappointed with the outcome of the small vessel procurement process. However, the yard continues to be supported by the Scottish Government in considering future investment. It is actively pursuing a number of commercial opportunities and its business strategy does not rely solely on one contract.

The cabinet secretary mentioned the productive round-table meeting that she chaired today, and said that everyone involved is facing in the same direction, which is very good news. For my part, I have met the ferries community board and co-chaired a meeting with CalMac and NFU Scotland's Argyll and Bute representatives, and lots of niggles were ironed out in those meetings. The point that I am making is that the cabinet secretary and I are absolutely determined to

ensure that we have the kind of community engagement that is needed.

The Government is making considerable investments in the services, and we are committed to delivering the best services for the island communities that we serve.

15:52

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

Not a day goes by when there is not another problem with our ferries. Last week, there was a welding crack in the Glen Sannox. This week, the Sound of Barra ferry is off again, and that ferry is not being replaced through the small ferries contract. The mainland route is being served by the MV Isle of Mull, which, because of problems with the evacuation system, can hold only 45 passengers, when the ship was built to hold nearly 1,000. That issue was flagged in the 2016 contract between Transport Scotland and CalMac, but it has been left to wither on the vine and go to fault rather than being dealt with. The community in Barra does not understand why boats are being deployed in that way, and they are asking for a debrief on the impact on the island in order to understand why decisions have been made.

Claire Baker talked about the impact that the situation is having on ferry users and on communities, and the impact of fare increases, which are well over inflation.

Ariane Burgess talked about the impact on businesses, especially agriculture and food businesses, in trying to get food on and off islands.

Islanders are, by necessity, seafarers, but the Scottish Government cannot find enough of them to provide members for boards to oversee the running of the ferries. We have a situation in which ferries are owned and operated by boards whose members have no idea what island living is like and no knowledge of the impact that ferry failures can have on the community.

The tripartite arrangement simply is not working, and it makes passing the buck much easier. Three bodies are in charge, but not one of them is taking responsibility. That needs to end. Communities that are served by ferries must be empowered to run the services using their knowledge and skills, and, indeed, because of their dependence on having a well-run ferry network. Those skills are crucial to board members.

Jamie Greene: Rhoda Grant will recall that back in 2020, the then Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee did a huge report on the issue. Reform of the Government's structures has been an issue for many years, but it seems that no action has been taken.

Rhoda Grant: No action whatsoever has been taken, and we are seeing the results of that now.

The week before last, I asked the First Minister about a resilience fund, which the Scottish Labour Party has been pushing for. He gave me a hopeful answer, but then I heard what he said in answer to Alasdair Allan who asked him about travel being charged to people as if they were taking the original vessel, which was off. That happens anyway: if people are rerouted because a vessel is off, they have to pay only the cost of their original journey, but we are looking for a resilience fund to pay people's additional costs. I have heard of people having to spend three nights in a hotel because of a lack of capacity before they can get the next service to the islands.

Businesses are failing—they desperately need a resilience fund. It could be paid for through the fines that are imposed on CalMac for cancellations and late sailings. That would allow businesses to get compensation so that they do not fail, because if they fail, we will have further depopulation of the islands.

Katy Clark and Jamie Greene talked about the Arran ferry going to Ardrossan and the issues that that causes in Ardrossan. Only under this Government could we build, for a service, a ferry that cannot even fit in the port. The Government has had seven years to change that, but it has still not changed it. That adds to costs, and it is total mismanagement.

Of course, we support the direct award of the contract to CalMac. It does not, to an extent, really matter who is running the service, because they will still have to deal with the same old ferries that do not work. The only difference would be that another company would be paying dividends to shareholders, as well as fines to the Scottish Government simply because the ferries do not work.

Many members talked about the small ferry contract and the fact that it has gone abroad. Willie Rennie talked about learning lessons from the past, but those lessons do not seem to have been learned at all. The building of the Glen Sannox and the Glen Rosa has been an absolute disaster, and the blame for that lies with the Scottish Government. Its governance arrangements were non-existent, the contracts were let without a design sign-off, and the decision on dual fuel, which will never be used, was part of a vanity project.

Sue Webber was right—if the Government does not shape up its act, it will doom Ferguson's, and we cannot allow that to happen. It needs to act to ensure that Ferguson's is working, to keep the employees who have done such an excellent job, and to stop failing them by giving them the wrong

contracts. The small ferry contracts would have been much better for Ferguson's than the two large ferry contracts, which had no space for the second ferry.

We need a 25-year plan for replacement of the fleet: we must have that in place. Scottish yards must know when ferry contracts will be put out to tender so that they can be prepared, and so that we can schedule that work in our own yards.

Islanders need ferry services that are designed by them and that work for them. Until we have governance structures that ensure that responsibility and good management are in place, until we have a Scottish Government that admits that it does not know best, and until people who are dependent on ferries make the decisions that affect ferries, nothing will change.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): That concludes the debate. There will be a brief pause before we move to the next item of business, to allow front benches to change.

Temporary Accommodation (Children's Rights)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-16844, in the name of Mark Griffin, on children's rights and temporary accommodation. I invite members who wish to participate in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons now or as soon as possible.

15:59

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): If you are a mum or dad, or if you have no kids at all, Shelter Scotland's publication, "In Their Own Words: Children's Experiences in Temporary Accommodation", on the stories of children in temporary accommodation, is stark and a really hard, difficult read. You cannot help but imagine your own children, or kids from other families who you spoil, comfort, laugh or play with, faced with some of the intolerable conditions and situations that are described in the report.

Towards the end of the report, there is a story that a mum tells about her little boy, who is six. She says that at Christmas and on his birthday, people ask him what he would like to put on his list for Santa or to have as a birthday present. He has to say, "Nothing," because he knows, as his mum knows, that the next time that they have to move house, when they are forced to move to the next temporary accommodation placement, they will have to leave his toys behind.

The feelings of isolation and unsettlement permeate absolutely every line of Shelter's report. We are told that unsuitable accommodation orders are in place to stop children living in hostels or bed and breakfasts for more than seven days. However, councils are having to move families from one place to another every seven days so that they do not breach the order. Last year, the number of children who are living in such places increased by more than 200 per cent.

Can you imagine being six and packing up your whole world every single week? What would you leave behind? What would you not manage to fit in your bag that week? What of yourself would you leave behind every week? Where would you move to? What does "unsuitable" really mean?

In the report, a mum says that her home is "wet" and "very, very cold". She says that both her boys have asthma and that they are both in and out of hospital all winter. Another describes her child throwing up blood and being in hospital for six weeks because the temporary accommodation in which they live is not clean.

In unsuitable accommodation, a child is having to brush her teeth at a bedroom sink because the area that she is supposed to use, which is around the toilet, is covered in absolute filth. Kids describe rats, bugs, mould and—every single time, again and again—the cold. They are learning resilience out of necessity, but they are lonely, insecure, cold and sad. Some of them act out at school and take their feelings out on others, which is understandable but is—again—disrupting their own education.

I cannot begin to imagine what it is like to be a parent who is trying their best, and trying to make things okay, but who is, every single day, seeing their child getting sadder and sadder, right in front of them, because of what their home is doing to them. Throughout the report, there is a feeling of children and their parents being forgotten about that will stay with me for ever. Those families, and more than 10,000 other children, have somehow disappeared into dirty, damp places that suck their childhood away.

I cannot accept—I cannot believe—that that is acceptable in Scotland in 2025. We are nearly a year into the Government reluctantly declaring a housing emergency—the same Government that promised, long ago, to reduce the number of children in temporary accommodation. We are still reading about kids witnessing stabbings and not being able to sleep at night because they are feeling scared and alone.

When I asked about the report at topical question time, the Government—as it often does—talked about empty homes, cutting voids, acquisitions and working groups. It takes a fair amount of front to respond to the details in the report—to respond to hearing about children watching someone else being stabbed—with plans for working groups. At that topical question time the other week, Willie Rennie voiced the absolute disbelief of members in the chamber when he asked the Minister for Housing whether he had actually “read the report”, because any sense of empathy or urgency in the face of the absolutely bleak reality of what the report describes seemed completely absent.

I accept that local authority housing departments are having to make impossible decisions. I do not believe that a single housing officer would ever willingly place a child in a house that they knew would cause a child harm. I do not envy them in their jobs, and I do not really know how they turn up for work. Because of the Government’s complete failure to tackle the shortage in the supply of homes and because of its abject failure to take urgent action on the housing emergency, those are the choices that we are asking housing officers to make.

The Housing (Scotland) Bill is progressing through the Parliament, but it hardly addresses the housing emergency and the conditions that are ravaging a generation of Scotland’s children. It does not build any new homes for them, nor does it stop them waking up in cold, unsafe and unhealthy rooms. They want something different, and they want that now.

Some of my amendments to the bill try to get to the heart of the issue. The Scottish Government’s failure to reduce the number of children in temporary accommodation as a matter of urgency is a breach of their rights. If agreed to, my amendments will require relevant bodies to take account of children’s rights in deciding where their homes should be. It is blindingly obvious to me that a system that places children in such situations is not putting their best interests at the heart of decision making. If it did, it would be impossible for any child in the 21st century in Scotland to have to be in hospital because of where they lived and what the conditions did to them.

I beg the Government, on behalf of the children, families and parents who are represented in Shelter Scotland’s report, as well as the thousands of others who are not quoted in it and who are in temporary accommodation, to replace the lethargy with absolute urgency. The situation that the report describes should never have happened. I ask the Parliament to collectively agree and pledge that this is the last generation of children who will have to face that situation.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the publication of *In Their Own Words: Children’s Experiences in Temporary Accommodation*, a research publication commissioned by Shelter Scotland from De Montfort University and University College London; accepts the findings of the publication, which concludes that children in Scotland are adversely affected by the shocking conditions found in some forms of temporary accommodation; recognises that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) provides children with rights to have their best interests considered when decisions about them are being taken, including the right to life and the ability to develop, the right to school, the right to protection from violence in all forms, and the right to play and rest; notes with concern that the report highlights a number of examples of these rights being breached; accepts that the use of hotel-like accommodation for children in temporary accommodation carries a high risk of breaching children’s rights under the UNCRC; notes that amendments to the Housing (Scotland) Bill have been laid that would require relevant bodies to have regard to the rights of the child in dealing with cases of homelessness, and calls on the Scottish Government to ensure that children in Scotland are placed in safe and secure homes which take account of their rights under the UNCRC.

16:07

The Minister for Housing (Paul McLennan): I welcome this debate on housing, which follows a few weeks after the publication of Shelter Scotland's research on children who are living in temporary accommodation. I attended and spoke at its event. The report lays bare some of the stark conditions for children and their families who are living in temporary accommodation, which Mark Griffin mentioned and which, quite frankly, are unacceptable. I agree with him on that point.

It is important to remember that not all temporary accommodation is unsuitable accommodation. However, we know that lengthy stays in temporary accommodation are not good for the health and wellbeing of families.

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): Will the minister take an intervention?

Paul McLennan: I will come back to the member once I am further into my speech, if that is all right.

That is why our response to the housing emergency is focused on working with local authorities and partners to increase the supply of social and affordable homes, particularly larger family homes. That will enable households to move into settled homes more quickly, which will reduce the uncertainty and instability of temporary accommodation.

Martin Whitfield: Is the Scottish Government saying that temporary accommodation complies with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child's rules on the human rights of children?

Paul McLennan: I will come to that later in my speech.

We also know that harm can be caused by the condition of some temporary accommodation. The Scottish Government is clear that temporary accommodation provided should be of a consistently high standard and that the households who live in that accommodation should receive good-quality services that meet their needs. That is why, in 2023, the Scottish Government published the temporary accommodation standards framework, which sets out physical, location, service and management standards to ensure that temporary accommodation is of good quality and is safe and affordable. We will need to discuss the framework with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and other stakeholders, but all local authorities should ensure that the temporary accommodation that they provide to accommodate homeless households meets the standards in that framework. A public consultation is required before the framework can be implemented, and I am

pleased to say that we will begin the consultation later this year.

