



OFFICIAL REPORT  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

DRAFT

# Meeting of the Parliament

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# Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 7 May 2025

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

## Portfolio Question Time

### Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** Good afternoon. The first item of business is portfolio questions, and the first portfolio is rural affairs, land reform and islands.

I remind members that we are tight for time throughout the afternoon. A number of members want to ask supplementary questions, so answers will need to be as brief as possible.

#### Inheritance Tax (Farmers)

**1. Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on how it is challenging the United Kingdom Government's proposed inheritance tax changes for farmers. (S6O-04608)

**The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie):** Disappointingly, the Scottish Government was not consulted on or notified of the UK Government's changes to agricultural property relief and business property relief. The changes will hit family businesses across Scotland hard. We are now working constructively with the UK Government on ensuring that Scottish tenant farmers remain exempt from inheritance tax.

The Scottish Government must be engaged in any reserved tax changes that will impact Scotland in the future. It remains our position that inheritance tax powers should be devolved to the Scottish Parliament, as that would ensure that the tax could be suitably tailored to Scotland's needs.

**Meghan Gallacher:** Farmers in Scotland could face devastating consequences as a result of the UK Government's proposed inheritance tax changes. As Labour has let farmers down, farmers will now be turning to the Scottish Government for its support, but the last budget saw a real-terms cut for rural affairs, and yesterday's programme for government will have given Scotland's farmers little confidence or certainty. What new action can the Scottish Government take to support our farming sector?

**Jim Fairlie:** The member talks about what the Scottish Government has done. It has given absolute certainty to the farming community that we are delivering a programme for government that delivers for Scottish farmers. We will be

investing more than £660 million per year in Scottish agriculture; we have ensured that there will be direct payments; and we are working with the sector—and across all sectors—to work out how we can reduce emissions while delivering payments to allow our farmers to continue producing food.

### Fishing Licence Authorisation (National Marine Plan Consideration)

**2. Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government, when authorising fishing licences, what process it follows to comply with any legal duty under section 15 of the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010, and the judgment in the Open Seas Trust v the Scottish Ministers case, to act in accordance with the national marine plan. (S6O-04609)

**The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie):** Following the outcome of the judicial review proceedings, the Scottish Government has put in place new arrangements in relation to fishing licence authorisation decisions to ensure that the national marine plan is taken into account, as is required by section 15 of the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010. Marine directorate officials have developed training and tools for decision makers to support that process.

**Patrick Harvie:** Scottish ministers have already lost two court cases on this matter, in July 2023 and April 2024. It is nearly two years since that first case, and my understanding is that the Open Seas Trust has alleged that Scottish ministers have continued to issue licences unlawfully and did not consider the national marine plan when they made those authorisations. Indeed, that has happened as recently as January. Will the minister commit to publishing in detail the new arrangements that he refers to—the detail of which, I understand, has not been made public—and to ensuring that the Government starts following the legal duties of the 2010 act and that authorisations do not allow significant harm to happen to priority marine habitats?

**Jim Fairlie:** Following the judicial review outcome, the Open Seas Trust and the marine directorate have been in regular correspondence on the processes that have been adopted to comply with section 15 of the 2010 act and the specific information relating to individual licence transfers. The directorate continues to consider and respond to those information requests in line with our obligations, including in relation to data protection.

We have introduced processes to ensure that fisheries licensing decisions are carried out in line with the court's ruling. As part of those processes, we have developed an assessment template to support the consideration of the relevant policies

in the national marine plan, and I will ask my officials to write to Mr Harvie to confirm that.

### Horticulture

**3. Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to promote horticulture. (S6O-04610)

**The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie):** The Scottish Government greatly values the horticultural sector's important contributions to the Scottish economy, society and the environment, providing plants and trees for gardens and green spaces and producing high-quality fruit and vegetables.

I have engaged extensively across the horticultural sector to address challenges. Examples of action that we have taken to promote horticulture include our small producers pilot fund, support for grow-your-own initiatives and the berry festival, which will be launched at this year's Royal Highland Show. I am pleased that the fruit and veg aid scheme will continue to support producer organisations in Scotland operating in the edible horticultural sector from 2026.

**Annabelle Ewing:** The horticultural sector has the potential to play an even more significant role in Scotland's economic life and wellbeing, but to do so, horticulture needs a champion in Government, given its cross-portfolio impacts in areas such as the economy, tourism, health, education, environment and biosecurity. Will the minister commit today to being horticulture's champion across Government, and will he outline what further action the Government will take to promote the success of the horticultural sector in Scotland?

**Jim Fairlie:** I would be absolutely delighted to commit to being the champion for horticulture. I recognise the significant role that the sector plays in the Scottish Government's policy priorities; indeed, I recently wrote to ministerial colleagues to highlight cross-portfolio interests, and I will soon facilitate a meeting to pursue integration of environmental and therapeutic horticulture into cross-Government strategies.

I very much welcome the Horticultural Trades Association's regular engagement, which has highlighted opportunities for us to work with the sector towards shared goals across a wide range of policy areas, and I look forward to updating ministers and sector representatives on my continuing work to promote the success of horticulture in Scotland.

I also recognise the work of colleagues in advocating for the sector, particularly Annabelle Ewing, Christine Grahame and even my old friend Rachael Hamilton, and the work that they do on the cross-party group.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** On that note, I call Rachel Hamilton.

**Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** I thank my friend for the compliment.

In the light of the news that we have heard today about the Redhall walled garden in Edinburgh, which is at risk of closure due to Government cuts, I would just note that when Jim Fairlie kindly visited the CPG, he said that he would work with the health minister to ensure that a preventative agenda and working with horticulture to promote wellbeing were high on his agenda. What has the minister done in relation to those conversations?

**Jim Fairlie:** As I have just said, I have written to all ministers. Given the time constraints, I will write to Rachael Hamilton with all the details on the points that she raises.

I am sorry, but I know nothing of the details of the walled garden issue. If the member wants to give me those details, I will follow up the issue.

### Food Security

**4. Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government when it last engaged with the United Kingdom Government on the subject of food security. (S6O-04611)

**The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie):** The Scottish Government takes every opportunity to engage with the UK Government, and we continue to make representations to the Government on a range of issues, such as food security. The formal mechanism is the interministerial group for environment, food and rural affairs, which last met on 27 January. There are also regular meetings at official level to discuss food security. We were deeply disappointed that the March IMG was cancelled, because the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs was unable to attend, so we have urged the UK Government to prioritise those important meetings.

**Jackie Dunbar:** Was there any indication at the previous meeting attended by the UK Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland that Labour cares about, or even understands, the needs of our agricultural industries in Scotland? Labour is threatening family farms with its agricultural property relief changes, it has Barnettised agricultural support funding and it does not seem to be in any hurry to take steps to undo the harms of Brexit.

**Jim Fairlie:** The Scottish Government is absolutely committed to working with and supporting our agricultural sector. As part of that, we engage with counterparts in the UK

Government, as I did last week, to ensure that we are doing all that we can to support our farmers, crofters and landowners. Although I was encouraged that the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland wanted to hear from Scottish agricultural stakeholders last week, I was very clear about pressing our position on a variety of issues, including the APR changes, and I will continue to do so in the future.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We have a couple of supplementary questions.

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** When discussing food security with the UK Government, did the Scottish Government share its proposals for the human rights bill, specifically in relation to how it would implement a right to food? If so, were those proposals within the competence of this Parliament, and what response was received?

**Jim Fairlie:** The round-table meeting was the work of the UK Government, and it was more interested in hearing from the sector itself, which I was glad about. The issues raised will be taken up jointly with the UK Government, and the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland and I will be liaising on them.

**Tim Eagle (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** Changes in land use have worrying consequences for food security, with projections showing that nearly 20 per cent of farmland in England could be removed from food production in order to meet green targets. In April, the minister, in replying to a question from Tess White, said that no assessment had been made at a national level of the impact of the loss of land from energy infrastructure developments, where responsibilities cross the UK and Scottish Governments. Given the importance of food security, will the minister now commit to conducting a study, as has been done in the UK, of the potential impacts in Scotland of loss of land for alternative uses, and its potential impact on Scottish food security?

**Jim Fairlie:** The Scottish Government has been clear that protecting our food security and resilience is a key priority for Scotland, and we continue to do that through a range of measures.

### Quota Management Groups

**5. Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the introduction of quota management groups and whether they would benefit fishers and coastal communities. (S6O-04612)

**The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie):** The "Evaluation of the Quota Management Group (QMG) Trial" report was published on 7 April 2025. The report explores the

suitability of quota management groups as a means of managing Scottish sea fish quotas, and recommends that the quota management groups are formalised by the Scottish Government. The Scottish Government will consider the report and the next steps in relation to the trial.

**Audrey Nicoll:** I thank the minister for the update. In 2020, the Scottish Government initiated a quota management groups trial. What does the evaluation of that trial demonstrate, how has any learning from the trial been carried forward and how does the Scottish Government envisage that QMGs might maximise the contribution that fisheries make to Scotland?

**Jim Fairlie:** The evaluation found that the trial had achieved its aims, and that QMGs are a viable alternative to producer organisations and had improved the information available to the Scottish Government. It recommended that QMGs be formalised.

The Scottish Government is considering its next steps following the report; however, the trial has given us a greater understanding of the operation of the quota management system, and in particular how the fish quota is utilised by sectoral groups.

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** Together with some local creel fishermen, I have been increasingly concerned about the number of creels that are being used off the Fife coast. One company has claimed to own 18,000 creels, and that is causing great concern about the size of the catch and the healthiness of the stock.

When the minister is considering the quota management groups and inshore fisheries measures, will he consider limiting the number of creels that are used?

**Jim Fairlie:** I am not aware of the specific case that Willie Rennie brings to the chamber, but I am more than happy to respond to him in writing. If he wants to write to us, we will take that up for him.

### Farm Incomes

**6. Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to figures showing that farm incomes are at a five-year low. (S6O-04613)

**Jim Fairlie:** We know that farmers very much appreciate the Scottish Government's commitment to maintaining direct payments as we transition from the common agricultural policy, recognising the stability that that gives to the sector. That is in stark contrast to the current and previous United Kingdom Governments. We note the results of the Scottish farm business income report, which demonstrates the volatility of the sector, thereby reinforcing that our approach is the correct one.

That is why we continue to provide the most generous package of support in the UK, investing around £660 million in agriculture support, and why, this year, we introduced the future farming investment scheme, providing £14 million to invest in business efficiencies to benefit nature and climate.

**Murdo Fraser:** I thank the minister for his response—perhaps he can tell us when that financial support plan will actually be published, because we are still waiting for it.

I also want to raise an issue that was raised with me last night at the NFU Scotland parliamentary reception, which I know that the minister attended. Farmers are concerned about the issue of public procurement and the need to have healthy, home-grown, locally produced food on the menu in schools and hospitals. What more is the Scottish Government going to do to make that happen?

**Jim Fairlie:** Murdo Fraser raises a very good point. As a result of the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Act 2022, good food nation plans are now in the process of being created, and I very much hope that local authorities will take those plans and work with local communities on aspects such as purchasing local food, including venison—as we know, there is a deer management issue in Scotland right now. If we can get all those people together and talking about how we can make that work, that would be very positive, and it is something that we should be doing.

**Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP):** Now that the dust has settled on Murdo Fraser's party being roundly booted out of Government, how would the minister assess what the Tories did for farmers while they were in Government? How did that impact farm incomes, and how does the truth of the matter stack up against the Tories' pretence to be the champions of agriculture and rural Scotland?

**Jim Fairlie:** There is absolutely no doubt that the Westminster Tory Government caused significant difficulties for Scotland's agricultural sector. The harms from Brexit are deep and long lasting, in particular the creation of issues of cost and trade barriers for those who are involved in exporting and issues in attracting labour.