The Government is focused on driving down the number of households, especially those with children, that are living in temporary accommodation. Our latest statistics show that 12 local authorities reduced the number of households that are living in temporary accommodation in 2023-24, and that 20 local authorities have reduced the number of children who are living in temporary accommodation.

With regard to actions that have been taken, I note that there has been a 40 per cent reduction in Edinburgh in the voids that Mark Griffin mentioned, a 23 per cent reduction in Fife, a 25 per cent reduction in West Lothian and a 20 per cent reduction in South Lanarkshire. The action that we are taking now is making a difference by bringing homes forward more quickly. For example, in my constituency, between September 2023 and September 2024, there was a 33 per cent reduction in the number of children living in temporary accommodation.

We know that housing and homelessness pressures are not uniform across Scotland. In response to that, we have provided funding of £80 million over this year and next, 80 per cent of which has been targeted at five local authorities that have the most sustained temporary accommodation pressures. To date, that has supported local authorities to bring 1,000 homes back into use through acquisitions and to reduce the number of empty homes. That is the action that we are taking, and we are seeing the outcomes of that coming through.

On the Housing (Scotland) Bill, Mark Griffin has lodged amendments at stage 2, and I will be happy to engage with him tomorrow at the Social Justice and Social Security Committee, and beyond.

Every child deserves a safe and warm place to call home. That is a fundamental human right. Mr Whitfield mentioned the UNCRC, and I know that he follows issues related to it very closely. Section 6 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 makes it unlawful for public authorities in Scotland to act in a manner that is incompatible with the UNCRC requirements when carrying out certain functions. That is really important, and I know that that is what some of Mark Griffin's amendments relate to. Again, I am willing to discuss that matter with Mr Whitfield. I note that the UNCRC also requires that, in all actions concerning children, the best interests of the child should be a primary consideration.

On Awaab's law, the tragic death of Awaab Ishak in Rochdale in 2020 highlighted the issue of

damp and mould in housing. The quality of housing has improved over a number of years due to the actions of this Government. We know that most social landlords in Scotland keep their properties in a good state of repair and tackle issues promptly. The Scottish house condition survey shows that more than 90 per cent of homes have no damp or condensation. However, we know that damp and mould still occur and that waiting for repairs brings physical and mental health risks. I do not think that anybody wants tenants in Scotland to live in those conditions. That is why I was very pleased to lodge an amendment to the Housing (Scotland) Bill that, in a way that is similar to Awaab's law in England—we have been working with the Government in England on this—will require social landlords to investigate and address issues in a timely manner, especially when tenants' health is affected. We are committed to implementing a similar provision to Awaab's law for private tenants after engagement with the private rented sector.

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

Paul McLennan: Do I have time, Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No.

Paul McLennan: I have raised that issue with Mr Simpson on a number of occasions, and I will try and bring up the issue in my closing speech.

We already have a strong set of rights and standards that have been improving the conditions of homes in Scotland. However, the measures that I describe will go even further and give tenants confidence that their health will be protected.

Hearing of the conditions that some children are experiencing in temporary accommodation has only reinforced the Government's commitment to improve the life chances of children in Scotland. We are taking all possible actions to help to deliver more high-quality permanent homes, provide the right homes in the right places and ensure a settled home for everyone.

I move amendment S6M-16844.3, to insert at end:

“; notes the actions taken to address the issues highlighted in the report, including the publication of the temporary accommodation standards framework and bringing forward the amendment to implement Awaab's Law in the Housing (Scotland) Bill, and welcomes that the number of children in temporary accommodation has reduced in 20 local authority areas.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members that we are always tight for time in these Opposition debates, as we are today.

I call Meghan Gallacher to speak to and move amendment S6M-16844.2. You have up to four minutes, Ms Gallacher

16:12

Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con): It has been 10 months since the Scottish Government was forced into declaring a housing emergency. Local councils, of course, followed suit, referencing the growing number of people declaring themselves as homeless and the fact that they have to place families in temporary accommodation as they do not have the supply to meet demand. At the same time, measures such as the introduction of rent controls have led to £3.2 billion of lost investment, with a significant drop in house building. Something has gone dreadfully wrong, and I have no confidence that this Government will be able to produce a plan that will tackle the housing emergency before the end of this parliamentary session.

Scottish Labour has rightly focused its debate today on the impacts of temporary accommodation and the affect that it has on children and young people.

Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

Meghan Gallacher: I do not have time; I have only four minutes for my speech.

The figure of 10,300 should shame the Scottish Government into action, and action is exactly what this Government promised to deliver following 15 recommendations from the temporary accommodation task-and-finish group in 2023. At that time, the Government said that it would

“prioritise action in response to the recommendations that will have the greatest impact to reduce the number of households in temporary accommodation by 2026.”

That is what it promised, yet here we are, with the number of people in temporary accommodation rising exponentially.

To add insult to the Government's injury, the publication of “In Their Own Words: Children's Experiences in Temporary Accommodation” lays bare the scale of the problems. I accept that a pilot programme is being rolled out to five local authorities with the most sustained temporary accommodation pressures to increase supply through buying back properties and bringing long-term empty homes back into use.

I submitted a written question to ask what immediate steps are being taken to

“guarantee that all temporary accommodation meets the basic standards of safety, cleanliness and suitability for households with children”.

The minister's response is to advise that the Scottish Government published a standards framework in 2023, although it will need to further consult on whether the framework can be legally enforced. The framework was published back in 2023, so if the minister has time in his concluding remarks, will he answer the question of what exactly has been done?

It would be remiss of me not to mention the Housing (Scotland) Bill, which represents the Scottish Government's biggest missed opportunity to tackle the housing emergency. The legislation should be about housing, but it will not result in the building of one single home. I will leave the issues that I have with rent controls to one side for today, but I gently remind the minister that, should billions of pounds of investment continue to be lost, that will be on his watch.

That being said, I welcome the minister's amendment to the Housing (Scotland) Bill on the introduction of Awaab's law, which I called for in the chamber just last week. However, that shows that many issues that could have been included in the bill have not been. I am still unclear why the amendment that the minister has lodged does not include the private rented sector, because the private rented sector will be included in the bill that is going through Westminster. Why is that not the case here? Perhaps the minister can expand on that in his closing speech. He was only too happy to tell me that most of the mould and damp instances occur in the private rented sector, despite the issue that I raised directly with him relating to a social landlord.

I am out of time, so I will conclude. The only way out of the housing emergency is to build more homes. Until this Government gets a grip on the housing situation that we face in Scotland, my fear is that more children will be stranded in temporary accommodation, which will not allow them to go on and live full lives.

I move amendment S6M-16844.2, to insert at end:

“; believes that the report underlines the urgent need for the Scottish Government to outline an action plan to address the housing emergency, and notes that the Housing (Scotland) Bill is a missed opportunity to encourage more investment and housebuilding in Scotland.”

16:17

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): I am deeply grateful to Shelter Scotland and the authors of this clear and comprehensive yet heartbreaking report. Just reading it is a harrowing experience. To write it and to listen to those stories must have been much more so. To live those stories—to experience those horrors—and then to retell them for the benefit of others is

worthy of the greatest respect and gratitude. Most of all, I thank the children and families who shared their stories with such grace, insight and integrity.

I do not use the word “horrors” lightly. There are some terrible accounts in the report, which are all the more chilling for the matter-of-fact way that they are told. There are accounts of thick black mould not just on bedroom walls but on a child's bed; of carpets soaked with urine and shared bathrooms smeared with faeces; of heating that does not work in the depths of a Scottish winter; and of a child in hospital with an infection caused by rat infestation. Another child lost two and a half stone as a result of their surroundings. The report talks of exposure to violence, including stabbings and shootings, and of noise through the night so loud that a child repeatedly fell asleep in their classroom.

Those are the stories that shock us, but there are many more—not so dramatic, perhaps, but just as haunting. There are the daily struggles to make a home and the quiet spirals of loss, anxiety and stigma. We read of unsafe accommodation without basic protections such as properly installed fire alarms, functional lighting, window guards or safety gates. We read of unsafe surroundings—of violence, knives, needles and confrontational neighbours—and of there being nowhere safe to play. We read of unhealthy accommodation, often cold and damp, lacking space and facilities, that leads to sleep deprivation, malnutrition, delays in development and long-term, lifetime trauma.

The mental health impacts for children and their parents are often worse than the physical impacts, through worry and anger, shame and secrecy, isolation and a sense of hopelessness. Some of those will stay with children for the rest of their lives. Some of those will make those lives shorter than they would otherwise be.

Every age group suffers. Babies and toddlers are without the space to learn to crawl and walk, with their shouts and cries quickly shushed for fear of the neighbours. Schoolchildren are separated from their family and friends as a result of long journeys to school, with missed opportunities, a loss of concentration and the recognition and sharing of their parents' sadness. Teenagers, without privacy or a place to study, are ashamed of where they live, lose self-esteem and are susceptible to risky behaviour, with lifelong consequences.

The costs in every sense are far too high—for families, who are charged rent that they cannot afford, with debt in Scotland for temporary accommodation standing at more than £33 million; for essential furniture and appliances that should have been supplied; for storage fees and taxi fares; for running small electric heaters when the

radiators do not work, again, for another week; for lost childhoods and chances; for lost agency and control; and for lost toys, with the swing in the old garden never forgotten.

However, it does not have to be like that. We can change this. Children's rights can be realised, and they must be realised as a matter of moral as well as legal responsibility. The report's recommendations show us the way forward. There are changes that can and must be made now—changes to provision, services and strategies; changes to legislation and policy; and changes in attitude and priority.

In my closing speech, I will say more about my commitment, which my Green colleagues share, to making a safe, secure and permanent home the reality for children everywhere.

16:21

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): It is really interesting that, in trying to amend Labour's motion, the Government has lodged an add-on amendment. In effect, it is accepting that there has been a breach of the UNCRC. This is quite a moment. The Government is readily accepting that there has been not just one breach but, we assume, numerous breaches.

However, on the back of that, there is no urgent action of the type that I would expect. The minister has just repeated what he is already doing. It is quite an admission for the Government to acknowledge that the UNCRC—the United Nations international convention on children's rights—has been breached on numerous occasions. I hope that, when the minister sums up the debate, we will hear a little more about the urgent action that is needed, because we have heard about the real consequences.

The report reveals that the issue is about not just numbers, but human lives and the impact on children's security, health—including mental health—and education. It is about schools and transport. It is not just one child whose life is in limbo; thousands of children are in limbo.

The quote that struck me the most shows that the effect is as much mental as it is physical:

"I'm coming back to a home that no matter how I clean it, it feels dirty".

You cannot get that out of your head. That feeling must be there 24/7—you must never escape it. Therefore, I hope that the minister responds in a much more significant way than he has done so far.

The minister talked about the standards framework, but Meghan Gallacher is right—the work began two years ago and we are still at the starting line. We do not even know what the

baseline is. I have asked the minister about that previously, but he was unable to give me an answer. The Government has not even asked whether we are anywhere near meeting the standards framework. Are we? In relation to temporary accommodation, do we understand what is really going on with social landlords and private landlords across the country? It does not seem that the minister is in a hurry to try to understand that, because work on the framework started two years ago.

We should not forget that half of the children in temporary accommodation in Glasgow are from refugee families. That has not been mentioned in the debate so far. They have to live in limbo for a very long time. We need to consider how we respond to and treat refugees, because, as I have witnessed, they have to live in hotels and other types of accommodation for very long periods.