What the Tories started, Labour is continuing. Energy costs for businesses that are 50 per cent higher than in the European Union make everything more expensive for farmers, especially their supply chain. The uncertainty and failure to stick with any decisions on future payments will not have helped, even though, thankfully, we make those decisions in Scotland. For the avoidance of doubt, the Scottish National Party Government promised to maintain direct payments, and we have. We promised certainty

and stability, which we have delivered. We promised to work with the industry to co-develop our new support framework, which is what we are doing.

**Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab):** The minister was asked about the level of farm incomes, but what about the distribution of farm incomes? When will the Scottish Government start to publish information about the end ownership and control of the recipients of farm support? Recipients and beneficiaries of public money should be a matter of public record. The minister must surely know that that was legislated for last year by the Parliament. When will that finally be enacted by the Government?

**Jim Fairlie:** The distribution of farm support is a complex issue, because there are data protection issues. However, the distribution of £660 million into the rural economy will ensure that it has a bright future.

### Anaerobic Digestion Facilities

**7. Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the rural affairs secretary has had with ministerial colleagues regarding whether anaerobic digestion facilities can support the decarbonisation of the agricultural sector by providing low-carbon fertiliser and the creation of biogas. (S6O-04614)

**The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie):** Although I have not had specific discussions on this issue, our draft bioenergy policy statement recognises anaerobic digestion's potential to support decarbonisation across hard-to-decarbonise sectors, including agriculture, and to contribute to a more circular economy. The Scottish Government is supportive of farmers and crofters wishing to reduce their energy costs and emissions through small farm-scale renewables and energy efficiency measures. We also recognise the value of processing farming and other organic waste through anaerobic digestion and the important contribution that that makes to Scotland's renewable and bioenergy ambitions and to reducing our emissions.

**Emma Harper:** With 48 per cent of Scotland's dairy herd in the south-west of Scotland, there is potential to harness anaerobic digestion and biogas production to not only cut greenhouse gas emissions but to provide a source of off-grid energy for rural areas, which have disproportionately higher numbers of households that are in fuel poverty. Meanwhile, 39 per cent of homes in Dumfries and Galloway are not connected to the main gas grid. What role does the Scottish Government envisage anaerobic digestion and biogas playing, and what sources of information and advice exist for farmers who might

be looking to adopt that innovative technology on their farms?

**Jim Fairlie:** We recognise the benefit and value of small farm-scale renewable production, and that farmers may wish to take advantage of it to decarbonise their operations and reduce costs. Renewable energy production, including from anaerobic digestion, could also help farmers to increase their energy security. Biomethane production is supported by the United Kingdom Government's green gas support scheme, which provides tariff support for biomethane that is produced via anaerobic digestion and is injected into the gas grid. Producers will receive tariff payments for a 15-year lifetime. It is funded by the green gas levy and licensed on Great Britain's gas suppliers.

Scotland's Farm Advisory Service also provides support in areas such as renewable energy, reducing energy bills on farms, energy use and fuel management, energy improvements and future energy solutions. Farmers are small and medium-sized enterprises and should be able to benefit from using Business Energy Scotland's one-to-one advice services and funding. I encourage farmers to contact Business Energy Scotland to discuss any plans as early as possible.

**Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** Given the continued vacuum in any policies that the Government has introduced, can the minister give an indication of when secondary legislation will be lodged to deliver some of the policies for farmers to undertake the just transition?

**Jim Fairlie:** There is no vacuum. There is a route map, which the member is well aware of, because he sits on the committee that deals with the legislation that will be required in order for us to complete the route map.

**"Climate change action: policy package" (Land Use and Agriculture Measures)**

8. **Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what progress it has made on implementing the land use and agriculture measures set out in its "Climate change action: policy package", published in April 2024. (S6O-04615)

**The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie):** We published the first update on the policy package in March. Two policies are complete. The First Minister announced the funding split for future agricultural support in February, and the whole farm plan was introduced this year.

We continue to make progress on developing options for a methane-suppressing feed products

pilot; work is on-going to transition the regional land use partnerships to a formal initiative and to deliver small pilot schemes on deer management; and research is being commissioned to understand the potential for the partial rewetting of peatland.

**Pam Duncan-Glancy:** The minister will be aware of the impact of agriculture on policies to promote healthy eating. People in Glasgow and Rutherglen face daily food insecurity, yet there is nothing in yesterday's programme for government to address the issues in the food supply chain that leave parts of Glasgow as fresh food deserts. Will the minister back Labour's call to enshrine in law the right to food and ensure that everyone, no matter where they live, can access affordable, healthy food?

**Jim Fairlie:** The Scottish Government absolutely supports the production of food—and good-quality food—across the country. As I said, we have the small producers pilot fund, and there are various other initiatives. We work with Trellis and various other organisations to ensure that good food is available right across the country.

**David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP):** Will the minister set out the extent to which, under Labour, the Barnettisation of agricultural funding has impacted on the progress of those initiatives?

**Jim Fairlie:** As I have said before, we are absolutely committed to continuing to work closely with the industry to develop new support and to improve the sustainability of farming and food production in Scotland. However, the United Kingdom Government's decisions can have a significant impact on the devolved responsibilities of the Scottish Government, whether through the clumsy imposition of the inheritance tax changes or the wholly inappropriate Barnettisation of future agricultural budgets. I therefore continue to call on the UK Government to engage in meaningful dialogue with the Scottish Government and the other devolved nations to ensure that funding settlements reflect the real potential for Scotland's land to deliver for food production, nature and climate.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes portfolio questions on rural affairs, land reform and islands. There will be a brief pause before we move to the next portfolio, to allow members on the front benches to change over.

## Health and Social Care

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The next portfolio questions are on health and social care. I remind members that questions 2 and 5 have been grouped together, so I will take supplementary questions on those after the substantive questions have been asked. There is

a lot of demand for supplementary questions, so I ask for brevity in questions and answers.

### **Brain Tumours (Outcomes)**

**1. Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how it is working to improve outcomes for people with brain tumours. (S6O-04616)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Neil Gray):** Through our 10-year cancer strategy and action plan, there is a key focus on improving outcomes for less survivable cancers, including brain tumours. Actions include the Get Checked Early and NHS Inform websites highlighting possible symptoms of brain tumours and encouraging early detection and referral; the Scottish referral guidelines for suspected cancer providing updated clinical guidance for the urgent referral of suspected brain tumours; a new national headache pathway, which lists the symptoms that require urgent or emergency assessment to exclude a brain tumour; and a clinical management pathway for adult brain tumours, supporting consistency in access to treatment and care.

**Marie McNair:** During the recent wear a hat day event in the Parliament, I met two of my constituents, Don and Rachel McKie, who, sadly, lost their son to a glioblastoma in 2006. Since that time, they have raised more than £50,000 for the Brain Tumour Charity. They are such an inspiring family.

Less survivable cancers such as brain tumours can be difficult to diagnose, as, often, they present as non-specific conditions. What more can be done to raise awareness? Are there any plans to commit further investment to fund the essential research that is required?

**Neil Gray:** First, I thank Marie McNair for her advocacy and her campaigning work in bringing the wear a hat day event to the Parliament. I pass on my deepest condolences and sympathies to her constituents, Mr and Mrs McKie, for their loss. I also thank them for their campaigning and fundraising over the years. Awareness raising and lived experience are absolutely critical in getting to the point of being able to detect less survivable cancers such as brain tumours early, so I thank them for that.

Alongside what I have set out around the less survivable cancers task force, of which the Brain Tumour Charity is a member, and developing practical and impactful actions to raise awareness and support increased detection of those cancers, we have also invested in our Get Checked Early website, which has content on brain cancer to highlight symptoms and advises when to seek professional advice.

Ms McNair will be interested in the work that has been done by the incredible rapid cancer diagnostic services, which have been expanded to NHS Forth Valley this week, providing primary care with access to a new fast-track diagnostic pathway for people with non-specific symptoms of suspected cancer, such as brain tumours.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** There are a couple of supplementary questions. They will need to be brief, as will the responses.

**Foysoil Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab):** The analysis of proton versus photon radiotherapy in oligodendroglioma and assessment of cognitive health—APPROACH—trial is currently exploring whether proton beam therapy can improve cognitive outcomes for people with primary brain tumours in England and Wales. However, Scottish patients are unable to participate due to lack of funding to cover excess treatment costs.

What consideration has the Scottish Government given to support patients during the APPROACH trial to ensure that no one misses out on cutting-edge treatment?

**Neil Gray:** I thank Foysoil Choudhury for raising an important issue. He will understand the importance of research and innovation in relation to treatments, to understand and prove their efficacy. Under the leadership of our chief scientific officer, Professor Dame Anna Dominiczak, we are looking to capture as many clinical trials in Scotland as possible so that we get the clinical benefits for our patients here, as well as the continued investment in research and development and the skilled jobs that come alongside that.

We will continue to explore that, and I would be happy to follow up with Foysoil Choudhury if he wishes to raise any specific examples.

**Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD):** Patients often report varying and non-specific symptoms that push them to go and see a general practitioner, and then it turns out that they might have a brain tumour. What actions can the Scottish Government take to ensure that GPs are best trained to be able to spot brain tumour symptoms from the very first appointment?

**Neil Gray:** I thank Beatrice Wishart for raising that important point. We need to continue to work with our primary care teams, because she is right that general practice is fundamentally important in that respect, as is the wider interaction with the primary care environment.

I point Beatrice Wishart to the expansion of the rapid cancer diagnostic services, which are providing primary care with the agency to make referrals into secondary care diagnostics and treatment. That will answer her question about

ensuring that pathways are available for non-specific symptoms and that people can access those services.

### **Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder Assessments (Waiting Times)**

**2. Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what support is currently available for those experiencing long waiting times for an ADHD assessment. (S6O-04617)

**The Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport (Maree Todd):** This year, we are providing funding of £123.5 million to national health service boards to support improvements across mental health services, including neurodevelopmental services. I expect each board to have arrangements in place to ensure that people who are waiting for an ADHD assessment are signposted to appropriate support.

Since 2020, local authorities have received more than £65 million to deliver community mental health and wellbeing support and services for children, young people and families, and £16 million a year to ensure that every secondary school has access to school counselling services.

Our £1 million autism support fund for adults funds organisations that support people with ADHD, especially where it co-occurs with autism.

**Clare Adamson:** I thank the minister for her answer, especially in relation to signposting patients.

In Lanarkshire, in recent years, the number of ADHD referrals has equalled those of all other mental health conditions combined. Given that volume, NHS Lanarkshire is developing a new care model. Will the minister provide an expected timeline for when the new ADHD service pathway will be available?

**Maree Todd:** Clare Adamson will understand that ADHD is not a mental illness; it is a form of neurodivergence. However, I absolutely recognise that mental health conditions often co-occur with ADHD.

Long waits for neurodevelopmental support are unacceptable. Health boards and service partners have to work together to ensure that children and their families, as well as adults, receive support and access to services that meet their needs at the earliest opportunity.

My officials are liaising with NHS boards across Scotland, including in Lanarkshire, to understand what provision they have in place, and they are exploring how to address the current issues. In addition, we fund the national autism implementation team, which is currently supporting

NHS boards to develop, enhance and redesign existing local neurodevelopmental services. I would be happy to meet Clare Adamson at a later date to update her on the work that is happening in Lanarkshire.

### **Child Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder Assessments**

**5. Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government what pathways are available to obtain a child ADHD assessment for those who do not have a co-existing mental health disorder that meets the child and adolescent mental health services mental health criteria and who cannot afford a private assessment. (S6O-04620)

**The Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport (Maree Todd):** As I have tried hard to help members to understand, CAMHS is not the correct service for children who are seeking a diagnosis for neurodevelopmental conditions such as ADHD, unless they have a co-existing mental health condition. For many young people, a neurodevelopmental pathway will ensure that the right help and support is provided.

The design and management of neurodevelopmental diagnostic services is for individual health boards to determine. Each will have their own arrangements and crucial links to education authorities. Demand has increased markedly, but I expect services to be designed to ensure that children receive the right support for their needs as quickly as possible.

**Mark Ruskell:** I accept the importance of a route to support neurodivergent young people in school that is not dependent on a diagnosis. However, will the minister accept that there are young people who urgently need a diagnosis? I raise the case of Archie from Kinross, whose parents have been knocked back three times by NHS Tayside for a CAMHS referral. They have spent thousands of pounds on a private assessment, and he now has a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder. Archie's medical professionals believe that he would benefit from trial medication that would come with an ADHD diagnosis, but he would have to wait 10 years to receive a diagnosis in Tayside and he would probably be an adult before getting through the waiting list.

Will the minister acknowledge that there is a need for an urgent diagnostic pathway, particularly to support young people such as Archie and the thousands of people across Scotland who do not have a route to getting a diagnosis?

**Maree Todd:** It is not acceptable for there to be no route to diagnosis at all. While people are waiting for a diagnosis, they should be signposted

to sources of support. The education system should be able to meet their needs, regardless of whether there is a diagnosis. Some individuals who are referred will not meet the diagnostic threshold, but that does not necessarily mean that they will not have support needs; they might have support needs without meeting the diagnostic threshold. It is important that we consider how to develop a sustainable service of diagnosis and support and where it should sit, which is possibly outside CAMHS. I would be happy to meet Mark Ruskell outside the chamber to discuss that more fully.

**Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab):** The reality is that, outwith CAMHS, diagnosis has become a private-only service. That is what has happened to a seven-year-old constituent in my region of Glasgow. Is the Government content that the only route for people to get ADHD support just now is through private healthcare?

**Maree Todd:** Not at all. As Mr Ruskell indicated, some people are waiting for medication for ADHD support. The challenge with ADHD is that there is a global shortage of medication because of the rise in the number of people who are seeking a diagnosis. That issue is not unique to Scotland. There are challenges with providing a sustainable route to diagnosis and support in Scotland, and there are challenges with triaging and starting people on medication. Due to the global shortage of medication, many services in Scotland are focusing on maintaining medication for those who are already established on medication, rather than on initiating new patients. Again, I would be more than happy to pick up that conversation outside the chamber.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I require briefer contributions, particularly from the ministerial team.

### **Breast Reconstruction Surgery (Access and Waiting Times)**

3. **Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on progress made to improve access to and reduce waiting times for breast reconstruction surgery following cancer treatment. (S6O-04618)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Neil Gray):** Last year, we provided funding to several health boards to deliver reductions to plastic-breast backlogs. Through our £100 million investment to address long waits this year, we have extended that level of funding to NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and NHS Grampian, and it will be provided on a recurring basis to ensure longer-term service sustainability.

Through engagement with health boards, we have improved our understanding of the existing

consultant workforce that is qualified to deliver those complex procedures and are engaging with NHS Education for Scotland to assess training capacity in that area to improve waiting times for that crucial procedure.

**Sandesh Gulhane:** I declare an interest as a practising national health service general practitioner.

In the chamber last year, I raised the case of my constituent Shareen. Shareen is waiting for breast reconstruction surgery following cancer treatment and was told that she would be on the waiting list for years. The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care assured me that the Scottish Government was working with health boards to maximise capacity and reduce waiting times. Six months later, patients in Glasgow are being told that waiting times are longer than the 104 weeks that was advised last year. The reality is that patients are facing a wait of a further three to five years.

Those are not just numbers—they represent years of uncertainty, distress and delayed recovery. For women, breast reconstruction is not a luxury. It is not simply cosmetic surgery, as the cabinet secretary said last year. It is, in fact, a vital part of healing from cancer. Where is the real plan to cut the shocking waiting times and give women the timely, life-changing treatment that they deserve?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I also need briefer questions.

**Neil Gray:** I absolutely understand and sympathise with the position that Mrs Gault is in. I thank Sandesh Gulhane for raising the issue again.

I will need to check the *Official Report*. I do not remember describing this as cosmetic surgery, but as reconstructive surgery, which it is. It is a complex procedure that requires specialist provision.

The £30 million intervention that we brought forward last year allowed for the employment of further consultants in the field. I hope that the additional investment that we are bringing forward this year will not just provide sustainability but deliver against the waiting times that we want to see and give confidence to patients such as Mrs Gault that we will get through those. Dr Gulhane is absolutely right to say that it is imperative that we do so for those women, and that is what we intend to do.

### **National Health Service Productivity**

4. **Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what steps are being taken to reverse the decline in

NHS productivity since the Covid-19 pandemic, as referenced in research by the Institute for Fiscal Studies. (S6O-04619)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Neil Gray):** In March, we published the “NHS Scotland operational improvement plan”, which details how we will deliver a more accessible NHS, with reductions to long waits and service pressures.

Productivity will be increased through a number of measures that are set out in the plan, including regional delivery models and maximising our national treatment centres, deploying digital technologies such as the roll-out of the new digital dermatology pathway and a national theatre scheduling tool, and collaborating with health boards to identify and implement best practice, to maximise and optimise efficiencies. That is supported through a record £21.7 billion investment, including £200 million to directly target long waits and improve flow through hospitals.

**Kenneth Gibson:** I welcome progress on increasing the number of surgical procedures by 50 per cent this year, as indicated in the programme for government.

Despite record numbers of NHS doctors, nurses, support staff and investment, many of our constituents are enduring lengthy waits for treatment. Will the cabinet secretary detail which health boards are showing the greatest signs of improvement and how that is being shared across the NHS to help to drive recovery?

**Neil Gray:** Mr Gibson is absolutely right that sharing best practice across the health service is critical to ensuring that we can deliver for the people of Scotland. The centre for sustainable delivery has a central role in working across NHS Scotland to drive that productivity and share best practice. That intensive and on-going cycle of work is carried out in close collaboration with health boards.

As well as the actions in the operational improvement plan that are being taken forward, that is reflected across health boards’ year-on-year delivery plans. We know that there is still some way for us to go, but we are seeing clear improvements. In 2020-24, nationally, in-patient and day-case activity was more than 7.4 per cent more than in 2023, and new out-patient activity was 2.4 per cent higher. We will build on that in the year ahead.

Accident and emergency waits are improving, and the number of people stuck in hospital unnecessarily is reducing. Waiting times are coming down. That is progress, and it is just the start of the progress that I want to deliver for Mr Gibson’s constituents and for the people of Scotland, who cherish our NHS.

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** When we talk about productivity, we actually mean helping our healthcare professionals to have more time to deliver effective healthcare. Technology is the obvious solution, particularly when the whole of the health service is currently plagued by systems that do not talk to one another and by paper records, with pharmacists unable to reliably check basic medical details about patients. Does the cabinet secretary agree that creating a single shared patient record and a universal digital platform for healthcare is absolutely key to improving productivity?

**Neil Gray:** Yes.

### General Practitioner Funding

**6. Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the reported intimation from the British Medical Association that it is considering a formal dispute with it over GP underfunding. (S6O-04621)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Neil Gray):** The Government has been listening carefully to the views of Scotland’s GPs, who have described the multiple contributions that general practice can make as we shift to more community-focused care and have argued that GPs must be given the resources that they need to fulfil their role. We have listened and we have been persuaded.

As a result, we are already committed to increasing investment in primary and community care, so that GPs and services in the community will have the resources that they need to carry out their essential role in our health system. That was evident from the budget and from the programme for government announcement yesterday. We will keep talking to the BMA, with which I have a very constructive and positive relationship—yes, there are challenges, but there is also an agreed sense of purpose in terms of the opportunities that there are for general practice to contribute.

**Willie Rennie:** It seems that yesterday’s programme for government announcement did not impress the British Medical Association, because it is pretty angry today. It thinks that there is more rhetoric than reality and that what was announced yesterday will “do very little” and is a “drop in the ocean”. The reality is that the share of the overall health budget for general practitioners has fallen every single year in real terms since 2008. That has a direct impact on the staff that GPs employ and the way that they can meet demand. What new actions will the minister take to fend off the formal dispute that is coming down the tracks?

**Neil Gray:** First and foremost, we will continue talking to the BMA. On the announcement on the programme for government, the 100,000 new

appointments are to help general practice to deliver what it does best, which is to prevent ill health. Cardiovascular disease is evidently an issue for us in Scotland, and we have worked with the BMA to deliver on that, for which I am grateful to it.

That basis of constructive dialogue and of finding ways in which we can support general practice is the way in which I will deal with the discussions with the BMA. Yes, we need more resource going in and, yes, we need to provide GPs with greater support, because they are the absolute fulcrum of our NHS.

### Women's Health Outcomes

**7. Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the work that it is doing to improve women's health outcomes. (S6O-04622)

**The Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport (Maree Todd):** The Government's 2021 women's health plan marked the start of an important journey to improve health outcomes for women and girls in Scotland. In November last year, we published a report setting out the progress that was made in the first three years. Our ambition is that women and girls enjoy the best possible health throughout their lives. That continues to be our guiding principle as we work on the next phase of the plan, which is set to be published this year.

**Carol Mochan:** Recent freedom of information requests from Scottish Labour to health boards have revealed just how bad things are for women on the ground. Thousands are stuck on waiting lists for treatment for gynaecological conditions. Waiting times have dramatically increased, despite Scottish Government manifesto commitments to improve women's health. A survey found that 90 per cent of women have concerns about accessing comprehensive health screening. Women are feeling very much left behind.

Nothing in the programme for government will improve outcomes for women in the here and now, and progress on women's health has already been slow. Does the Government intend to deliver on its commitment to improve waiting times for women? When will women start to see a difference on the ground?

**Maree Todd:** Timely access to gynaecology services will be a priority as we develop the next phase of the women's health plan. In 2024-25, we allocated £450,000 to gynaecology from our £30 million targeted investment in planned care, aiming to deliver 3,500 new out-patient appointments. In actual fact, we realigned that commitment in year and spent £630,000. That included day-case and in-patient care—more than

was planned for. That shows the priority and commitment that we are determined to deliver.

The 2025-26 budget will provide £21 billion for health and social care, including a commitment to spend £200 million to reduce waiting times. To improve capacity, we will deliver more than 150,000 extra appointments and procedures in the coming year, which will ensure that people receive the care that they need as quickly as possible. Gynaecology will continue to be a priority area for that funding.

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** Can the minister outline how the Scottish Government has increased funding for gynaecology services, which has helped to drive down waiting times in women's health?

**Maree Todd:** As a result of last year's additional investment of £30 million to address the longest waits, health boards exceeded the commitment to deliver 64,000 appointments and procedures in 2024-25. As of March 2025, health boards are reporting delivery of 105,500 appointments and procedures. For gynaecology, boards have reported a final position of just under 3,500 extra appointments and procedures delivered, which is due to an investment of £630,000.

We will continue to build on that momentum. As I mentioned in my answer to the previous question, the funding that we are putting in—the £200 million to address waiting list backlogs and improve capacity—will be targeted at key priority areas such as gynaecology.

### Prostate Cancer Treatment Gap

**8. Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to improve performance and close any treatment gap for prostate cancer, in light of reports that a lower proportion of patients in Scotland are treated within the 62-day target, at 49 per cent, compared with higher rates reported in England. (S6O-04623)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Neil Gray):** Although cancer waiting times reporting across United Kingdom nations are not directly comparable, we note that prostate cancer five-year survival rates in Scotland are similar to those observed in England.

The earlier prostate cancer is diagnosed, the easier it is to treat, which is why we continue to invest in our detect cancer earlier programme. Additionally, the Scottish Government continues to invest in cancer services and in improving waiting times. Over the past five years, we have invested more than £40 million, which has been focused on urological cancers, including prostate cancer, and colorectal and breast cancers. In 2024-25, £11.3 million was provided to boards.

**Sue Webber:** Yesterday, the First Minister said in his statement:

“More cancer patients are now treated faster. Compared with a decade ago, 16 per cent more patients receive care within the 31-day standard and 11 per cent more within the 62-day standard.”—[*Official Report*, 6 May 2025; c 11.]

However, the reality is that prostate cancer outcomes in Scotland have fallen significantly behind those in England. Cancer staging is the same on both sides of the border. Despite national health service spending being higher per person in Scotland, more than one in three men are diagnosed at stage 4, which compares with only one in eight in London. That gap is staggering and unacceptable.