The root of the problem is the lack of investment. I disagree with Meghan Gallacher on one point. She says that the bill is not driving any kind of investment, but I think that the bill and Government policy probably are driving investment simply by removing many of the damaging policies that the Government introduced in previous years—it has neutered those—and because the Government is considering bringing in exemptions around build-to-rent housing and mid-market rents that were not there before. Therefore, the bill represents progress, but only through the removal of the barriers that the Government had put up in the first place. To some degree—[*Interruption.*] I am trying to be generous. To some degree there is progress. I am hunting for some credit to give to the minister.

We need to take the opportunity through the bill to ensure that those changes incentivise investment in housing, because we have seen significant detriment in recent years. There has been a 12 per cent decrease in starts for housing in all sectors and a 10 per cent decrease in completions. That is a terrible record, and we need to fix it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Rennie. We move to the open debate.

16:25

Foysoyl Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): The report from Shelter Scotland is uncomfortable and depressing reading, but, unfortunately, for many members, it will be unsurprising, and it merely confirms what we have heard from our constituents. It is an indictment of an SNP Government that allowed the housing emergency to grow and grow. That is especially true in Edinburgh, which has the highest number of children who are waiting in temporary

accommodation of anywhere in Scotland. The report's findings are stark and they show that children are being failed and that their rights are not being met.

Last year, north Edinburgh parents action group published a similar report, and both reports identify common issues that people in temporary accommodation face—particularly mould and damp. The Shelter report states that

“dampness, mould, and inadequate maintenance were observable and pervasive features of children's daily lives”.

Damp and mould were described as causing “discomfort and fear” in children and “frustration and stress” in parents, who faced great concern about their children's health and could not get these issues fixed for months. That situation does not meet a child's right to an adequate standard of living or best health.

Crime and antisocial behaviour were also features of children's and parents' experience. One family with a four-year-old mentioned neighbours consistently shouting and threatening to kill each other at night. Many parents restricted children's outdoor play due to crime and drug taking. Those issues alone are harmful to children's development and health, but we must stress the compounding nature of these experiences.

Research shows that a child who cannot sleep due to antisocial behaviour is more likely to do poorly at school. A parent being stressed and anxious in their life situation can cause a child to be stressed and anxious. Years spent in temporary accommodation have lifelong consequences, so investing in housing, raising standards and, most important, lowering the waiting time for social housing will benefit us all in the long term.

The conditions that are described in the report are appalling and shame us all. They fall far short of what vulnerable children need and deserve. Shelter's recommendations should be implemented by the Scottish Government. I have called for Awaab's law to be implemented in Scotland, to ensure that damp and mould are addressed, so I welcome the fact that the Scottish Government is in favour of that.

Children lose out socially and educationally when they move schools, so we should keep them in the same school unless it is absolutely necessary to move them.

Above all, we need to build more social housing. That is the clearest demand in the report. The current rate of social and private house building does not touch the sides and must be accelerated.

As we approach a year since the housing emergency was declared, the report serves as a

painful reminder that a failure to act is failing Scotland's children.

16:30

Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): The SNP Scottish Government is committed to every child having the right to grow up in a safe and comfortable home. In its report, Shelter Scotland states:

“The Scottish Government has taken bold steps to adopt a human rights approach to ending adverse childhood experiences. Their decision to enshrine the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into Scots Law promised a Scotland where ‘every child has the right to a standard of living that is good enough to meet their physical and social needs and support their development.’”

That ensures that children's voices are not just heard but listened to.

However, I accept that too many children live in temporary accommodation. The Scottish Government recognises that, which is why it is taking the decisive action that is needed to address the housing emergency, get families out of temporary accommodation and eradicate child poverty in Scotland.

In Scotland, we invest more per person to tackle homelessness and keep people in their homes than any other United Kingdom nation. We are delivering a further 110,000 affordable homes by 2032 and are set to invest £768 million in the affordable housing supply programme in 2025-26, so that everybody in Scotland can have the safe, warm and affordable home that they deserve.

Despite dealing with a challenging financial context, Scotland continues to make steady progress in how it tackles homelessness. To reduce the use of temporary accommodation, we are taking action, such as the £83 million national acquisition programme, which delivered almost 1,500 social and affordable homes over 2023-24. We will go further by investing an extra £80 million in acquisitions between 2024 and 2026. All that will play a strong role in keeping children in secure and safe homes.

However, we all have a part to play in this, and that includes the UK Government. Mr Griffin is a really decent guy, but I am sure that, like me, he is still shell-shocked by his party's inhumane attack on disabled people yesterday, when it announced benefits cuts. Those will have a dreadful impact on many people's financial security and, consequently, on their housing situation. That disgusting decision penalises those who are most vulnerable.

Anas Sarwar has bizarrely claimed that that is “not austerity”. If it is not austerity, what is it? Clearly, that is austerity. Independent analysis by Crisis has shown that austerity-driven policies,

such as the two-child limit, are undoubtedly driving up homelessness across the country. That contrasts with the SNP's commitments to ending the two-child policy, and this year it will provide around £97 million in discretionary housing payments to mitigate the bedroom tax and the benefit cap.

In the face of Westminster austerity, the SNP has delivered an average of 7,750 affordable homes across Scotland each year. Prior to that, at a time of plenty, when it was last in office, the Labour-led Scottish Executive built just six council houses. Since 2007, more than 135,000 affordable and social homes have been completed under SNP Governments. That is, proportionately, 45 per cent more affordable homes than have been built in England and 70 per cent more than in Wales.

Despite the Labour Party promising change, it is delivering more of the same. In contrast, Scotland is the only part of the UK where child poverty is expected to fall, which is a direct result of the SNP's progressive policies that put children first. The consequential impact of Labour's cuts on support to disabled people that were announced yesterday will put much more pressure on the Scottish Government. However, only the SNP will take the housing emergency seriously. As part of that, we recognise that that includes the rights of children to have a safe and secure home, and we need to work together on the matter.

16:34

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): It is now nearly a year since the Scottish Government accepted what the rest of us already knew, and declared a housing emergency. It has been a year of missed opportunities and increasing misery for those who do not have a permanent place to call home. What a pity that the cabinet secretary is not here today to help out her beleaguered housing minister.

Paul McLennan: Will the member take an intervention?

Graham Simpson: No. The minister can come back in later, potentially.

Government statistics show us that 15,500 children in Scotland became homeless last year. According to Shelter Scotland, 10,360 children are currently in temporary accommodation, which is an increase of 5 per cent compared with the previous year and a 150 per cent increase over the past 10 years. Those are damning figures.

None of us here is in the position of living somewhere that we know is only temporary. The Shelter report, "In Their Own Words: Children's Experiences in Temporary Accommodation", spells out from the children affected a situation

that should make the Government sit up. It is little wonder that Alison Watson of Shelter Scotland said:

"Their words have put into stark relief the fact that children are bearing the brunt of Scotland's housing emergency. Our children are being denied their rights and condemned to growing up in often poor quality, entirely unsuitable, temporary accommodation."

She is right.

Children spoke of living

"miles away from friends"

and of sleeping in

"beds covered with black mould, placed in accommodation with urine-soaked carpets, dead rats and broken windows, with no access to decent cooking and washing facilities."

They also spoke of lack of sleep, poor nutrition and hygiene and repeated hospital visits. All that places a great emotional toll on the children and their families. It is hard to imagine the uncertainty that such a lifestyle—if we can call it that—brings.

In February, we learned that more children are trapped in temporary accommodation in Edinburgh than in the whole of Wales. That is more than 3,600 as of November 2024, compared with 2,823 children stuck in temporary accommodation across Wales in the same month. Glasgow is in the same position. As of 30 September 2024, there were 16,634 households in temporary accommodation in Scotland.

It is not just about the overall figures; it is also the length of time that families are spending in temporary accommodation. For cases that closed between April and September last year in which there was at least one temporary accommodation placement, households spent an average of 234 days in temporary accommodation. That is shocking. That compares with 222 days for the same six-month period in 2023 and 233 days for the period from October 2023 to March 2024. The situation has got worse—and it is worse in Edinburgh.

According to the Government's own homelessness update of last September, between April and September, there were 7,500 instances of households not being offered temporary accommodation, which is breaking the law.

The minister mentioned Awaab's law. I have seen an amendment that might deal with the issue, although I am not really sure. He mentioned that the measure would aim to fix problems "in a timely manner". I do not know what "a timely manner" means; perhaps the minister can explain what that is.

We have known about all those problems for years, but very little has changed. The reality of life for some people in Scotland is a badge of

shame, which should make any housing minister consider their position.

16:38

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow Graham Simpson in this very important debate.

The voices of Scotland's children need to be heard. The report "In Their Own Words: Children's Experiences in Temporary Accommodation", commissioned by Shelter Scotland—for which I thank Shelter—puts those words not just in front of the Parliament but in front of the people of Scotland. It reports that more than 10,000 children are living—or, rather, enduring life—in temporary accommodation. As we have just heard, they are forced to live for upwards of a year in such conditions, with mould-infested rooms, beds soaked with urine and space shared with vermin being just some of the harrowing conditions that have been reported.

That is not just an issue of poor housing; it is a fundamental breach of human rights. Such conditions actively harm children's physical and mental health, their development, their education and their life chances. It is not only a housing crisis, but a moral failure. We are a country that prides itself on our values of fairness and human rights, yet children here are growing up isolated from their peers, placed far from their schools and subjected to environments filled with fear and anxiety. Those are not just bad conditions; they violate the rights outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which this Parliament enshrined into law.

Article 27.1 states that parties—that is, Governments—recognise

"the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development."

The article makes it clear that, unequivocally, it is the responsibility of the Scottish Government, under the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024, to ensure that those rights to adequate standards of living are upheld.

I welcome the fact that, as Willie Rennie pointed out, in its amendment to the motion, the Scottish Government accepts its responsibility and, indeed, the breach of the UNCRC rights.

Children have a right to live in safe, stable and secure environments. They have a right to attend school without fear of being displaced or living in unhealthy conditions. They should not have to suffer the trauma of inadequate housing that impacts on their health, education and wellbeing. The Scottish Government has a responsibility to uphold those rights. Its failure to do so is not just a

policy failure but a failure to meet the moral and legal obligations to protect children here.

The consequences of the breach of children's rights are profound. Children suffer from sleep deprivation, poor nutrition, respiratory illness and mental health challenges. They fall behind in their education, struggle to maintain friendships and live in fear for their future. They are the effects of not only poor housing; they are the direct result of the failure to prioritise children's rights in policy and in practice.

On top of that, the oversight board for the Promise reminds us in its recent report that children of families in temporary accommodation are more likely to be taken into care. When we fail on housing, we fail on so much. The right to a home is fundamental to the Promise being kept.

Scotland's children deserve more than just words. They deserve a Government that takes action to address the crisis and ensures that every child has access to a safe, stable and supportive home environment. I welcome the fact that the minister will close the debate. I wonder whether he recalls that, in 2012, when he was leader of East Lothian Council, he said:

"We are proud of what we have achieved."

He continued:

"But we recognise that we're only as good as our last achievement."

I ask the minister, what was the last achievement relating to children in temporary accommodation that he is proud of?

16:42

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): The Shelter report provides us with a clear message on the impact on children and young people who are experiencing life in temporary accommodation. The focus of the report on safety, health and educational development is incredibly helpful. Some of the testimonials were positive, but most were not, and they were hard to read.

The first thing that occurred to me to ask was: why does temporary accommodation generally always seem to be in such poor condition? Why is it that homeless families and kids are given housing—even temporary housing—that is not fit for purpose? There is really no excuse for that. It is as if they do not matter—that, somehow, homeless families can take second best when it comes to being rehoused. Surely that has to stop.