Can the cabinet secretary tell us when men in Scotland can expect the same chances of early diagnosis, which helps to save lives, as those who live elsewhere in the UK?

**Neil Gray:** The figures that the First Minister provided to the Parliament yesterday, which Sue Webber reflected on, are accurate. Although the 62-day target has been more difficult for us to meet, we have been treating more patients within that timeframe than at any time since pre-Covid. That serves to illustrate the additional demand that there is on services.

We have continued to prioritise prostate cancer. I again pay tribute to Sir Chris Hoy for his campaigning and awareness-raising work. In that regard, I have written to the UK National Screening Committee, which we take a lead from in our screening programmes, in order to ensure that we have the right processes and policies in place to meet the demands that Sue Webber is asking us to address.

**Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP):** It is vital that we detect cancer early to ensure the best chance of survival for the affected patients. What steps is the NHS taking, supported by the Scottish Government, to improve prostate cancer pathways?

**Neil Gray:** In 2024-25, £11.3 million in cancer waiting times funding was made available across Scotland. Most of that funding is being directed to tackling urological cancers, such as prostate cancer, as well as colorectal and breast cancers. We are establishing a network of urology diagnostic hubs across NHS Scotland—seven have already been established—in order to provide efficient, patient-centred care for urology patients. A clinical review of the Scottish referral guidelines for suspected cancer, including prostate cancer, is under way to help to ensure that the right person is on the right pathway at the right time. Those guidelines are due to be published in the spring.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes portfolio questions on health and social care. There will be a brief pause before we move to the next item of business, to allow members on the front benches to change.

## Programme for Government (Building the Best Future for Scotland)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-17437, in the name of Kate Forbes, on the programme for government—building the best future for Scotland.

14:50

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic (Kate Forbes):** We are at a crucial moment in Scotland's economic history—a history that has been shaped by ambition, innovation, openness, resilience and collaboration. Our economy today is built on that history. Scotland has always been a land of strength, tradition and resilience. From our islands to our cities, our businesses and communities carry with us a spirit that has been forged through centuries of challenge and change.

The global economic system is undergoing a reset, with the International Monetary Fund warning of slow growth due to escalating tariffs and related policy uncertainty. Such economic instability causes anxiety.

**Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP):** Economic uncertainty is not good for anyone. I wrote to the Prime Minister recently about the impact of the energy profit levy and, today, Harbour Energy has announced that it will cut 250 onshore jobs in Aberdeen because of the United Kingdom Government's

“ongoing punitive fiscal position and a challenging regulatory environment.”

Will the Deputy First Minister call on the UK Government to change its fiscal regime and save jobs in Aberdeen and the north-east of Scotland?

**Kate Forbes:** I express my huge sympathy for those who face losing their job. As Kevin Stewart said, we are faced with the loss of several hundred onshore jobs, and we are willing to work with employers and the wider sector to look at how we can support the wider industry. We recognise Kevin Stewart's point about the impact of the energy profit levy. We will always stand on the side of Scottish industry and Scottish jobs, and I am happy to explore with my UK Government counterparts what we can do to support jobs and the wider sector, because we understand that a just transition must involve a transition—we cannot abandon people as previous Prime Ministers have done.

Although some of the economic instability is out of our control, how far Scotland is buffeted will

depend on how we confront the global challenges. As we look to the end of this parliamentary session and beyond, our mission is clear: we must build a stronger, fairer and greener economy that works for every business and every community, from the edge of the Borders to the tip of the Highlands and Islands.

Lifting incomes is the bridge between tackling poverty and growing the economy so that people, communities and the nation as a whole can thrive. We raise incomes by growing the economy from the ground up, investing in people and jobs, supporting enterprise and trade, attracting investment and sharing success across the whole of Scotland.

**Paul O'Kane (West Scotland) (Lab):** Over the past two years, Scotland has had the lowest wage growth of any region or nation in the United Kingdom. The Deputy First Minister talks about increasing incomes and security, but what in the programme for government will address that?

**Kate Forbes:** I am intrigued as to which figures Paul O'Kane is using, because, in March, Scotland's claimant count—the unemployment rate—was 3.7 per cent, which was lower than the UK rate of 4.6 per cent, and our overall economy grew more quickly than the UK economy did last year. When I look at the policies and initiatives that are in place in Scotland, which are driven not least by our enterprise agencies, I see significant and strong growth.

**Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP):** At lunch time today, I chaired the cross-party group on the wood panel industry, which supports the wood panel products sector. Several industry leaders were there, who very much hope to meet the First Minister shortly to discuss the enormous, positive potential of that sector across the whole of the economy—indeed, the sector contributes around £200,000 per annum gross value added per person in employment. As the Deputy First Minister will know, West Fraser has received some of the largest investments.

Does the Deputy First Minister agree that there is enormous potential to support that industry? Does she and the First Minister support having a full, Government-led debate to allow us all to work together to explore how we can unlock that enormous potential for Scotland?

**Kate Forbes:** I am very supportive of the sector and, indeed, have had the great pleasure of visiting West Fraser and seeing the expansion in which it has invested. It is one of our finest examples of a brilliant-quality Scottish resource, which, through supporting the manufacturing sector and, ultimately, building houses, has a triple impact on the economy. I am happy to continue to engage with the sector, and the First Minister just

told me that he had bumped into and had a very constructive conversation with sector representatives today.

Economic growth is like turning the distillery's water on. It lets fresh energy, jobs and innovation flow into the heart of our communities. However, growth alone is not enough, because running a distillery is not only about letting the water flow—it is about care, concentration and co-ordination to ensure that all parts of the process work together. As we grow our economy, we must do it in a way that ensures that every business, community, individual, family and child have the chance to contribute to and benefit from that growth.

Our aim is simple: we want to build a fair and inclusive economy, increase employment and raise wages. One example thereof is the expansion of the fairer futures partnerships, which enable partners to help more families to access the support that they need, where and when they need it, and to maximise incomes and access to sustained employment or education opportunities. That is why we are investing more than £40 million in parental employability support in every local authority area, to tailor employability services to parents.

We want to improve inclusive recruitment practices, including flexible working and support for disabled employees. Although the Government will continue to create opportunities and roll out support for disabled people, such as our recent national roll-out of the pension age disability payment, we continue to call on the UK Government to immediately drop its cruel benefit cuts, which target the most vulnerable in our communities. The Scottish Government is unashamedly investing in the communities that the Labour Government seeks to penalise. That is why we have committed to supporting disabled people to move into sustainable employment through specialist employability support from summer 2025, across all 32 local authority areas, supporting closer working between employability provision and employers.

**Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab):** Will the Deputy First Minister therefore share my concern that a really successful programme for supporting disabled people into employment in Glasgow through the Glasgow Centre for Inclusive Living has not been able to have as many internships for disabled people in the national health service this year, as a result of what it has been told are recruitment freezes? What could the Deputy First Minister do with me to help to address that?

**Kate Forbes:** The example that the member has cited is precisely the kind of opportunity that we are supporting and are keen to continue to support. The employability support that I just outlined is very much focused on maximising the

opportunities for disabled people. If the member shares more information with me, I will be happy to look at the specifics of the case—I know that the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care is already aware of it.

We are committed to helping hard-pressed families with the costs of childcare as well, because ensuring that people continue to get the right support and skills to flourish once they are in work is a key part of our plans for growth. This coming year, we will create even more funded breakfast, after-school and holiday club places for families who need them, through a £3 million bright start breakfasts fund and the expansion of the extra time programme. The new approach to national skills planning means that employers, colleges, universities and others come together to ensure that post-school provision becomes more responsive to our economy's needs and priorities.

**Pam Duncan-Glancy:** Will the Deputy First Minister take another intervention?

**Kate Forbes:** A really brief one.

**Pam Duncan-Glancy:** In evidence to the Education, Children and Young People Committee this morning on the Government's plans for skills reform, Skills Development Scotland said that it believes that

“the timescales for current reform mean that any benefits or unintended consequences of the programme will not be understood for a decade.”

**Kate Forbes:** I disagree with that, because although we work to reform and future proof the system on a long-term basis, we are acting now to support more immediate skills needs. I am particularly pleased with some of the commitments in the programme for government, not least the £2 million for the Clyde maritime cluster, which is specifically designed to support people who are furthest from the job market into skilled employment. We are working with the private sector on that.

The country of Adam Smith has always looked outwards—when our economy grows, we do not just create wealth; we export our creativity and turn our global connections into local opportunity. Scotland boasts many global economic strengths, such as in renewable energy, its world leading financial services sector, whisky exports, advanced manufacturing, life sciences and tech innovation.

Our global image blends rich culture and heritage, innovation, resilience, natural beauty, and top-class food and drink, attracting millions of tourists, investors and international connections to Scotland—I am immensely proud of what our businesses and communities achieve in this country.

As well as trading outwards, we welcome investment inwards. We understand that we will not achieve our ambitions for growing the economy, tackling the climate emergency, reducing child poverty or improving public services without investment flowing into Scotland. We are already a prime destination for capital investment. For multiple years in a row, we have continued to be the most attractive place in the UK for inward investment outside London and the south-east. In other words, investors have confidence in the Scottish economy.

Last month, I was at Glasgow airport welcoming the £1.5 billion investment that is being made by PSP Investments Ltd and AviAlliance into AGS Airports Ltd. We are taking an investor-friendly approach to being a globally competitive destination by engaging with priority investors alongside the Scottish National Investment Bank to send a clear signal that Scotland offers huge opportunities and the right conditions for investment. In the coming year, we will launch investScotland to showcase significant investment opportunities, building on the First Minister's global offshore wind investment forum. We will also implement the recommendations of the housing investment task force.

We have a critical role in making it easier to support local domestic business by providing certainty and stability to taxpayers. We will provide further certainty and stability by supporting better engagement and robust business and regulatory impact assessments as well as by reaffirming our commitment to having no further divergence from UK Government income tax policy for the rest of this parliamentary session. That will ensure that the majority of Scottish taxpayers continue to pay less income tax than those in the rest of the UK.

The programme for government sets out a range of planning commitments, such as to reverse the decline in professional planners working in public authorities and to address delays through the planning hub to help tackle poverty through good new homes and making our communities more attractive and sustainable places to live and do business.

Our three enterprise agencies are cornerstones to our efforts to develop Scotland's entrepreneurial strengths and boost innovation. The figures are remarkable. Last year alone, they supported the creation or safeguarding of more than 19,600 jobs and unlocked a record £2.3 billion of planned capital investment.

I will draw my comments to a close. We are very clear that our actions to support the economy are a means of tackling poverty and that those two things go hand in hand. We are proud of our strengths and of the progress that we are making on reducing poverty.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises the actions outlined in the Programme for Government 2025-26 to grow the Scottish economy and eradicate child poverty; further recognises that these missions are inextricably linked, with a strong economy providing access to fair work opportunities and supporting investment in public services and ambitious climate and anti-poverty measures; notes that, over the year ahead, the actions within the Programme for Government will build on Scotland's economic strengths to address the additional challenges the country faces from economic volatility, capturing the economic opportunities ahead to drive improvements in living standards, reduce child poverty and build a strong foundation for the future, to weather the global economic uncertainty; welcomes the Scottish Government's continued focus on delivering action across the drivers of child poverty reduction, to increase earned incomes, reduce the costs of living and maximise incomes from social security and benefits in kind, and commits to working together to grow the economy, and deliver on the 2030 child poverty targets unanimously supported by the Scottish Parliament.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I advise members that there is no time in hand, so members will be required to stick to their speaking allocations.

I call Murdo Fraser to speak to and move amendment S6M-17437.4. Mr Fraser, you have up to nine minutes.

15:03

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I start by reminding members of my entry in the register of members' interests in relation to the income that I derive from property rental and my connection with the Scotch Whisky Association.

The programme for government that was announced yesterday was a real opportunity for the Scottish Government to put growth back at the heart of the political agenda. For years, in coalition with the anti-growth Green Party, it did not even want to mention the subject. Fortunately, it is now at least prepared to talk about growth, although there is a huge mismatch between the rhetoric and the actual delivery. We should all agree that growth is important. Growth is what delivers the ability to solve the nation's problems. It creates wealth, it reduces poverty, it supports household incomes and it provides the tax revenues to fund the public services that we all rely on.

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind):** Will the member give way?

**Murdo Fraser:** I will in a second.

We should all affirm that as a set of outcomes. At least, I hope that we would all affirm that—perhaps Mr Mason is about to disappoint me.

**John Mason:** The member says that growth reduces poverty. Would he accept that that is not

automatic and that we have to take action to move the wealth around?

**Murdo Fraser:** We have to create the growth first; we have to create the wealth first. That needs to be the first priority. If we do not have the wealth, we cannot share it around.

However, the reality is that growth has been too slow both across the UK and in Scotland. In the latest month for which we have figures, which is February 2025, Scotland's onshore gross domestic product is estimated to have fallen by 0.2 per cent. Overall, the UK economy grew in the same month by just 0.5 per cent. The output of 11 of 14 sectors of the Scottish economy fell, with the services sector shrinking overall by 0.6 per cent. Too many people of working age are not working, and we have a higher percentage of people who are economically inactive compared with the UK as a whole.

That poor economic output is reflected in collapsing levels of business confidence. Just last month, Scottish Chambers of Commerce published its quarterly economic indicator in conjunction with the Fraser of Allander Institute. It shows business confidence evaporating across key sectors, with sharp drops recorded for tourism, manufacturing and construction compared with the same period last year. Taxation is now the number 1 concern for Scottish businesses, overtaking inflation, and rising labour and energy costs continue to be major factors. Overall, it is a very worrying picture.

Kicking in just at the beginning of last month was the UK Labour Government's increase in employer national insurance contributions, which is literally a tax on jobs.

**Kate Forbes:** I do not wish to pre-empt what the member will say, but does he agree that one of the primary problems with the hike in national insurance contributions is that the Labour Government has no mandate for it as it was not even in its manifesto?

**Murdo Fraser:** I do not disagree at all with that point from the Deputy First Minister. If Labour had signalled in advance of the election what it was going to do, whether on national insurance, the farmers tax or cutting the winter fuel payments, people might have been happier to live with that, but none of that was promised in advance of the election. No wonder people are so angry.

It is no surprise that the growth forecasts for the UK economy have been substantially downgraded in the period since Labour came to power and since Rachel Reeves's budget.

That said, we cannot exempt the Scottish National Party Government from criticism, as I am sure the Deputy First Minister would expect. At the

business in the Parliament conference the week before last, there were questions about matters that are under the Scottish Government's control, including taxation, business rates and the fact that Barnett consequential from reductions in rates for hospitality, retail and leisure south of the border have not been passed on for three years in succession. We had questions about skills, apprenticeships and housing, which are all matters of interest to business and are all areas where economic growth is being held back, and all of them are in the devolved space.

On Friday, I spoke at a tourism conference where we heard from VisitScotland that, while international visitor numbers are doing well, there is a significant decline in the domestic market. That is at a time when the tourism sector is struggling with business rates, the national insurance increase, the regulation of short-term lets and, of course, the coming visitor levy.

The Scottish Government can make choices on the great majority of those things, but the choices that it has made so far have been to lump on additional regulation and taxation in sectors that are now struggling. That is not how we grow the economy. At the same time, previous SNP decisions on rent controls have resulted in the loss of what is estimated to be in excess of £3 billion of investment in the build-to-rent sector.

**The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice (Shirley-Anne Somerville):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Murdo Fraser:** I ask the cabinet secretary to let me make this point. I will then give way.

That means that, at a time when we have a housing emergency, which even the Scottish Government accepts, we are simply not building enough new houses to rent. That is a direct result of the choices that have been made by the Scottish Government.

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** Earlier, Murdo Fraser called my Scottish Green colleagues "anti-growth", which is a highly pejorative term. Will he comment on members of the Conservative Party voting with the Greens to make rent controls easier during stage 2 of the Housing (Scotland) Bill yesterday? I am afraid that he is not up to date with what is happening in the rest of his party, because it has increased the chances of rent controls rather than decreasing them. That is exactly what happened yesterday.

**Murdo Fraser:** Rent controls are an SNP Government policy; they are not supported by this party. We will not support the housing bill if rent controls are part of it. I give the cabinet secretary that absolute assurance, because the policy has driven away £3 billion of investment in Scotland—that £3 billion has gone elsewhere.

I looked forward to seeing whether the programme for government would signal a change of direction and whether the tax differential between Scotland and the rest of the UK would be addressed, given all the concern that we hear from industry about the difficulty that it presents in attracting skilled people to come here. I also thought that the programme for government might address the rates imbalance with Barnett consequentials not being passed on and that it might deal with the overregulation of business holding back sectors such as tourism. Sadly, I was disappointed.

What did we see instead? We saw a promise to publish an

“action and implementation plan based on an assessment of the regulatory controls which exist in key growth sectors”.

The SNP has been in power for 18 years, and it is talking about publishing more plans. What businesses need is action and not more bits of paper. There was also a promise to subject

“future Scottish Government regulation to scrutiny to ensure that its purpose, content and timing have regard to potential opportunities and impacts on business and investment”.

**John Mason:** Will the member give way?

**Murdo Fraser:** I am running out of time, so I ask my colleague to forgive me.

The Scottish Government has had 18 years to do that. Finally, it is waking up to the fact that its policies might be harming growth.

Yesterday, we heard from the First Minister about promoting international trade, which is very welcome. Remarkably, however, we heard nothing about yesterday’s real big news, which was the announcement that there is to be a free trade agreement between India and the United Kingdom. The Scotch Whisky Association described that as

“a once in a generation deal”.

I know that there are issues with some of the detail, but the previous UK Conservative Government worked hard to bring that together and it is good to see it being completed. It means that, for India, which is potentially the world’s largest whisky market, we will see a halving of the current 150 per cent tariff on Scotch whisky to 75 per cent, with a staged reduction down to 40 per cent over 10 years. That will be transformational for the industry, with the potential to increase income from Scotch whisky exports by £1 billion over five years and create 1,200 jobs across the UK.

That is tremendous news, so why have we heard nothing about it from the Scottish Government? Perhaps the reason is that it is

being delivered only as a consequence of Brexit and our ability to make such agreements on our own outwith the EU. However, the First Minister would rather moan about Brexit than celebrate the opportunities that it brings for Scottish business.

What the Scottish Government should be delivering to help to promote growth is clear. It should address the overtaxation of business, address the excessive regulation, provide the support for skills and apprenticeship that businesses need and ensure that the infrastructure is there—with roads such as the A9 and rail and ferry networks—to support the economy. The programme for government is a missed opportunity for Scottish business. What we need to see is growth, but that is not what the Government is delivering. That is the point of our amendment.

I am very happy to move amendment S6M-17437.4, to leave out from first “the actions” to end and insert:

“that all good Scottish Government outcomes, including supporting household incomes, reducing poverty, creating wealth and funding public services, depend on delivering stronger economic growth; regrets that, despite the overriding importance of stronger economic growth, the Programme for Government 2025-26 fails to contain the policies needed to deliver it, and instead signals the continuation of the UK’s harshest tax regime on households and businesses, and fails to commit to the actions needed to deliver a growth-promoting regulatory and planning environment, and calls on the Scottish Government to adopt the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party’s common-sense proposals to grow the economy, including by reducing taxes on individuals and businesses and by improving the skills of the workforce.”

15:13

**Paul O’Kane (West Scotland) (Lab):** Listening to the Deputy First Minister open this debate and the debate yesterday and the First Minister’s statement, one would think that today was day 1 of a new Government. I am disappointed that the First Minister is not in his place, because I enjoy making him feel old, but some of us in the chamber had just left secondary school when he started delivering programmes for government. The reality is that what we have seen today is yet another attempt by the Scottish National Party Government to reinvent itself, but we have had 18 years of it, and we know that its record speaks for itself.

In today’s debate, we are focusing on the economic challenge. I recognise much of what the Deputy First Minister has said about international headwinds and the challenges faced by the UK and Scottish Governments, but the reality is that she always seems to want to point to UK policy and blame the UK Government for the circumstances in which the Scottish Government finds itself. Is it not the truth that Scotland lags

behind the rest of the UK on 10 out of 13 productivity indicators, including business investment and business research and development spend? Is it not the truth that after 18 years, the Scottish National Party has built a low-growth, low-pay economy, and that all of Scotland is paying the price for that?

**Kate Forbes:** I am intervening in part to tell Paul O’Kane that he might have been leaving secondary school when the First Minister started delivering programmes for government, but I was still in secondary school.

Apart from that minor point, when it comes to productivity improvements, I am very happy to claim credit for the £1.89 billion of investment and the 16,700 jobs that have been delivered in the past year alone by Scottish Enterprise, because of our focused policies.

**Paul O’Kane:** I in no way meant to make the Deputy First Minister feel old, because she certainly is not, but the reality is that she has experienced those 18 years and has supported her party through that time, so she must take some ownership of that.

Coming on to the subject of wages, I note that, when I intervened on the Deputy First Minister, she was unable to answer the point about Scotland having lower wage growth than the rest of the UK. That has to be faced up to; the figures are based on her Government’s figures, which show that wage growth here has not kept pace with that in the other nations and regions in the United Kingdom. There is serious concern on that front.

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I do not disagree with this part of Paul O’Kane’s contribution, but does he accept that the UK Labour Government is making it that much more difficult to inspire growth with its national insurance increase, which is a tax on jobs, because it ensures that employers are not able to take on as many people as they would otherwise?

**Paul O’Kane:** Ms Smith and I have debated this issue many times. She knows the inheritance that was faced by the UK Labour Government when we came to office, and she cannot get away from the appalling situation with the public finances that was left by her party.

The reality is that there is a cosy consensus between the SNP and the Conservatives on these and many other issues. The SNP is not willing to spell out how it would pay for the investments resulting from decisions made in the UK budget, or the £5 billion that was invested in the Scottish Government’s own budget—there are no answers from the SNP on that. Equally, it is clear that there is no plan from the Conservatives on how they

would ensure stability and investment in public services here in Scotland.

We seek not only to debate the economy but to ensure that the economy has a strong underpinning so that we can invest in a more socially just and fairer Scotland. Those noble ambitions have been held by the Government for 18 years now, but there has been a lack of progress and achievement in that space. It is very telling that the Wise Group has noted its concerns about the structural problems with public services in Scotland. I appreciate that the Liberal Democrats cover much of that in their amendment, but it is worth referencing, because, too often, people experience services not as a safety net but as a maze. We have spent years trying to define and redefine poverty when, in truth, we know what needs to happen, and we learn by doing.

The Wise Group has spoken about investing in public sector reform, investing in services around people, investing in relationships and not just transactions and focusing on what works.

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** Given what he says, Paul O’Kane will, I hope, welcome the nearly £2 million that the Scottish Government recently invested in the Wise Group to assist in exactly that work, which it has been doing exceptionally well, and welcome the focus that the First Minister has put on whole-family support and the expansion of the fairer futures partnerships to do what Mr O’Kane talks about—public service reform.

**Paul O’Kane:** Of course I welcome investment in things such as relational mentoring, which are extremely important, but the point that the Wise Group is trying to make is that, after 18 years of this Government, there are still serious challenges in how public services are delivered, in how we know who is in need of support and in how that support is pushed down into communities more widely.

The First Minister concluded his statement yesterday by saying that the Government would be centred on delivery and providing hope. We really have to ask ourselves what the Government has been doing for 18 years if only now, one year from an election, it is centred on delivery and focusing on hope.