One of the sections in the report that caught my eye was the one on mould and dampness, which seemed to be prevalent in the temporary housing that was featured in the study. The comments from a wee six-year-old child were pretty awful,

describing his or her bed as being soaking wet due to the dampness in the house. It is beyond me as to why a house in that condition can be used at all, and I ask the Government and the councils to take a serious look at preventing the use of accommodation that is not fit to be lived in. Sadly, councils have not done that for years—that includes Labour and Tory councils, let us remember.

The impacts of the issue went beyond the discomfort of the dampness itself. It had wider implications for the children, who expressed fear and anxiety to the researchers about the conditions that they were living in. Added to that was the frustration and anger of parents who were trying to solve those issues, on top of the homelessness situation that they were already facing. It presented a disturbing picture for us all.

I think back to my early days as a local councillor in the 1990s, when a big proportion of my inquiries came from tenants living in damp houses with mould. We have come a long way since then. According to the current Scottish house condition survey, 90 per cent of all housing stock is free of the stuff, but it is still there, and it is causing misery and harm in equal measure.

Only yesterday, the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee heard about testimonials from people who are suffering dampness in their homes—not temporary accommodation—and the problems that they have encountered in trying to deal with it. We know that it can be a complex issue to sort. The witnesses who gave evidence to the committee also talked about the importance of improving the specialist skills that are needed in order to diagnose and treat such problems.

Even now, 30-odd years later, there are still examples of fungicidal washing and paint being used as the sole means of keeping dampness at bay, but that does not solve the problem. My question for our councils is this: why are you continuing to allocate houses that are clearly damp and mouldy at the outset? That includes some of the temporary housing that is featured in the report. Surely we should outlaw that practice, too, as well as embracing Awaab's law.

As ever, I am indebted to my East Ayrshire Council colleagues, who advised me that the number of kids who live in temporary accommodation down there is dropping year on year; the current figure is around 25. That figure is too high, but it is among the lowest in Scotland. The council is doing its best. It is building more council houses than ever before, and it is buying back a substantial number of properties, too. Taken together, that work shows that East Ayrshire Council is doing all that it can to tackle the problems of demand and capacity. The Government's big investment of £768 million in

affordable homes will be a significant help in dealing with the problem, and the council hopes to build more than 600 new affordable homes in the period ahead.

It is right for the main focus of my comments to be on what is in the Shelter report. I am reassured by the minister's assurance at the outset of the debate that the Government accepts the recommendations and will act on the findings to address the issues that are presented in the report.

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

16:46

Maggie Chapman: In closing the debate for the Scottish Greens, I reiterate my thanks to Shelter and to the researchers, children and families who made the report such a valuable, challenging and human testament. It shows us not only what is wrong, but the paths to making it right—to making the rights of children real.

There are immediate provisions to be made on support and services and access to amenities and facilities, as well as to better—much better—temporary accommodation, while that is still needed. There are policies to be changed. Standards for temporary accommodation need to be set at the same level as those for permanent housing. Primary health services need to be included in prevention strategies. Families with children and those children who are most in need must be prioritised.

There is a wider picture, too, which is a desperately urgent one. We again call on the Scottish Government to build more high-quality permanent homes for social rent, including homes that are large enough for families. We reiterate our commitment to ending homelessness and to a housing first approach as its central pillar. We call on the Parliament to show courage and commitment in making the Housing (Scotland) Bill an opportunity for transformational change. The amendments that we and others have lodged will go some way in helping with that.

No child should face eviction over the winter months. No woman who faces domestic abuse should have to make the choice between staying in an abusive home and making herself and her children homeless. No family should have their physical and mental health jeopardised by mould and damp.

I welcome the opportunities to engage with the minister and others on those and many other issues over the coming months, as the Housing (Scotland) Bill makes its way through Parliament, but I echo Willie Rennie's call for the minister to

tell us how he intends to address the recommendations in the report, because we need action now.

We also need to see compassion and justice at every level of government. Poisonous rhetoric about social security, suspicion and scorn for those who are in need, and an obsession with work, when parents are already working their fingers to the bone and still cannot afford to eat, will not help. It seems that the workhouse mentality—the idea that the very worst thing that a Government can do is to provide food and shelter for someone who does not deserve them, whatever “deserve” means in that context—has not gone away. In truth, the worst thing that a Government can do in this context is deny children the basics of a happy childhood as a way of punishing their parents.

When we, as a Parliament and as a nation, passed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill we were not just taking on a legal responsibility; we were taking on a moral one. We in the Scottish Greens take that moral responsibility seriously and I know that colleagues across the chamber do too. We also need the conviction to act. We must act, and we must do it now—for all our children’s sake.

16:50

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): Shelter Scotland’s report can be summed up in one sentence: the SNP has failed Scottish children. Our country is gripped by a housing crisis, which is forcing thousands of vulnerable people out of their homes and into a system that is unable to handle the workload.

As has already been mentioned this afternoon, more than 33,619 households were assessed as homeless in 2023-24, including 15,000 children. Take a moment to think about that: there are 15,000 children without a safe place to call home. In the past 15 minutes of this debate, we have heard not one practical solution from the Government or its members for how that is going to change. That number should shame all 129 of us and it should shame the Scottish Government even more.

In my region, here in Lothian, the picture is as bleak as it is on the national level. There were 3,600 children in temporary accommodation in Edinburgh in 2023-24. As Mr Simpson pointed out, that figure is larger than the total number of children in temporary accommodation in the whole of Wales during the same time.

The Government must stop talking and start acting to protect the most vulnerable in our society. For too many years, it has continued to oversee a worsening situation. Make no mistake,

what we see in Scotland today is a modern-day scandal.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that every child has the right

“to a standard of living adequate for the child’s physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.”

As Mr Rennie pointed out, the Government has not sought to amend, only to add to, the Labour motion before us. It is happy to accept that it is in breach of the convention, not just once but over and over again.

Not only is the number of children in temporary accommodation unacceptable, but, as we have heard from other speakers, the conditions in the accommodation are often unacceptable: mould, damp and heating systems that do not work during winter months. That is unacceptable.

We have a housing bill, which we will debate tomorrow in the Social Justice and Social Security Committee but which will bring almost no benefit to those children. The Government has refused to look at amendments that would improve the bill. It wants to discourage people from renting accommodation; we will see fewer properties being put up for rent in the next years because of what is in the bill.

It is even worse than that. The only way to solve the problem is to build more houses, yet what have we seen under this Scottish Government administration? There has been a fall in house building in Scotland. Unsuitable accommodation, a lack of house building, and no willingness to listen to experts and change the housing bill—the Government should go away and think again, not for my sake, but for the sake of the children here in Lothian and across Scotland.

16:54

Paul McLennan: The report that was published earlier this month highlighted the devastating impact that living in poor-quality temporary accommodation can have on children’s lives. We have heard examples of that today, and I take addressing that as one of my main objectives as housing minister.

In response to the research findings, Shelter Scotland stated that we—all of us—

“have a duty to act”

on what we have heard. The Government is already acting. I talked about the £768 million investment in acquisitions and voids funding, which has enabled reductions in Edinburgh, as I think Foyso Choudhury mentioned, and in four other areas that are under the most sustained pressure.

However, we all need to act on the issue together. One key thing that was in the Crisis report was the need for the UK Government to act on local housing allowance and tackling poverty. Local housing allowance is being frozen again, and the Crisis report mentioned that that has the biggest influence in pushing people into homelessness. We need the Labour Government to act on that and, again, I ask colleagues from the Labour Party to engage with that. The Tories had that policy for a number of years and knew the impact of it, so they have to take responsibility on that point. That report mentioned that the policy on local housing allowance pushed people into homelessness, which the Tories have to acknowledge.

Our ambition—all members' ambition—is for every household to have a settled home, and we are firmly committed to reducing the number of households that are in temporary accommodation.

I will touch on the point that Willie Rennie made about voids and acquisitions. In engaging with the housing to 2040 group, we have worked with local authorities on targeting homes that need to be purchased for families with large numbers of children. That is a targeted focus, and a reduction in temporary accommodation has started in 20 local authorities. That is key. I have talked about the £200 million that is increasing housing supply, and I will come on to Meghan Gallacher's point about investment in a second.

We are all, rightly, concerned to hear of the experiences that children described in the research of living in conditions that breached the unsuitable accommodation order. Of course we are—everybody is. The action that the Scottish Government is taking now is intended to move us out of the housing emergency, but that will take time and requires a sustained and joint effort from all parties. I will touch on that in a second.

As was mentioned, local authorities—of all colours—are responsible for that, too. They are all working extremely hard to increase the supply of social, affordable housing and deliver services for people who experience homelessness. We have been working, and will continue to work, in partnership with local government. We will not support the Tory amendment, for the very reason that we have been working very closely with local authorities on their housing emergency action plans. We think that it is better to work with local authorities on their own local housing emergencies rather than the national picture. We have seen the effect of that, through a reduction of about 40 per cent in Edinburgh, for example.

Mark Griffin: Will the minister take an intervention?

Paul McLennan: Yes, if I have time.

Mark Griffin: What is the point of declaring a national housing emergency if the Government will not take national responsibility? We would be as well just to leave the 32 councils to get on with it and not bother with declaring a national housing emergency in the Parliament.

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

Paul McLennan: I am happy to answer that point. Our action is in consultation with local authorities. The situations of local authorities in Edinburgh, Glasgow and elsewhere are all different.

We have targeted an increase in the budget to £768 million. The increase in voids and acquisitions funding is an important part of that. We have talked about the £4 million pilot for the Scottish empty homes partnership. We think that it is better to work in engagement with local authorities on their specifics. That is demonstrated in the action that we are taking and in the reductions that 20 local authorities have had in temporary accommodation for children. That is an important point. Reducing the number of households and time spent in temporary accommodation is a priority for the Government, as it is for everybody else.

Housing is critical to the delivery of our national mission to eradicate child poverty. I think that Marie McNair made the point that the UK Government's announcement yesterday on disability benefits will not help the housing situation at all. It will push more people, including more families with children, into homelessness.

The Scottish Government spends more money per person on discretionary housing payments than the UK Government does. Again, the UK Labour Government can help on that. We are spending £97 million in 2025-26, which is an increase on 2024-25. Again, the UK Government could help us to reduce the figures that we talked about.

I want to talk about some of the amendments.

Meghan Gallacher: Will the minister accept any responsibility for the actions of his Government that have led to a housing emergency and the issues of temporary accommodation for children?

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

Paul McLennan: I will come back to that point. On the amendments—[*Interruption.*]

I said that I would come back, and I will come back to the points that were made by Meghan Gallacher after I address Mark Griffin's points.

We discussed the UNCRRC. We will vote for the Labour motion, but we are also trying to acknowledge the progress that has been made.

Meghan Gallacher made a few points about the task and finish group, which fed directly into the Housing (Scotland) Bill. On investment, she knows as well as Graham Simpson does that I value the impact of build to rent, mid-market rent and other investment opportunities. Just this afternoon, we met the housing investment task force, which has produced recommendations. The Government will look at those and will get back to that group quickly. We acknowledge the value of that area. The task force also fed into the rent controls discussion. As I said, we will come back to that point.

Willie Rennie made a point about looking at opportunities in the investment sector, and Mr Rennie and I have talked about the value of bringing investment into Scotland. We need that. It is not just about Government funding; it is about funding from other areas as well.

Mr Rennie made a point about asylum issues, which we are discussing with the UK Government. As Mr Rennie mentioned, there are specific pressures in Glasgow, but we are discussing that particular point with the UK Government.

On Meghan Gallacher's point, of course we take responsibility for our actions. That is why we have the £768 million, the temporary accommodation fund and the £4 million for that. We will engage with Shelter on that point, too. Of course we have taken responsibility—that is why we have taken the actions that we have decided to take.