One might forgive people for thinking that the hope and optimism that many felt in 2007 might now be realised and that, after all the reports, independent inquiries, working groups, pilots and consultations that the Government has put forward over that 18-year period, the type of radical reform that is required might finally be round the corner. However, I do not think that anyone will be holding their breath waiting for that reform to be delivered. We know—because we have heard as much today, and in yesterday’s debate—about the litany

of broken promises from the Government over the past 18 years when it comes to tackling the challenges that exist in our NHS and in education, and delivering a social security system that works.

This programme for government—the last one before an election—is devoid of change and policies that would make a tangible difference on the issues that have been raised by the Wise Group and many others. There are no new promises, and no clear actions to end what has become a managed decline. If the SNP had the ideas to fix the crisis in our NHS and the housing emergency, and to raise attainment and stop violence in schools, it would have delivered those policies by now.

It is clear that the SNP Government has lost its way, and its own incompetence has cost the people of Scotland dearly. We are faced with that reality, as the people of Scotland will be in 12 months' time. It is clear that we can no longer have sticking-plaster solutions—we need a new direction for Scotland.

I move amendment S6M-17437.2, to leave out from first “recognises” to end and insert:

“believes that, after 18 years, the Scottish National Party (SNP) has taken Scotland in the wrong direction and made every institution in Scotland weaker, with almost one in six people in Scotland on an NHS waiting list, falling attainment, and thousands stuck in poverty or living in inadequate housing or on the streets; regrets that the SNP administration's failure to use the levers that it has to meet statutory child poverty targets, tackle the housing crisis, reduce violence in schools, provide child and adolescent mental health services when young people need them, and prioritise skills development is denying young people a more prosperous and stable future; recognises that the SNP administration has had no industrial strategy or plan for skills, building a low-growth economy and delivering the lowest wage growth of any region or nation in the UK over the last two years; believes that this economic underperformance has had negative implications for public services and the living standards of families and working people, and that the Programme for Government lacks the scale of action needed to make Scotland's economy work for people across Scotland, and calls on the Scottish Government to prioritise skills and regional economic development, reform Scotland's enterprise agencies and cut waste, harness the power of technology to help business grow, and ensure that people get the support that they need to find secure work.”

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Lorna Slater to speak to and move amendment S6M-17437.3.

15:20

**Lorna Slater (Lothian) (Green):** We all accept that we are living in uncertain times, from Donald Trump to war in Europe, Palestine and now potentially Kashmir—and, looking ahead, to the impacts of climate change. The increase in armed conflict is a glimpse of things to come as the breakdown of our climate progresses, the earth's

resources become scarcer and our planet heats up.

The Scottish Government cannot be timid in its response to the challenges that we face. We are facing profound threats, and we need profound answers. It is not enough to try to do the same thing faster with ever-reducing resources. Business as usual is not only alienating a significant proportion of our society and driving them into the arms of the far right; it is not reducing emissions fast enough to prevent the collapse of our environment.

It is possible to build a fairer and greener Scotland, and we need a brave and bold Government to do so. Greener means rapidly reducing emissions, in line with the advice from the UK Climate Change Committee, and restoring our depleted nature. Fairer means redistributing wealth and opportunity so that homes are affordable and work pays fair wages, and ensuring that our social security net allows everyone to live with dignity. It means implementing practical measures to get money back into people's pockets and to reduce poverty.

There are some good examples of those policies in the programme for government, including a permanent end to peak rail fares, a policy that was first brought in by the Scottish Greens in October 2023. There are references to key budget commitments that were also won by the Scottish Greens, such as the £2 bus fare cap pilot, the free bus travel pilot for people seeking asylum and the increased roll-out of free school meals in eight local authority areas for Scottish child payment recipients from secondary 1 through to secondary 3.

The roll-out of the offshore wind skills programme and the continuation of the nature restoration fund for another year are also to be welcomed, and I am pleased to see a recommitment to a 20mph speed limit as the default by the end of 2025-26. It will make our towns and cities safer for children, pedestrians and cyclists, and will also reduce pollution. Moreover, progress towards the devolution of parking fines to local authorities, and allowing local authorities to increase council tax on second homes, are welcome, if somewhat overdue, developments.

However, I see too many backward steps on progressive policy. The Government does not always seem to be willing to do the hard things that we need to do to build a fairer, greener Scotland. We need those things now—because, to be frank, we are running out of tomorrows. It would have been good to see some progress on tackling the high levels of wealth inequality that we see entrenched in Scotland, and a recognition that income inequality has surged in recent years.

Scotland is unfair for so many people, and the Scottish Government could do more to make it fairer—for example, with greater ambition to deliver warmer homes and cheaper energy bills, and with rent controls to end rip-off rents and protect renters. We need an ambitious plan to tax wealth in Scotland effectively and reinvest it in public services for communities. We need cheaper bus fares—and, indeed, cheaper fares across all public transport. Capped bus fares would go a long way towards delivering that.

I am particularly disappointed that the car kilometre reduction target has been scrapped. The target could have been met, but the Scottish Government was never bothered about putting a plan in place to follow through and make the effort to meet it. We cannot get people out of their cars when buses remain unreliable or unavailable, and trains remain so expensive.

The watering down of our ambitions to make homes cheaper and cleaner to heat will make it impossible to meet our 2045 net zero target, unless we make up the difference in other sectors. Will the Scottish Government really go that much further and faster on emissions reduction in agriculture and transport to make up the difference from what it is not going to achieve in housing?

With the world and climate in crisis, people across Scotland want reassurance that the Government is still on their side, and that cannot come from broken promises and scrapped commitments. From ditching plans to ban so-called conversion therapy and introduce the long-awaited misogyny bill, to rolling back on addressing climate action, this is not the programme for government that Scotland needs. The Scottish Government can do better than that, and the Scottish Greens will keep pushing it to do so.

I move amendment S6M-17437.3, to, leave out from first “to grow” to end and insert:

“could have been an opportunity for bold, decisive action towards building a more equal, healthier and greener Scotland with an economy that works for people and planet; recognises the substantial changes to Scotland’s transport, industry, land use and homes and buildings systems that are required to meet the challenges of the climate emergency, as described by the UK Climate Change Committee; further recognises the need for action to create well-paid, skilled jobs in growing low-carbon industries; believes that tackling poverty requires not only strong, resilient economies that provide access to fair work opportunities and support investment in public services, but also measures that secure the human rights of all citizens, from affordable, accessible housing and education to a social security system based on care and compassion; regrets the weakening of commitments to tackle climate change and the housing emergency, such as the watering down of the proposed Heat in Buildings Bill and the Housing (Scotland) Bill; expresses its dismay that the proposed Bills to tackle misogyny and end conversion practices have been dropped from this Programme for

Government, and calls on the Scottish Government to reconsider its position on human rights and equalities legislation and urgently produce an ambitious plan to tax wealth more effectively in Scotland to ensure appropriate investment in public services, support communities and build a fairer Scotland.”

15:26

**Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (LD):** I will talk about two very different but vital strategies for how we can tackle poverty. My opening speech will focus on economic growth, which others have touched on, whereas my closing speech will focus more on the wider public sector reform that is needed to target poverty.

When I read the Government’s motion, I was disappointed to say the least because, although it talks about reducing child poverty, the Government does not say how it is going to do that. The motion talks about improving living standards, but it does not mention Scotland’s growing housing emergency and crisis. It talks about growing the economy, but it does not detail how it is going to do that.

In the Government’s 168-word motion, there is no mention of the crisis in Scotland’s national health service, NHS waiting times, missed targets in accident and emergency departments and the postcode lottery for access to dental care. Nothing in the motion talks about the growing attainment gap, which has gone from 3.7 per cent to 4.3 per cent in just a year. Nothing talks about falling police numbers, when we have lost more than 1,000 police officers since Police Scotland was created; and there is nothing about infrastructure, such as the Government’s failure to dual the A9. Nothing in the motion talks about how the Government will tackle our drug and alcohol deaths crisis, although alcohol deaths are at a 15-year high and Scotland’s drug deaths rate is still the highest in Europe. There is nothing in the motion about any of that.

That does not surprise me, but it all matters because, as I will touch on, our constituents are most likely to interact with the Scottish Government’s policies in their public service interactions. Those are the touch points that can help them to improve their lives and to live healthier, happier, safer and more prosperous lives. On the Scottish Government’s defining mission of eradicating poverty and, particularly, child poverty, which the First Minister said is his personal career-defining mission, I am not exactly filled with confidence.

**Fergus Ewing:** The member mentioned the A9. Does he agree that, since the capital budget is now £7 billion annually over the next 10 years, and since the combined plans for the A9, the A96 and the Nairn bypass would involve just over half of

that, there is more than enough money in the capital budget to fund the dualling of the A9 and the Nairn bypass?

**Jamie Greene:** I could not agree more. That should have been done years ago. The member knows my position on that and I am sure that he agrees with it. He is in the same political party as members on the Government front bench, so perhaps he could put as much pressure as he can on the Government to fulfil that obligation, because infrastructure is absolutely key. Digital, road and transport infrastructure is all necessary for economic growth.

Solving a systemic problem such as child poverty is an admirable ambition. I have long held the belief—mostly born out of life experience, rather than political ideology—that economic growth and opportunity are the key routes out of poverty. We need to grow our economy by far more than just 1 per cent per year. Whether that is a couple of percentage points either side of the UK average is irrelevant, because the economy needs to be growing by double-digit figures if we are to have the sort of growth in the tax base that we need to improve public services.

We need three things to happen—we need more businesses, more jobs and better wage growth. All three must happen; success in just one will not suffice. It is no coincidence that the three Opposition amendments stress the importance of economic growth as part of the national mission.

It is also my view that the programme for government should have defined how the Government will advance—not just grow—the Scottish economy, how we will tackle the skill shortages that we all know exist in many sectors and how the Government will invest in the industries of the future. It is all very well name dropping life sciences, precision manufacturing, aerospace and renewables, but that is not the same as doing something about growing them and attracting investment into the country. We know that those industries are our unique selling points. They have business leaders who say to us that they want the Government to help, not hinder, their growth.

Not everyone will want to go into those industries of the future—I understand that. Many young people—in particular, those from deprived communities—may not see a route or a path to them. However, those people still deserve life chances. On the other side of the coin, how can someone become a barber, a plumber, an electrician or a welder if the training is not there or if there are no large employers in their region to attract apprentices? In the economy debate that we had last week, I pointed out that more than 1,000 jobs have been lost in Inverclyde. How will that help to eradicate child poverty?

In my closing speech, I will talk a little more about some of the public sector reform that was mentioned by Paul O’Kane and is documented by the Wise Group. There are some really interesting points in that, which we should be talking about. However, I do not think that we can fully eradicate child poverty in Scotland until we talk about the economic growth that is required to fund the tackling of it. That includes investing in new and emerging industries and markets, developing our workforce—I cannot stress that enough—as well as investing in digital, transport and infrastructure and, of course, building more houses, which is another point in my amendment. We absolutely need more affordable, safe, clean and warm houses in Scotland. It is an absolute shame to the Government that 10,000 people live in temporary accommodation in modern-day Scotland. That has to be a focus, but it is not in the motion either. It is for that reason that we will not support the Government’s motion. I urge members to support my amendment.

I move amendment S6M-17437.1, to insert at end:

“; notes that, whilst the Programme for Government 2025-26 contains plans and policies to eradicate child poverty, the Scottish Government has already missed the interim child poverty targets of less than 18% of children living in relative poverty and less than 14% living in absolute poverty by 2023-24; believes that action is also required on Scotland’s housing and planning systems in order to not only help the economy grow and encourage investment, but also to ensure that everyone has a safe, warm place to call home, particularly given that an estimated 10,360 children and their families are living in temporary accommodation in Scotland; understands that, whilst there are wider economic challenges both domestically and internationally, there remains concern that the work and reform that may be required to eradicate intergenerational poverty is not taking place at the necessary pace, as noted by The Wise Group, and is further concerned that, despite the actions announced in the Programme for Government 2025-26, these will not be enough to drive the economic growth required and the 2030 child poverty targets, of less than 10% of children living in relative poverty, will be missed.”