On a point that Graham Simpson made, the cabinet secretary is not here because she has a long-standing meeting with the UK Government—I wanted to put that on the record.

Willie Coffey made the point that parties of all colours are involved. All local authorities are involved.

We have touched on amending the Housing (Scotland) Bill to require social landlords to investigate and address issues that, if left unattended, could cause health problems or worse, as in the case of Awaab Ishak. That measure would provide tenants in the social rented sector with assurances that their homes will be of good quality, and we are engaging with the private rented sector on that.

Scotland has strong homelessness rights, which mean that households have the safety net of temporary accommodation when that is needed, as a legal right. We are taking action, and we are seeing those actions coming through. The number of children in temporary accommodation has

dropped in 20 local authorities, and the number of voids is also falling.

We have also implemented a wide range of anti-poverty measures, including the Scottish child payment and mitigating the bedroom tax and the benefit cap to address issues that we know contribute to households presenting as homeless and to negate the need for them to enter temporary accommodation.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Please conclude, minister.

Paul McLennan: I am happy to meet Mr Griffin and Mr Whitfield to discuss the point about the UNCRRC. The Housing (Scotland) Bill will strengthen protections for households from potential harm that could be caused by living in social rented properties.

17:02

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): It is a privilege to close today's debate on behalf of the Scottish Labour Party. I will start where Maggie Chapman and others started, by thanking Shelter Scotland for all its work on the issue. Today, as we are having the debate, 15,000 children are homeless, as Jeremy Balfour reminded us, and 10,360 children are living in temporary accommodation across Scotland.

At the start of the debate, my colleague Mark Griffin and others set out the dark reality of the situation every day for children and those who are closest to them. We heard from members across the chamber about the intolerable conditions that children find themselves in. As many said, we have also been devastated by the tragedy of the death of Awaab Ishak. I was pleased to hear that members from across the chamber, including Meghan Gallacher, the minister and others, support the need to act and bring in Awaab's law. I hope that members will support the amendments on the issue to the Housing (Scotland) Bill, which are in Mark Griffin's name. I agree with Willie Rennie that the Government could inject urgency in addressing the issue and that supporting those amendments could indicate that.

The number of people who are in temporary accommodation placements that have been in breach of the unsuitable accommodation order reached 7,400 in 2023-24, which was an increase of 41 per cent, or 2,160, on the previous year. Shelter Scotland's recent report on children's experiences in temporary accommodation, which is a painful reminder, as Foysol Choudhury rightly called it, and a damning report, as Graham Simpson correctly stated, sets out the intolerable real-life consequences of those alarming statistics for some of the most marginalised and disadvantaged children in our society. Many

members share those concerns and mentioned that today.

The UNCRC sets out what we and they—children across Scotland—should expect. That the UN has commented on how bad things are must be a wake-up call, as Willie Rennie said. I agree with Martin Whitfield that the situation represents a failure.

The UNCRC provides children with rights to have their best interests considered when decisions about them are being taken, including the right to life and the ability to develop, the right to school, the right to protection from violence in all forms and the right to play and rest. It is a huge concern that the Shelter report highlights that those rights are being breached.

One such right that has had attention from members across the chamber today is in article 28, which states that every child has the right to an education. Given its wide-ranging impact, it is no surprise that many members spoke about that today. The instability and uncertainty that come with living in temporary accommodation have significant impacts on a child's education and development, and, ultimately, on their life chances. Every day that a child spends in temporary accommodation is a day too long and is a day that holds back their education and their opportunities. Shelter Scotland's report lays bare the impact of that.

The logistics that children and their parents face when their housing is not near the children's school include long commutes and the associated financial burdens, lateness and increased stress. The disruption to school attendance, social connections and emotional stability that comes with frequent relocation, which Willie Coffey spoke passionately about, sees many children have trouble adjusting to new schools and losing access to friends, networks, preferred resources and activities.

Pupil absence rates are stubbornly high for many, and the Government must consider that that issue could be exacerbated for children who are living in temporary accommodation. The quality of temporary accommodation has been highlighted as a significant factor in young people and children's distress at home and in school.

The Shelter Scotland report concluded that

"Noise and inadequate sleep in temporary accommodation negatively impact on children's academic performance and concentration."

The report also found that instability affected teenagers' eligibility for education maintenance allowance, which further exacerbates concerns.

There is much evidence on the link between poor housing and negative educational

experiences, which is why it is the case that we should move children who are living in temporary accommodation into secure housing not only because it will improve their life chances today but because every one of the 10,000 children in Scotland who are in temporary accommodation will otherwise be held back in future.

That issue is keenly felt by my constituents in the Glasgow region. A recent letter from Glasgow City Council to the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee revealed that, as of February this year, 3,503 children were living in temporary accommodation in Glasgow. That is more than the number of children who were stuck in temporary accommodation across the whole of Wales in December. The city of Glasgow alone has more children in temporary accommodation than the whole of Wales does—let that sink in. Ultimately, children in the region that I represent, and across Scotland, are being failed. There is no excuse and no explanation for the amount of children in temporary accommodation.

Although I am pleased that most members engaged with the seriousness of the issue, I have to say that I am a little disappointed that some members chose to list Government actions—or the lack thereof—that have so far failed, instead of setting out how they could get serious about addressing this housing crisis of the Government's making.

We must act quickly to move children to secure, safe and affordable homes. The use of hotel-like accommodation for children in temporary accommodation carries a huge risk of breaching children's rights under the UNCRC, but it is also a failure of our moral duty to children across Scotland.

I note that there are UNCRC-related stage 2 amendments to the Housing (Scotland) Bill that would require relevant bodies to have regard to the rights of the child in dealing with cases of homelessness. I hope that the minister will support them tomorrow.

Scottish Labour wants everyone to live in a warm, safe, accessible and affordable home. That means driving up the supply of housing across all tenures and ensuring that children in Scotland are placed in safe and secure homes that take account of their rights, including those under the UNCRC. I hope that, at decision time, Parliament will support our calls to do that.

Urgent Question

17:09

Fatal Accident Inquiry (Response)

Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con):

To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the findings of the fatal accident inquiry for Lea Lamont, Ellie McCormick, and Mira-Belle Bosch, published on 14 March 2025, which suggest that the three child fatalities were avoidable.

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Neil Gray):

I appreciate Meghan Gallacher's raising this urgent question. The loss of a baby is devastating for any family, and I offer my sincerest apologies to the families for any failures in the system that has seen the tragic deaths of baby Lea, baby Ellie and baby Mira-Belle. As a father of four, my heart breaks to think of the unspeakable pain that those families will be suffering, especially as the fatal accident inquiry has flagged opportunities for their babies' lives to have potentially been saved.

In that light, I thank those families for participating in the fatal accident inquiry. I simply cannot begin to imagine the pain of not only losing their child but having to relive that time through the investigation. I am also grateful to Sheriff Principal Anwar for her report. We are considering the findings carefully with the maternity community to ensure that the recommendations are acted on with the greatest urgency.

Indeed, NHS Lanarkshire and NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde have already put in place a range of actions to deliver against the recommendations, and they have an on-going programme of work to deliver the safest care for mothers and babies. I have written to the chief executives of those boards seeking further assurances that actions are under way and that appropriate changes are happening at pace, and I have asked to be kept informed of progress.

Meghan Gallacher: I appreciate the response that the cabinet secretary has just provided, because the most heartbreaking conclusion of the inquiry is, of course, that the deaths of Lea, Ellie and Mira-Belle could have been avoided. My deepest sympathies go to the families who have been impacted by the inquiry findings.

While we cannot undo the pain and distress that those families have endured, we must ensure that their experiences lead to meaningful change. The report highlights defects in the system of working in hospitals, pointing to a lack of guidance for midwives in assessing preterm labour symptoms

and a lack of effective means of flagging risks on hospital systems.

Given the inquiry's recommendations, although I was listening closely to what the cabinet secretary has just said, what further assurances can the Scottish Government provide to pregnant women and families that those recommendations will be fully implemented in order to prevent similar tragedies in the future?

Neil Gray: Again, I thank Meghan Gallacher for her question. To reassure her, I would be happy to provide, in writing, to her and to the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee, the Government's response to all those recommendations. I believe that there is already progress on some of them, and more progress to come, which is currently being worked on, on others.

Meghan Gallacher is right—improving maternity safety is paramount, and I would like to reassure expectant mothers that maternity services in Scotland are very safe for both mothers and babies. Our world-leading Scottish patient safety perinatal improvement programme works with maternity services across Scotland to drive improvements in care for mothers and babies.

We are also working with Healthcare Improvement Scotland on the renewed approach to significant adverse event reviews, and we will update the maternity and neonatal guidelines to reflect the revised HIS guidelines. To improve the safety of maternity services, the Government has commissioned HIS to develop a set of maternity standards. The process has already started and we expect the standards to be published in late 2025.

As Meghan Gallacher will know, HIS is also now starting unannounced inspections of maternity services in order to give that additional level of assurance.

Meghan Gallacher: A written response from the cabinet secretary would be greatly appreciated.

Following the reviews that were conducted by the fatal accident inquiry, and its findings, there will be significant concern, anxiety and anticipation among women and families who are expecting. Can the Scottish Government provide assurance on the additional measures that are being considered to enhance that patient safety—I understand that the cabinet secretary has just outlined some of those—to improve oversight and address staffing levels in our maternity and neonatal services in order to alleviate those concerns?

The cabinet secretary has provided a timescale for that, but could he also consider whether any changes that have been made to neonatal services, in particular in relation to the

downgrading at Wishaw general hospital, can also be taken into consideration, given the findings of the fatal accident inquiry?

Neil Gray: Progress on that is already under way. The Government published guidance in 2021 for boards on how and when to undertake significant adverse event reviews in maternity and neonatal services. Those sit alongside Healthcare Improvement Scotland's SAER process, in which there is a strong focus on being open and including affected families. We expect all boards to follow those guidelines to ensure that robust and timely reviews are undertaken.

As I said, I will follow up in writing with both Meghan Gallacher and the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee about the individual recommendations and the work that is under way through the Health and Care (Staffing) (Scotland) Act 2019. I would also be more than happy to interact with her, as I have with others, about the process for the reorganisation of neonatal services, which I believe will result in a safer process for the most vulnerable babies in our society.

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): I also thank the cabinet secretary for his answers.

Last year, a report on neonatal deaths recommended the review of maternity units to help to assess how care for mothers and babies can be improved. As the cabinet secretary said, following that, it was recommended that Healthcare Improvement Scotland carry out inspections of maternity units from January 2025 in order to provide assurances on the care that women and babies can expect to receive. Will the cabinet secretary provide an update to the Parliament on the progress that has been made on those inspections?

Neil Gray: I thank Carol Mochan for her question. I can provide an illustrative update. The first inspections have happened, and we are expecting reports on them later this year. During the inspections, which are to last between one and three days, HIS inspectors will look at care, speak to staff and senior managers, talk to mothers and families, and review information about staffing levels, culture and leadership in the units.

I am happy to correspond further with Carol Mochan if she requires any further details on the work that HIS is doing to provide additional assurance.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes the urgent question.