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

15:32

**Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** I have heard from Opposition members the false claim that Scotland has the highest income tax in the UK. In fact, most here pay less than in England, and the same is true of council tax, which is some 30 per cent lower here.

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** Will Christine Grahame give way?

**Christine Grahame:** I will, in a moment.

The elephant in the room is the hike in employer national insurance. That tax on jobs, which one employer estimated would cost an extra £400,000 per annum on his wage bill, will also cost jobs. The Office for Budget Responsibility has predicted that 60 per cent of those increased costs will be passed to consumers.

The impact on the voluntary sector is also devastating. The Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations estimates an additional cost to the sector of £75 million. If we add in winter fuel allowance cuts and farm inheritance tax, which threatens the very basis of our food sustainability—none of which was in Labour's manifesto—no wonder Labour had a kicking in the recent council elections.

To go back to what the Scottish taxpayer gets for their money, Murdo Fraser can take it as read that I know and recognise that we need a thriving economy to fund social justice, and that will be my focus. As my old history teacher, Tar Macadam, used to say, what better way to assess than by comparing and contrasting? In this instance, I will compare and contrast Scotland under the SNP with England under the Tories and now Labour.

I will give examples. University tuition is free in Scotland; in England, it is £9,535 per annum, and students have after three years a debt of around £28,000 just for fees.

Contrast the delivery in Scotland of 1,140 hours of childcare for all three and four-year-olds and eligible two-year-olds with England, where, broadly, provision is only for all three and four-year-olds, for 570 hours.

Keeping 40,000 children out of poverty by providing the Scottish child payment at £27.15 per week for every child under 16 in a qualifying household can be contrasted with an absence of child payment under UK Labour and, instead, the punitive and disgraceful two-child benefit cap.

For the older generation, all pensioners in Scotland will receive at least £100 in winter fuel payment; those who receive the UK-run pension credit will get £300. If we contrast that with England, we see that only those on pension credit get anything, and the majority are left out in the cold.

We are investing in a fairer social security system and helping people into work, and we have 16 more benefits than are available in England. By contrast, the Labour Government is intent on restricting disability payments. It euphemistically says that that is about

“re-evaluating the personal independence payment eligibility criteria”—

that is cuts to you and me.

Here, we are providing free bus travel for 2.3 million people, including older and disabled people and all children and young people under 22. In England, free bus travel is available only for those with certain disabilities or on reaching state pension age, which is currently 66; in Scotland, people get their bus pass at 60.

Prescriptions here are free, and eye examinations are free for everyone, every two years. Prescription charges in England are £9.90 per item. In England, eye tests are free, but only for certain groups—for people who are under 16 or aged 60 or over, or who have specific medical conditions.

We are reducing the cost of the school day for families through free school meals for pupils in primary 1 to P5. In England, free meals are only for pupils in reception, year 1 and year 2.

The majority of Scottish taxpayers pay less tax than those in England, and we provide a compassionate and fair distribution of that tax.

I very much endorse the Scottish Government's statement that it has

“targeted engagement with investors to secure investments from our new National Project Pipeline”,

which is a bit of official gobbledegook, but I hope that that means research and development. We have missed out on that in Scotland, so I want to hear more about the new proof of concept fund and an improved system of grants to increase the scale and quality of the Scottish start-up ecosystem. For Scotland, while tied to the UK, there has been a lack of vision and investment in manufacturing and in universities.

In a previous debate—I am apparently in a compare-and-contrast mode—I noted how Taiwan, with little or no natural resources, unlike energy-rich and food-rich Scotland, invests in research and development and protects intellectual property and patents internationally, which is essential in this fast-moving world.

For me, comparing and contrasting demonstrates without a scintilla of doubt the benefits, even with the constrictions of devolution, of living in Scotland under this SNP Government, but think how much more we could achieve with full economic independence.

15:37

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** It is always a pleasure to follow Christine Grahame in a debate. I would have intervened on her if there had been time, because she said that we are investing in social security to help people to get back into work. I have asked Social Security Scotland on more than one occasion how many people have come off social security because they

have been helped back into work, but it does not keep any measurement of that. If that is genuinely an objective of Social Security Scotland, it is not even measuring it.

I was going to intervene on my friend Murdo Fraser to say that in the programme for government, which is supposed to be about economic growth, the word “productivity” appears but once. The key to economic growth is productivity, but there is nothing to be said about that in the programme for government.

I am ambitious for Scotland, but on the idea that we are going to boast that more than half of our fellow citizens are in an income bracket of £27,500 or less, I say that we should be energised by an attempt to see that statistic change. We should not boast about it like the SNP does.

The programme for government is not a programme and it is certainly not about joined-up government. It is just platitudes and a checklist of things that will not happen, because this SNP Government has no ambition for our country. It is tired, thin on ideas, thin on talent—my goodness, members should see the list of candidates who are hoping to come here next year—and thinner still on competence. After 18 years, the SNP is out of energy and out of answers. It dresses up delay as consultation and presents indecision as a strategy. The SNP is slick on spin, but behind it all, like the wizard of Oz, there is nothing—there is a vacuum where action should be.

**Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP):** We always need to remember that it is the public who will vote. I am sure that the member would have enjoyed—as I did today—looking at the current poll numbers. The public are clearly predicted to vote with their feet by voting to give the SNP the largest number of MSPs by a country mile, unlike his own party.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I remind members about electioneering in the chamber.

**Stephen Kerr:** That was a fantastic display of hubris from Michelle Thomson. Let us see what happens when they open the ballot boxes and count the votes.

This is a Government that is clinging to office, not one that is capable of delivering for the people of Scotland. It is a case of another year and another plan—and yet another plan—which is all kicking the can down the road. There is another bunch of summits, and there are more task forces and reviews. The SNP cannot govern, so it hides—as it has always done—behind process. However, Scotland cannot afford to wait. If this programme for government really is about economic growth, it fails on that fundamental test, because economic growth has not been put at its heart.

Every good outcome that the Parliament wants to see—lower poverty, better public services and greater social justice—depends on a growing economy, because without growth there are no resources and there is no hope. Economic growth does not come from press releases or speeches, and it certainly does not come from increasing the burdens of taxation; it comes from enterprise, vision and determination, and from people who take risks, build businesses, create jobs and contribute to the tax base.

The Deputy First Minister used to love to talk about broadening the tax base. At one point, in the not-so-distant past, she was someone who understood that the burden of tax, as it stands in Scotland, is a massive disincentive to the people who must take risks, build businesses and create jobs to provide economic growth.

**Kate Forbes:** What would the member say to the 250 people who are at risk of losing their jobs right now at Harbour Energy because of the energy profit levy that his party’s Government introduced?

**Stephen Kerr:** I think that it is well recorded what I thought about the excess profits levy—or whatever it is called—that the Labour Government has managed to increase the burden of while reducing all the investment incentives. It is a disgrace. It is a Labour Government that—as is typical of Labour Governments—has no idea how to grow the economy. All it knows how to do is grow indebtedness and the levels of tax and to boost inflation. Critically, Labour Governments always know how to increase unemployment, and that is what Labour is doing with its tax on jobs.

I will get back to the SNP. I am running out of time—rather sadly, because I have much more to say. However, time being what it is in this Parliament, there is no time for proper debates. I would love to have given way for more hubris from Michelle Thomson, for example.

I will simply say that after 18 years of failure and broken promises—my goodness, those parties know about broken promises. *[Interruption.]* Oh, they absolutely do know about that. They are blame shifters and people who hide behind excuses. Scotland can do better, which is captured well in Murdo Fraser’s amendment. This is a country that is crying out for leadership that delivers and believes in enterprise, rewards hard work and empowers every person to fulfil their potential.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You need to conclude.

**Stephen Kerr:** It is time to turn the page on 18 wasted years of nationalist drift and get to work building a stronger, more dynamic country where real opportunity is open to all.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I remind members that there is time for interventions; they simply need to be included in the member's speaking allocations. What there is not time for is electioneering.

15:44

**George Adam (Paisley) (SNP):** I will take my time to get up, because, according to Mr Kerr, I have no energy left. I have as much energy now as I had the day that I came in here. I am here for one reason: to help the people of Paisley and ensure that they get the chance for Scotland to be an independent country. That will keep me energised every day that I come into the chamber and in every debate.

The First Minister spoke earlier today. I could not attend—I was using some of all the energy that I have in the Education, Children and Young People Committee, where other members and I dealt with all the business that we have there.

The First Minister promises hope and delivery, which is the important part of the debate. The programme for government is based on what we have been delivering on over the years. However, in difficult times, people need certainty. Yes, Palestine has been flattened, there is a war in Ukraine and we hear on television non-stop about the rise of the right across the world, but the SNP is talking about talking with people. I will stand by any SNP member who will talk with the people of Scotland, as opposed to talking at them, which is what we hear today from the Opposition parties. They go down the same old tired attack lines. Frankly, I am sick of it and the public are sick of it. It is now time for us to talk with the public as we move towards next year's election. I cannot wait for that, because it is an important one for all of us. I am quite happy to stand in front of the people of Paisley on my record and that of the SNP Government.

As everyone has said, economic growth is an important part of the solution to building a better tomorrow. It is not the only tool, but it is a very important one. I will look at what is going on in Paisley and the surrounding district—that is Greater Paisley to me and Renfrewshire to other members—and the can-do attitude there.

We have seen record levels of investment in Renfrewshire, with jobs in low-carbon tech and manufacturing. Those are real jobs for real families and will ensure them a better future.

On the border between Paisley and Renfrew—I am always careful not to say that the Paisley borders are too expansionist; Renfrew might be a wee toon, but the people are game—we have Scotland's advanced manufacturing innovation district. That 52-hectare site, which is next to

Glasgow airport, is a collaboration project that is led by Renfrewshire Council and supported by the Scottish Government and Scottish Enterprise. The development is projected to create 6,000 jobs and boost Scotland's manufacturing sector by £535 million, with a plethora of jobs in a plethora of sectors.

There is a positivity about Paisley's historic High Street. That is not just to do with the sound of folk nipping to the local Subway for a cheeky wee sub; it is because of the promise of culture, tourism and new enterprise. That is thanks to the Scottish Government's commitment to regeneration and innovation.

Renfrewshire Council and Scottish Government funding is changing how we look at our high streets. The Paisley museum, which at the very top of the High Street, has had a £45 million investment that will increase footfall there when it opens. That is funded through a plethora of sources, one of which is the Scottish Government. That is exactly the can-do attitude that I am talking about.

The Paisley central library, which is also on the High Street, is not just lending books but bringing people together as a successful community hub. The Scottish Government provided £1.5 million of that £7 million project.

Right at the heart of the town is the George A Clark town hall—that was its Sunday name, Presiding Officer, when it was opened 135 years ago, but we just call it Paisley toon hall. A £22 million investment by Renfrewshire Council has brought our grand old town hall to the 21st century, ensuring that people can go to events and come to the heart of the centre of the universe in Paisley.

However, we cannot stop there. All that investment is fantastic, and we need to bring more people to our town centre, but we must continue to look to the future. We have two shopping malls in the town, one of which is successful and one of which is less so. We need to take that investment further, invest in more town centre housing and look at some of the projects that are being developed as we speak. If we learn anything from the past, it is that we never finish with the work of regeneration—we just need to continue it.

**Paul O'Kane:** George Adam is extolling the virtues of Paisley, as we would expect, but will he say anything about the Royal Alexandra hospital in Paisley—a hospital that is known to him and me—which has suffered serious downgrades over the past 18 years under this Government, including the closure of its children's ward, and about continual threats to other services in Paisley? Will he say anything about that, and will he do anything to defend it?

**George Adam:** The people of Paisley do not want to hear the same tired old attack lines. We hear constantly from the Opposition that the NHS is on its knees, which is not the case. If the member talks to constituents in Paisley, they will tell him that. Incidentally, as we are talking about the economy, I point out that the NHS is one of the biggest employers in the area.