Business Motions

17:17

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-16855, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 25 March 2025

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Ministerial Statement: Scottish Government Response to the Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 2 Report

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Scotland - A Fair Trade Nation

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 26 March 2025

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Deputy First Minister Responsibilities, Economy and Gaelic; Finance and Local Government

followed by Ministerial Statement: Secure Accommodation in Scotland - Capacity

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Land Reform (Scotland) Bill

followed by Financial Resolution: Land Reform (Scotland) Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.30 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 27 March 2025

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:

Net Zero and Energy, and Transport

followed by Ministerial Statement: Response to Fatal Accident Inquiries (Deaths in Custody)

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Schools (Residential Outdoor Education) (Scotland) Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.30 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 1 April 2025

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Criminal Justice Modernisation and Abusive Domestic Behaviour Reviews (Scotland) Bill

followed by Financial Resolution: Criminal Justice Modernisation and Abusive Domestic Behaviour Reviews (Scotland) Bill

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 2 April 2025

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands;
Health and Social Care

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 3 April 2025

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:
Social Justice

followed by Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee and Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee Debate: The Aarhus Convention and Access to Environmental Justice

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 24 March 2025, in rule 13.7.3, after the word "except" the words "to the extent to which the Presiding Officer considers that the questions are on the same or similar subject matter or" are inserted.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-16856, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on a stage 2 timetable.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Education (Scotland) Bill at stage 2 be completed by 9 May 2025.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:18

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is consideration of five Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motions S6M-16857 to S6M-16860, on approval of Scottish statutory instruments, and S6M-16861, on the designation of a lead committee.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the National Bus Travel Concession Schemes (Miscellaneous Amendment) (Scotland) Order 2025 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Community Care (Personal Care and Nursing Care) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2025 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Social Security (Up-rating) (Miscellaneous Amendments) (Scotland) Regulations 2025 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Social Security Up-rating (Scotland) Order 2025 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the UEFA European Championship (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.—
[*Jamie Hepburn*]

The Presiding Officer: The question on the motions will be put at decision time, which we will come to momentarily.

Decision Time

17:20

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): There are seven questions to be put as a result of today's business.

The question is, that amendment S6M-16845.2, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, which seeks to amend motion S6M-16845, in the name of Claire Baker, on reforming Scotland's west coast ferries, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

There will be a brief suspension to allow members to access the digital voting system.

17:20

Meeting suspended.

17:22

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We come to the vote on amendment S6M-16845.2, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, which seeks to amend motion S6M-16845, in the name of Claire Baker. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is closed.

The Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport (Maree Todd): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I was unable to vote in time, and I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Todd. We will ensure that that is recorded.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I tried to connect but could not. I would have voted yes.

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

For

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

Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (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)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)

Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Abstentions

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

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-16845.2, in the name of Fiona Hyslop is: For 57, Against 52, Abstentions 7.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-16845.1, in the name of Sue Webber, which seeks to amend motion S6M-16845, in the name of Claire Baker, on reforming Scotland's west coast ferries, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is closed.

The Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise (Natalie Don-Innes): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app would not connect. I would have voted no.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Don-Innes. We will ensure that that is recorded.

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)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)

Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caitness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Abstentions

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

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-16845.1, in the name of Sue Webber, is: For 52, Against 56, Abstentions 7.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-16845, in the name of Claire Baker, on reforming Scotland's west coast ferries, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (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)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

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

Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowe, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Abstentions

Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-16845, in the name of Claire Baker, on reforming Scotland's west coast ferries, as amended, is: For 58, Against 52, Abstentions 6.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament recognises the challenges that have faced a number of island communities with ferry service disruptions but notes that CalMac crews delivered 95.8% of services in the last recorded contract year; welcomes the provision of over £530 million in 2025-26 for maintaining and improving ferry services, replacing vessels, upgrading ports and harbours, and investing further in low-carbon

inter-island ferries, with at least £21 million to progress phase 1 of the Small Vessel Replacement Programme; acknowledges that the delivery of six new large vessels, providing fleet resilience, and the procurement of seven new small vessels, which is currently in the 10-day 'standstill period', and the replacement for the MV Lord of the Isles, will provide 37% of the total fleet with new vessels, helping to reduce emissions and create more sustainability, resilience and reliability for residents, businesses and communities; notes that public engagement is being undertaken in Orkney and Shetland to inform the procurement of two new freight vessels for the Northern Isles services; acknowledges the work underway to make a direct award for the next Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Services contract, and the roundtable with all stakeholders, including the Ferries Community Board and trade unions, to collectively discuss ambitions for the contract, including putting public service delivery and accountable key performance indicators developed with communities at its heart, and agrees that delivery of the award will then provide the space and opportunity for more fundamental reform of governance.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-16844.3, in the name of Paul McLennan, which seeks to amend motion S6M-16844, in the name of Mark Griffin, on children's rights and temporary accommodation, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-16844.2, in the name of Meghan Gallacher, which seeks to amend motion S6M-16844, in the name of Mark Griffin, on children's rights and temporary accommodation, 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. I apologise, but I could not connect to the app. I would have voted no.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, cabinet secretary. We will ensure that that is recorded.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and West Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 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]
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (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)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-16844.2, in the name of Meghan Gallacher, is: For 53, Against 63, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-16844, in the name of Mark Griffin, on children's rights and temporary accommodation, as amended, be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

That the Parliament notes the publication of *In Their Own Words: Children's Experiences in Temporary Accommodation*, a research publication commissioned by Shelter Scotland from De Montfort University and University College London; accepts the findings of the publication, which concludes that children in Scotland are adversely affected by the shocking conditions found in some forms of temporary accommodation; recognises that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) provides children with rights to have their best interests considered when decisions about them are being taken, including the right to life and the ability to develop, the right to school, the right to protection from violence in all forms, and the right to play and rest; notes with concern that the report highlights a number of examples of these rights being breached; accepts that the use of hotel-like accommodation for children in temporary accommodation carries a high risk of breaching children's rights under the UNCRC; notes that amendments to the Housing (Scotland) Bill have been laid that would require relevant bodies to have regard to the rights of the child in dealing with cases

of homelessness; calls on the Scottish Government to ensure that children in Scotland are placed in safe and secure homes which take account of their rights under the UNCRC; notes the actions taken to address the issues highlighted in the report, including the publication of the temporary accommodation standards framework and bringing forward the amendment to implement Awaab's Law in the Housing (Scotland) Bill, and welcomes that the number of children in temporary accommodation has reduced in 20 local authority areas.

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

As no member objects, the final question is, that motions S6M-16857 to S6M-16860, on approval of Scottish statutory instruments, and motion S6M-16861, on the designation of a lead committee, all in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the National Bus Travel Concession Schemes (Miscellaneous Amendment) (Scotland) Order 2025 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Community Care (Personal Care and Nursing Care) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2025 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Social Security (Up-rating) (Miscellaneous Amendments) (Scotland) Regulations 2025 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Social Security Up-rating (Scotland) Order 2025 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the UEFA European Championship (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Sexual Violence (Hospitals)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-16705, in the name of Tess White, on addressing sexual violence in Scotland's hospitals. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament considers that single-sex spaces for women and girls across Scotland's public services are being eroded, with worrying implications for their rights and safety; acknowledges what it sees as the fundamental importance of the dignity, privacy and safety of women and girls in sanitary and changing facilities, as well as in hospital settings where women and children are often at their most vulnerable; highlights the Women's Rights Network Scotland report, *How safe are our Scottish hospitals?*, authored by Carolyn Brown and Mary Howden and published in March 2025, which found that, over a five-year period between 2019 and 2024, 276 sexual assaults and 12 rapes took place across 57 hospitals; considers that the actual figures will likely be much higher given that, it understands, data is not routinely kept by all Scottish hospitals; notes in particular that 22 sexual assaults and one rape reportedly took place in NHS Grampian over this period, while 17 sexual assaults and three rapes reportedly took place in NHS Tayside, with, it understands, a high number occurring on hospital wards; believes that hospitals should be a place of safety for patients and staff, and notes the view that urgent action should be taken to address any sexual violence on the NHS estate, and further notes the view that such action should include the introduction of robust and transparent record keeping procedures to help inform preventative practices, as well as accommodating women on single-sex wards wherever possible and protecting single-sex spaces for biological female patients and staff.

17:33

Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con): I welcome the opportunity to lead this members' business debate on sexual violence in Scotland's hospitals. I thank Michelle Thomson for supporting the motion and allowing it to achieve cross-party support. That means that we can shine a much-needed light on a serious safeguarding issue in Scotland's national health service.

I pay tribute to the Women's Rights Network Scotland, which is represented in the public gallery, especially Mary Howden and Carolyn Brown, who authored the sobering report—which I have with me here—"How safe are our Scottish hospitals?"

Once again, it is a grass-roots women's organisation that has brought concerns about safety and safeguarding in Scotland's public sector to the fore. The *Sunday Post* has built on that work in recent weeks by exposing the issue and holding the Scottish National Party Government to account. The WRN submitted close to 200 freedom of information requests to

Police Scotland and surveyed 198 hospital settings over a five-year period. Data was made available for only 57 of those hospitals, which is just 29 per cent of Scotland's total. It showed that, between 2019 and 2024, 276 sexual assaults and 12 rapes were reported and 163 sexual assaults and rapes occurred on hospital wards. Twenty-two sexual assaults and one rape took place in NHS Grampian, in my region, and 17 sexual assaults and three rapes took place in NHS Tayside. Out of a total of 288 incidents, only 156 individuals were charged.

Those are spine-chilling figures. By no means is that a complete picture. We do not have data for almost two thirds of Scotland's NHS and private hospitals. Underreporting and a lack of data management mean that we simply do not know the full scale of the problem. We can all agree that even one sexual assault in our NHS is too many.

Whether it is to receive medical care ourselves or to visit a poorly loved one, we are often at our most vulnerable when we enter a hospital. We are placing our physical and psychological safety in the hands of health boards and NHS staff. We are entrusting our children and our family to their care. We must be able to do so without fear. Staff, too, are vulnerable. Members will recall the shocking revelations in autumn 2023 about female surgeons being sexually assaulted and harassed by male colleagues in the operating theatre. The safety of patients, visitors and staff must be the SNP Government's top priority when it comes to the NHS.

I was extremely concerned to learn that some women are afraid to seek treatment because of the potential risk to their safety. I hope that the minister will address that in closing the debate. Earlier this year, I raised with the First Minister concerns about the Carseview psychiatric unit in NHS Tayside, which has mixed-sex wards. The WRN's research suggests that seven sexual assaults and two rapes took place in this so-called secure psychiatric setting.

One of my constituents received treatment in Carseview for postpartum psychosis following the birth of her second baby. I understand that, at that most vulnerable point in her life, she was repeatedly subjected to another patient exposing himself. She was terrified and traumatised, she was separated from her support network and she was scared for her safety on a mixed-sex ward. How can that be? Where was the duty of care? For women giving birth or accessing support for serious mental ill health or learning disabilities, safeguarding has to be of paramount importance.

The Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee recently heard evidence that 90 per cent of women with learning difficulties and disabilities have been subjected to sexual abuse,

with 68 per cent of them experiencing sexual abuse before turning 18. Women have been raped or sexually assaulted at Scottish maternity hospitals on at least five different occasions, and one of those rapes was reported at Aberdeen maternity hospital. Sexual assaults have also been reported in other psychiatric units and palliative settings.

That cannot go on. We must see urgent action from the SNP Government, health boards, NHS partners and Police Scotland to allay the concerns of women and girls.

What is the way ahead? I often say that we cannot manage what we cannot measure. I understand that Healthcare Improvement Scotland is working to standardise the reporting of incidents, and that is to be welcomed, but we need details from the Scottish Government on how that will operate in practice. To address the risks and weaknesses and to put preventative policies in place, we need to see the data.

There is a wider issue about mixed-sex wards. Protecting single-sex spaces in our public sector should be at the top of the policy agenda, and I have had rigorous exchanges with SNP ministers on that issue. Since 2005, the Scottish Government has expected health boards to ensure that their facilities comply with the guidelines and recommendations on the elimination of mixed-sex accommodation that were published 25 years ago. However, that is just not happening on the ground, and I think that that is evident from the data.

Our hospitals must be safe for people—especially women and children—who access those settings. The SNP Government must act swiftly to address sexual violence in Scotland's hospitals. *[Applause.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms White. I say to our visitors in the gallery, who are all most welcome in the Parliament, that we do not have clapping in the gallery because we, MSPs, are the participants in the process. However, visitors are very welcome to observe the process from the gallery. Thank you for your co-operation.

17:40

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am pleased to contribute to this evening's debate, and I thank my colleague Tess White for bringing this important issue to the chamber. I also congratulate Mary Howden and Carolyn Brown on publishing the report.

The stark point is that, as we have heard, between 2019 and 2024, 276 sexual assaults and 23 rapes took place in 57 hospitals in Scotland. Those incidents included 11 cases of sexual

assault in NHS Forth Valley, 34 in NHS Fife and 17 in NHS Tayside, all of which fall within my region. However, the Women's Rights Network report points out that those incidents are just the ones that we know about and that there are many that we do not know about. When we debate the threat to single-sex spaces and the need to protect those spaces in settings such as hospitals, we must take into account the wider context. We will continue to highlight that issue in the chamber, even if the Government would rather not debate and discuss it.

One of my biggest issues with sexual violence in hospitals is the lack of reporting. The Women's Rights Network report reveals that data on sexual assault is not routinely kept by NHS boards or Police Scotland. The report sets out that 67 per cent of hospitals simply did not collect the data and that a further 4 per cent refused to reveal the data on the grounds of privacy. That means that many of those situations are not known about.

What is the true extent of the issue in our health boards across Scotland? What procedures and guidance are in place for Police Scotland to deal with those incidents? The report concludes that there is no evidence of a coherent data-keeping system and that the recording of data on sexual assaults has to improve. That should be the case—it has to improve.

We need to ensure that there is robust transparency when it comes to that issue in our hospitals, and the report rightly calls for measures in that regard to be introduced. However, several reports from the Care Quality Commission have already made the same recommendations, only to be ignored. How many more incidents will it take to force the Scottish Government to take the issue seriously and take action?

As well as improving records, we must ensure that safeguarding measures are put in place and that they are transparent for patients in hospitals. Regardless of the law surrounding the issue, the proven track record is complex. We understand that, but urgent action needs to be taken to address the scourge of sexual violence in Scotland's hospitals. It is time for the denial to stop and for information to be clarified.

My party will continue to display the leadership and the drive to ensure that public sector organisations and health boards have some direction on this issue. Directives should require them to prepare single-sex spaces for biological women and girls. That should be the minimum that we are looking at. In most cases, that would simply remind organisations of their legal obligation—something that even the First Minister has accepted is crystal clear.

Women and girls deserve nothing less than a clear, commonsense approach when it comes to hospital safety. I urge the Scottish Government to seek the data and ensure that it is provided. We must take action to ensure that that data is required to be produced. Hospitals should be a safe place for treatment, not an environment for sexual violence.

17:45

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I thank Tess White for securing this debate on the research that has been undertaken by the Women's Rights Network into safety in hospitals. I was able to highlight that research in a debate last week, and I have raised the report at First Minister's question time. I felt that the response that I received on that occasion could have been more expansive, so I hope that the minister is able to engage more fully with the topic this evening.

I thank the Women's Rights Network for its work in exposing the levels of sexual assaults and rapes in our hospitals. It was not an easy task. It was laborious, as, at first, the figures were not available, but the researchers persisted. By identifying the number of rapes and sexual assaults taking place in hospitals in Scotland through freedom of information requests, they have highlighted the extent of the problem, and the figures are shocking.

Almost 250 sexual assaults and rapes have taken place in Scottish hospitals over the past five years. Some 163 of those rapes and sexual assaults happened on hospital wards, although it is important to say that we do not know whether they are single-sex or mixed-sex wards. The figures from Police Scotland are more shocking, as they reveal that those incidents took place in only 57 of the 198 hospitals in Scotland. If we take into account the fact that the figures include the pandemic years, when the hospital population was reduced and the number of visitors was heavily restricted, it is clear that those figures are likely to reflect underreporting, and those offences are often underreported across society anyway.

As well as shining a light on those horrendous crimes, the report highlights the areas in which there is a lack of information, which makes it more challenging to provide a policy response.

Patients in hospitals are vulnerable, frail and dependent on others to meet their needs. At times, they will be unconscious or disorientated. They are often in a state of undress, and they are in unfamiliar surroundings.

We know the pressure that our hospitals are under. In Fife, ambulances regularly have to wait outside accident and emergency departments as people cannot be admitted, and through-flow is at

times impossible as there is a lack of suitable beds. The recent report from the Royal College of Nursing describes a collapse in care standards across Scotland's hospitals, with increasing reports of corridor care, which results in people being left vulnerable and in undignified settings. All of those conditions could lead to opportunistic attacks.

The limited information that the Women's Rights Network was able to obtain leaves many unanswered questions. When we are thinking about how to respond and how to improve safeguarding and security, there are many uncertainties. It is not certain whether assaults were carried out by other patients or staff, or whether they were carried out on patients or staff, although the high number that took place on a hospital ward suggests that patients are often the victims.

Most concerning was that the research found that assaults were not routinely recorded. It would appear that, sometimes, they are underplayed or minimised, as if the setting excuses some behaviours. That is reflected in the fact that 133 hospitals do not hold the data.

The First Minister was right when he said that all sexual assaults are against the law and that they should be immediately reported to the police. That is similar to the statements from NHS boards, which say that, when incidents are reported, people are encouraged to report to the police. However, I do not think that those responses sufficiently reflect the significance of the location and our responsibility to NHS patients and staff. There is little examination of the figures, there is little understanding of why Stobhill hospital, the Edinburgh royal infirmary and the Cygnet Wallace private hospital have the highest rates, and there is hardly any discussion about why women should accept being at greater risk in psychiatric hospitals.

There is scant evidence that the figures are being taken seriously as a collective issue by NHS boards or the Government. There is no piece of work that asks why this situation is happening in hospitals and what steps are being taken to prevent further rapes and assaults.

The report from the Women's Rights Network makes a number of recommendations, and I urge the Scottish Government and NHS boards to consider how to make progress on them. The recommendations include steps to minimise the risk of sexual assault, to maintain accurate recording of incidents and to make greater progress on single-sex wards in all settings. We must not ignore that research, and we must take action.

17:49

Sharon Dowe (South Scotland) (Con): I thank Tess White for bringing the debate to the chamber. I will focus my comments on the first line of today's motion, which is:

"That the Parliament considers that single-sex spaces for women and girls across Scotland's public services are being eroded, with worrying implications for their rights and safety".

The issue of protecting single-sex spaces for women is being spoken about everywhere. It is talked about in the streets, at the school gates, in the pubs, in the media on a daily basis and now even in the legal system, with the on-going case of brave Fife nurse Sandie Peggie. Today, I want to talk about three specific areas where the Scottish Government's abject failure to protect single-sex spaces for women is being felt most painfully.

The first area is schools. As of 2024, not all secondaries in Scotland provided suitable single-sex toilets. Forcing young girls to share facilities with teenage boys is utterly shameful, and most parents cannot believe that we have got ourselves into that position. We know from evidence that is provided to us by girls that it is making them scared to use the bathrooms at schools, which causes them to miss lessons or perhaps not even turn up to school at all.

It may be an uncomfortable issue for the Government to think about, but when a girl is going through her early teenage years, it is—as all females across the chamber are well aware—an incredibly difficult time for her. The idea that schoolgirls should have to go through experiences such as beginning their monthly periods while pushing past boys to get into a small cubicle that leaves a gap at the top of the door, separated from those boys only by a door that is a quarter of an inch thick, is utterly inhumane. The First Minister must drop the hesitation and the placating of various fringe groups and issue a simple order: that all secondary schools and public services must provide suitable separate toilets for girls as a matter of the utmost urgency.

We know that the younger members of society are being affected by this issue, and so too are the most vulnerable. The situation in women's prisons is beyond a joke. We have well-documented cases that have made Scotland a global laughing stock, from double rapists putting on blonde wigs to gain a place in a female prison to male inmates having state-facilitated surgery to shave down an Adam's apple. Those examples would be comical if they were not so deadly serious. The Parliament hears a lot about the vulnerability of women prisoners and how so many of them have endured violent sexual and physical abuse at the hands of men. When those accounts are shared, the Scottish Government nods its

head in sympathy. At the same time, however, it does little to keep them safe from predatory males inside prison walls. From recent media reports, it appears that that now includes female visitors who are visiting male prisons being subjected to searches that are conducted by male-bodied trans women.

We also have the example of the police. Earlier this month, a leading lawyer warned that Police Scotland could run into the same difficulties that NHS Fife is facing. She said that female police officers, for obvious reasons, do not want to share changing facilities with men, but that they are also likely to be too scared to raise the matter, fearful of an employment tribunal, suspension or an end to what could otherwise be a strong and successful career—all on the altar of a dangerous gender ideology designed by the SNP Government and pandered to by everyone else except the Scottish Conservatives.

I hope that every member in the chamber can get behind Tess White's motion today, but I especially hope that female members do so. We have a particular duty to women and girls across Scotland, and we must stand up for them.

17:53

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I thank Tess White for bringing the debate to the chamber. I had the opportunity to attend the event that she sponsored in Parliament a few weeks ago, at which the Women's Rights Network presented its findings to MSPs and guests. I have to say that those findings were profoundly shocking.

It is beyond question that our hospitals should be places where patients and staff alike know that they will be kept safe and treated with dignity. As Tess White said, the report tells us that, of the 288 sexual assaults and rapes that were recorded in Scottish hospitals in the past five years, more than half occurred on a hospital ward. The surroundings where those assaults took place included a children's hospital, two maternity hospitals and a palliative care hospital.

Shockingly, as we have already heard, Police Scotland could give details of only 29 per cent of cases, so the real number of sexual assaults will be far higher, as many will go unreported. The opportunity to commit sexual assaults will, I believe, be increased because we still have mixed-sex wards.

For 20 years now, first Scottish Labour and then SNP Administrations have required health boards to eliminate mixed-sex accommodation in our hospitals, yet in 2024, only two health board areas—Dumfries and Galloway and Orkney—confirmed that they offered single-sex accommodation across all their wards. The

remaining 12 health boards that replied offered mixed-sex accommodation in at least some of their wards—a far cry from the pledge by the SNP. I wonder whether the minister can tell me now, or in summing up, whether that situation has improved at all.

If the SNP Government had kept its promise, we might not have the level of abuse that goes on in our hospitals today. How disappointing it is that women are let down and that, even when the Government commits to a clear principle, it simply fails to deliver in practice.

So, will the Government commit to urgently working with health boards and Police Scotland to investigate the circumstances of those assaults, including whether they happened on mixed-sex wards? Will it ensure that there is, in the NHS, more accurate recording and reporting of sexual crimes in the future? What action will be taken to prevent such assaults from happening in the first place?

The report demonstrates that our hospitals are not as safe as they should be. The reality is that, too often, women are stuck not even in mixed-sex wards but in corridors. Most members in the chamber will be aware of the recent report from the Royal College of Nursing, in which one Scottish nurse described having to use privacy screens around patients so that they could use the bedpan. As the director of the Royal College of Nursing Scotland said,

“This is completely unacceptable for patient safety and staff wellbeing.”

I could not agree more with those comments.

All that remains for me to ask is this: will the SNP Government live up to its long-standing pledge to end mixed-sex wards, or will we be here in a year’s time discussing yet another report of increased numbers of women experiencing assaults in NHS Scotland?

17:57

Ash Regan (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba): I congratulate Tess White on bringing this important debate to the chamber, and I congratulate the Women’s Rights Network on its report.

Observers of proceedings in the chamber and in some of our committees over the past months may conclude that sex realists are from Venus and gender ideologists are from Mars, such is the difference between the two positions, so I seek now to bring some clarity where confusion has been reigning across all levels of the Government and in our public sector.

I start with the purpose and effect of the Equality Act 2010. Its purpose is to balance rights across nine protected characteristics, but those rights are

not hierarchical, as some people seem to believe that they are. Its effect is to protect individuals from discrimination, harassment and victimisation, based on those protected characteristics. The purpose of the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992 is to ensure the health, safety, welfare, privacy and dignity of employees, and the effect of those regulations is to ensure that employees are provided with legally compliant welfare facilities, including single-sex toilets, changing rooms and washing facilities.

The certainty of the protections that are provided by the Health and Safety Executive regulations and the 2010 act cannot be overridden by internal policies, and equality impact assessments are not nice-to-haves.

I will bust some myths, given the confusion around the case-by-case approach that the Government seems to be labouring under at the moment. Public bodies and the Government appear to think that access to single-sex provision must be decided on an individual case-by-case basis, and that blanket policies that exclude all males from female-only spaces are unlawful. That is wrong. Blanket policies that exclude all males, regardless of how they identify, are lawful, and the fairness of a policy must be assessed not on the fairness of its application to individuals but on the application of the policy.

It is critical to understand that sex-based safeguarding is a result of the risk of mixed-sex access in vulnerable situations. The consequence for women arising from the risk of access by any males in female-only spaces—be they prisons, hospital wards, changing rooms or toilets—is that it removes that sex-based safeguarding. Allowing the introduction of risk by removing the assurance of single-sex spaces is a dereliction of governance and fails women.

Data is also critical to good governance, and there are clear obligations on that under the law. The Istanbul convention requires state parties to collect data on all forms of violence against women. As a minimum requirement, recorded data on victims and perpetrators should be disaggregated by sex, age and type of violence, as well as by the relationship of the perpetrator to the victim and the geographical location. Therefore, for hospitals and other public bodies to fail to collect that data on forms of violence against women is a breach of international obligations and a failure by the state with regard to women.

The Government must get a grip on that outrageous situation and demonstrate that Scotland values and will protect the safety, privacy and dignity of women and girls. Quite frankly, we expect nothing less.

18:01

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank Tess White for bringing the debate to the chamber. I welcome the speeches by members who have already spoken on this really important matter. I will make a short contribution, following on from questions that I have asked the cabinet secretary and the minister about the provision of single-sex toilets.

For context, as others have said, single-sex spaces that are based on biological sex are protected under the Equality Act 2010. Women and girls have a right to feel safe in our public buildings such as schools and hospitals. They are often in those places when they are at their most vulnerable and, further, they require to attend those places, so Government has a responsibility to ensure that those places are safe and comply with the law.

Recently, we have heard about patients having to wait in corridors and the strain that the NHS is under. Given that, we can see why people are asking the Government to engage with them in light of the “How safe are our Scottish hospitals?” report.

We can all agree that the report’s findings are particularly worrying. For 20 years, the Scottish Government, first under Scottish Labour and now under the SNP, has required health boards to eliminate mixed-sex accommodations in hospitals. However, as my colleague Jackie Baillie indicated, at the moment, we think that only two health boards comply with that: NHS Dumfries and Galloway and NHS Orkney. That is unacceptable, and I believe that the Government must take some responsibility for it. I agree with my colleague Claire Baker and others who have said that the Government needs to have more engagement with us on those matters so that we can get the information that is required.

To go back to the questions that I asked the cabinet secretary and the minister, the issue is about engagement. I asked three separate questions—one in the chamber, to the cabinet secretary, and two written questions—on the provision of single-sex toilets. However, I feel that the Government was unable to give me full answers about the way in which it is ensuring that the laws are being applied in Scotland, and I feel that it is important for the Government to take responsibility in that regard.

The cabinet secretary’s response to the question that I asked in the chamber was:

“I say once again that those regulations are also included in the Government’s belief that all public bodies should fulfil their obligations under all pieces of legislation with reference to this issue.”—[*Official Report*, 25 February 2025; c 15.]

If the cabinet secretary is saying that that is the Government’s belief, I think that, possibly, the Government should be doing more.

I will end by asking the minister whether the Government can give us assurance that it will take some responsibility and look to assess the current situation in our NHS and other organisations, particularly ones to which the Government provides public funds. Gathering that information should not be difficult, but I think that it is essential.

18:04

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): I will not take much time, Presiding Officer. I have just decided to say a few words, after listening to my colleagues today.

I thank the Women’s Rights Network for its report. I was at the event that has been referred to, and I found the information to be quite shocking and stark. I am not sure whether the minister or the cabinet secretary were at the event, but I hope that they have read the report, which is incredibly shocking, as others have said.

I do not think that the Government can continue to obfuscate on this particular issue with regard to protection of women and girls. It has quoted the Equality Act 2010 *ad verbum*, and we know that those protections are already set out in the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992, as Ash Regan said.

The public are losing patience and are, I am afraid to say, losing trust in the Scottish Government’s ability to protect women and girls. The report refers to the women’s health plan. We fly that high and are proud to talk about the work that is going on in respect of that plan. However, the SNP Government does the same in this respect as it does with some of the other targets that it has set. The Scottish Government says that the priority is to reduce inequalities in outcomes for women with regard to general health, but we know, from looking at the content of the WRN report, that the Scottish Government is adopting a policy of self-identification.

We did not pass the Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill, but self-ID seems to have seeped into the minds of those in all public organisations, and into the guidance that is being produced. That is damaging and has led to sexual assaults and rapes in hospitals, which is absolutely disgraceful. We do not even have clear data on that, because Police Scotland—as Sharon Dowey said—is not collecting data on sex or age, and the hospitals are not collecting data, so nobody knows the true extent of the damage that self-ID is doing.

I therefore ask the minister: how can we reduce inequalities? The situation is absolutely shameful. How can we protect women? It is absolutely right that the minister and the Scottish Government will—I hope—take the report 100 per cent seriously, and it is right that a cabinet secretary and a minister should come to the chamber and answer, once and for all, the questions that all of us in the chamber tonight have been asking for weeks on end without a result.

18:07

The Minister for Public Health and Women's Health (Jenni Minto): Every member who has spoken in the debate today recognises that violence against women and girls is abhorrent and unacceptable. That is the case in our hospital estate, as it is in every part of our society. It is shocking and depressing that it remains the case that there is violence, including sexual violence, at the hands of men wherever women live and work. I agree with what Tess White said in her opening speech that one attack in a hospital or anywhere else is one too many.

Such violence has a profound, long-lasting and devastating impact on the lives of women and girls, and those around them. It damages health and wellbeing, limits freedom and potential, and is a fundamental violation of human rights. In my office, I have a 16 days of activism against violence against women candle. I see it every day, and the movement is something that I very much understand and support. Although I have not read the WRN report in its entirety, I have read some summaries of it, and it is shocking.

We are, I think united together in our recognition that the drivers of violence against women and girls are firmly anchored in the behaviour of men. It is men who must accept that they need to do much more to deliver the culture and the national change that is necessary to remove that stain that remains with us. As the First Minister said during the debate to mark the annual 16 days of activism against gender-based violence campaign last year,

“men must take up the challenge ... about being a better guy and reflecting on our own behaviour.” —[*Official Report*, 5 December 2024; c 116.]

Violence against women and girls is, and always will be, an issue that the Government takes seriously. That is reflected in our partnership with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities through “Equally Safe: Scotland's Strategy for Preventing and Eradicating Violence Against Women and Girls”. The strategy sets out a vision of

“A strong and flourishing”
country

“where all individuals are ... safe and respected, and where women and girls live free from all forms of violence, abuse and ... the attitudes that ... perpetuate it.”

The strategy works to prevent violence

“from occurring in the first place”

and to build and sustain the capability and capacity of support services and strengthen the justice response to victims and perpetrators.

A number of members have commented on single-sex spaces for women in hospitals. Jackie Baillie is correct that, since 2005, we have expected NHS boards to ensure that their facilities comply with guidelines on the elimination of mixed-sex accommodations. In all new hospital developments, there should be a presumption that there will be 100 per cent single rooms, and where existing accommodation has been refurbished, that the figure will be as close to 100 per cent as possible.

Tess White: Will the minister take an intervention?

Jenni Minto: I am just going to continue, if Tess White does not mind.

There are limited exceptions for areas such as intensive care units. Within our hospitals, a number of health boards are participating in the equally safe at work employer accreditation programme. Alongside our commitment to the equally safe strategy, NHS once for Scotland policies on gender-based violence and sexual harassment—

Tess White: Will the minister take an intervention?

Jenni Minto: I am going to continue, if the member does not mind.

Those policies are due to be published soon and will provide a standardised approach for all health boards. We are also working with the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh to roll out its “Let's remove it” campaign, which is designed to raise awareness of sexual misconduct. Furthermore, we have been working with Police Scotland and other parties, using the your safety matters initiative, on tackling violence and aggression across our front-line services.

In addition, supporting survivors is key. In order to support victims and change attitudes, we are providing more than £5.3 million to rape crisis centres through our delivering equally safe fund. We have taken robust action to tackle sexual offending and we are encouraging more victims to come forward, improving support and modernising the law on sexual offences. It is vital that we progress our vision for justice and that we deliver a truly person-centred and trauma-informed

system through the Victims, Witnesses and Justice Reform (Scotland) Bill.

The Minister for Equalities recently announced a £2.4 million increase to the delivering equally safe fund for 2025-26. That will allow all funding recipients to continue the vital work that they undertake to prevent violence and to support survivors of violence against women and girls.

Stopping violence against women and girls before it occurs must be central to our collective efforts. To do that, we must tackle the root cause of the problem—

Claire Baker: Will the minister take an intervention?

Jenni Minto: I am just going to continue—

Claire Baker: I am trying to be helpful; it is not intended to be—

Jenni Minto: I am happy to take an intervention from Claire Baker.

Claire Baker: Thank you, minister.

We are talking about hospitals. As the minister will know, in six out of seven cases of rape against women, it is a person whom they know who carries out the offence. One would surmise that in a hospital, however, such things might be more opportunistic, with a stranger carrying out the crime. Will the Government look at that and undertake more examination of the figures that we have in the public domain?

Jenni Minto: I thank Claire Baker for that intervention. I agree that we have to look at the data and collect more of it, which is why we are continuing to work with Healthcare Improvement Scotland to improve recording and reporting. I hope that that gives some comfort to Ms Baker.

Stopping violence against women and girls before it occurs must be central to our collective efforts. To do that, we must tackle the root cause of the problem, which—as I said—is gender inequality. Women's inequality is both a cause and a consequence of violence against women, which is why the equally safe strategy emphasises the importance of primary prevention and focuses on the structures, systems, policies and assumptions that we live with.

In addition to working with Healthcare Improvement Scotland, we are working closely with Police Scotland on reporting of sexual crimes, and through our your safety matters partnership group.

Claire Baker: Will the minister take an intervention?

Jenni Minto: I am concluding.

It is through addressing the fundamental causes of violence against women and girls that we can effectively respond to this critical issue. Hospitals should be places of safety for patients and staff, and their safety is paramount. Assaults on patients or staff are abhorrent, and all instances of violent behaviour, including sexual assaults, should be reported and escalated to the police as quickly as possible.

I have listened to what many members have said during the debate, and I will comment on two points. Tomorrow morning, I will meet Professor Anna Glasier, who is Scotland's wonderful women's health champion, and I will take the discussion from the debate to her, in order to have a further conversation with her.

I would also be content to engage with members who have taken part in the debate, because I think that it is important that we have a cross-party solution to the issue, and a cross-party approach to how we can work better with our health boards.

I believe that violence against women reflects the worst aspects of our society, and we must do more to ensure that women and girls are safe, feel safe and are respected.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate.

Meeting closed at 18:15.

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