The Labour Party can continue having a go at the people of Paisley and my constituents, but I, for one, will always stand up for them.

**Paul O’Kane:** Will the member take an intervention?

**George Adam:** I am sorry, but I am coming to the end of my time, which is unfortunate.

We have had the Tories crashing the economy with the Truss budget, and Labour shrugging and signing up to the Tory spending limits, with the Scottish Government left to pick up the pieces again. Even now, after everything, those parties cling to their broken promises and broken rules while the people of Paisley pay the price through rising food costs and energy bills and stretched public services.

Let us be blunt: Westminster does not work for Scotland—it is not even pretending any more. That is why independence is not a slogan; it is a necessity. It gives us the power to build a fairer economy, to end poverty and to take decisions about Scotland in Scotland.

15:50

**Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab):** The First Minister tells us that the programme for government is about building Scotland’s best future but, after 18 years of the SNP Government, Scotland’s young people are still waiting for their future to begin. They were told that education was the top priority but, instead of opportunity, they have been handed broken promises, over and over again. The result is that 84,000 young people in Scotland are not in training, education or employment. Earlier, I intervened on the Deputy First Minister to ask about the Government’s skills agency’s view on the SNP’s plans to fix the issues on training and skills. In short, that agency’s view was that it fears that the plans are not enough and are unlikely to effect change for 10 years.

In yesterday’s programme for government statement, the First Minister spoke of returning to “the ABC of education”. I would like to use my time to test the Government further on that, because I believe that education is fundamental to building a strong foundation for the future. The First Minister said that A is for attainment and attendance, yet more young people than ever before are leaving school with no qualifications, the attainment gap at

higher level is growing and the most disadvantaged young people are falling further behind. All the while, attendance is falling. However, instead of bold action to address all that, all that we get is a campaign on attendance and sticking plasters. There is nothing that recognises the whole-scale systemic change that is needed to get young people back to school.

There is nothing of that scale on the B that the First Minister spoke about either—behaviour. Violence in classrooms is rising and misogynistic abuse is growing. The Government’s new action plan on that has not even got as far as to define the problem, let alone solve it. Meanwhile, staff are burning out and children are suffering in silence. Finally, the First Minister said that C is for curriculum. However, what we have seen is narrowing subject choice, underresourced vocational routes and reform that has been delayed, diluted and discredited. The Government’s announcements yesterday on rationalising qualifications have only added confusion and mistrust.

That brings me to a letter that the First Minister did not offer yesterday: D for delivery. Let us look at delivery on skills. Instead of delivering the skills that we need, the Government has presided over skills gaps in key areas of the economy. Colleges are pivotal to that. The Government calls them anchor institutions, yet decisions that the SNP has taken have put colleges in crisis. Staffing has fallen by 28 per cent since 2007, enrolments dropped by 62,000 last year alone and courses are being cut. That is not renewal; it is managed decline or, worse, as one college leader has said, it is unmanaged decline. We hear of pilot projects for offshore wind and engineering, but there is nothing—no vision—to fix the college sector. All of that leaves thousands of young people from the poorest backgrounds and care-experienced young people not in education, employment or training.

Today, the Deputy First Minister mentioned childcare. The Government promised transformational expansion but, instead, costs for under-threes in Scotland remain higher than the average in the UK. The current provision, which is a pilot in six communities, falls short; it is a national policy reduced to a postcode lottery. Parents of children with additional support needs struggle to access funded childcare at all.

On ASN, the Government’s approach and delivery have been branded intolerable. One in three pupils now has an additional support need, and a report out today says that the figure in Glasgow is as high as half of all pupils, yet the number of specialist teachers has plummeted. Teacher unions and third sector organisations have been warning of a crisis in ASN for years, and parents are at the end of their tether. Children

are being denied support. They are being moved off NHS waiting lists for child and adolescent mental health services and diverted to provision that is not NHS or statutory—they are left in limbo. All the while, schools are being left to pick up the pieces.

The First Minister says that the programme for government is about fairness, but let me be clear: there is no fairness without opportunity, and there is no opportunity without investment in education, skills and the people who our children become.

Once, Scotland's young people had access to a world-class education system. Now, they are subject to a patchwork of pilot schemes, hollowed-out colleges, missed targets and rebrands instead of reforms. The SNP used to say, "Judge us on this." Well, 18 years on, the attainment gap is not closing, the system is not improving and opportunities are being squandered.

I will tell you which people pay the price for the SNP's failure: the pupil who is sitting in a crowded classroom without a support teacher, the teenager who is leaving school with no qualifications or next steps and the young adult who is being turned away from college because the course has been cut. They are not statistics; their lives are shaped by political choices. The programme for government could have been a turning point away from all that; it could have been a moment of honesty and a plan for recovery. Instead, it is more of the same: delay dressed up as delivery and slogans in place of solutions.

Scotland's young people are ambitious, capable and brimming with potential. That is why Scottish Labour is clear that this cannot go on. The solutions have been proposed time and again yet, year after year, ministers choose to step back instead of step up. Education is the central task of Government, because how we support young people today will decide what kind of Scotland we wake up to tomorrow.

That is why Scottish Labour would take a new direction in education. We would build a system that inspires young people to learn, be curious and progress. It would be a system that supports teachers to teach and learners to learn by rebuilding support for young people, including in the health and care system. It would be a system that prepares young people with the skills that they need for tomorrow's world of work. Most of all, a new direction for education is one that broadens horizons and smashes the glass, class and stepped ceilings that are in the way of opportunity being spread for all.

If Scotland is to have the best future, we must start by investing in all the people who will shape it. We must act now—not with delay or deflection

but with determination. That is what young people in Scotland deserve.

15:57

**Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP):** I welcome the programme for government and, in particular—perhaps this is no surprise—the actions that will support growth in the economy.

Having recently returned from Alberta, I am more convinced than ever that Scotland needs more powers and flexibility than is available under the current devolution arrangements. I want Scotland to be a normal independent country but, if this institution is to be a devolved legislature, can it please have the same powers as the Legislative Assembly of Alberta? The province retains all the tax take from oil and gas and has unlimited borrowing powers. It is ridiculous to pretend that Scotland, with its very restrictive regime—particularly around capital borrowing—can fully address the great challenges that are ahead.

**Jamie Greene:** Will Michelle Thomson take an intervention?

**Murdo Fraser:** Will Michelle Thomson give way?

**Michelle Thomson:** I will take Jamie Greene's intervention, as he asked first.

**Jamie Greene:** Income tax is devolved to the Scottish Parliament, but that responsibility comes with risk. It has resulted in £3.3 billion of additional tax being raised due to tax divergence with the rest of the UK, yet only £600 million has gone to the Scottish budget in net terms due to a slower economic performance. Michelle Thomson might want the powers, but she has to accept the responsibility as well.

**Michelle Thomson:** I appreciate that Jamie Greene is new in post and will still be getting his head around exactly how the fiscal framework works. What he describes is a function of the fiscal framework.

I agree with the First Minister, who, in yesterday's statement, said:

"Tariffs will impact directly on many Scottish exporters to the United States, while a US recession and a global trade war will have direct and indirect effects on almost every sector of our economy."—[*Official Report*, 6 May 2025; c 13.]

That is not likely to be fixed by a bilateral trade deal between the US and UK, and the mood music on a trade deal with the US is not good. I agree with the recent review of the UK trade policy observatory, which is a joint initiative between the University of Sussex and Chatham house, that

"a quick and economically significant outcome to US–UK trade negotiations seems unlikely."

The Trump Administration has issued stringent guidelines to its negotiators as it moves away from multilateral to bilateral deals. It is quite clear that its aim is to increase US exports and decrease imports.

Another point that worries me is that alignment with US standards would present a specific danger to Scottish products. It would mean greater divergence with the EU, and it could also compromise our own standards—not only those in agriculture—creating a toxic mixture for Scotland's domestic and export businesses.

Last week, during question time, I called for a review of our export strategy in the light of international challenges. I am therefore pleased to note the new six-point export plan to enable Scottish exporters to diversify and grow markets. In the past, I have written about the need to fully utilise our Scottish business diaspora, and I look forward to continued engagement with it as part of that export strategy.

As someone who has regularly called for greater recognition of and support for women in business, innovation and entrepreneurship, I was pleased to note that that was recognised by the First Minister and is, doubtless, supported by the Deputy First Minister, who shares my passion in that area. The First Minister talked about the launch of a new proof of concept fund, with a focus on supporting the commercialisation of research projects with significant economic potential, including action to transform the number of women who start and scale up businesses. In pursuing the drive for the commercialisation of research projects, with which I completely agree, we also need to review the gaps across Scotland's financial sector architecture—arguably, the lack of our own stock exchange, for example—and we must do everything in our power to create a fully supportive economic environment for business.

Economic growth must be supported not only by the Government but by business. We know that we need to nurture an environment of profitable businesses that are given the confidence to invest in the future.

**Liz Smith:** Does Michelle Thomson accept that part of that involves ensuring that there is much better co-operation between the public and private sectors, so that we can scale up things and deliver growth?

**Michelle Thomson:** I completely and strongly agree with that point, particularly in relation to some of the funding requirements for net zero, for example. That is imperative.

It is fair to say that profits help to drive growth, as we discussed earlier, and growth supports our social policy ambitions. I have no shame in saying that. It is really important to recognise that point.

As the member for Falkirk East, I was particularly interested in the First Minister's comments about Grangemouth, which was the subject of my question to him yesterday. I welcome the leadership of the Deputy First Minister, Kate Forbes, who is engaging, as I am, with potential investors to ensure a green industrial future for the Grangemouth site. Yesterday, we talked about a key feature of that being the development of carbon capture in Scotland. The Acorn project is a vital component, so we must redouble our efforts to pressurise the UK Government to look beyond England for investment in carbon capture. I therefore welcome the fact that, as part of the programme for government, the First Minister is committed to increasing the £80 million of Scottish funding that is already available to make the Acorn project a reality, should the UK Government give it the go-ahead.

There is much to welcome in the programme for government, and there is much to do. I will play my part in supporting the Government's ambitions.

16:03

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):**

The programme for government is an attempt at damage limitation by the Scottish Government. There is the reinstatement of plans for the cancelled Barra hospital, which were delayed for years but are now being brought back the year before an election. There is the scrapping of peak-time rail fares, which were so recently put in place. There is the pledge to end the 8 am lottery for general practitioner appointments—a lottery that was created by the same Government. There is the commitment to continue to try to find a solution for the Rest and Be Thankful, which was first promised in 2012 and became a manifesto pledge at subsequent Scottish Parliament elections. The Government made those promises while, at the same time, presiding over a worsening situation. In reality, the programme for government is a long letter of apology and a promise to try harder.

One apology that is especially galling for me relates to the addition of women, four years too late, to those who receive protection under the Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Act 2021. I lodged amendments that would have done that when the bill was going through the Parliament, as did Johann Lamont, but we were told, "No—misogyny is different. The Government will legislate within a year and women will be protected." That has not happened.

We suggested that women be covered by the Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Bill and that that protection could be removed when the misogyny bill was introduced. However, that common-sense approach was dismissed. We

were told that the Scottish Government would make misogyny a specific crime within a year. Now—four years later—it is taking the approach that we suggested. In those four years, incel culture has been on the rise, and rape and all forms of violence against women have increased. That protection is coming four years too late.

There is so much of this programme for government that is doing what we urged the Scottish Government to do years ago. They say that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery but, sadly, it is not flattering—only frustrating that we have a Government that delays and prevaricates and has simply run out of ideas.

I turn to the rural and islands part of the programme for government, which is a rehash of broken promises, too—those things should have been delivered years ago. A crofting bill was promised not only last year but in the previous session of Parliament. The Government shelved it in the previous session, saying that it would bring it back early in this one—yet here we are, rushing complex legislation through at the last gasp. Moreover, we expect to see a timid bill that will not meet the aspirations of the crofting counties, which means that Parliament in the next session will have to wrestle with the issue again.

The Land Reform (Scotland) Bill does not include communities' and crofting communities' right to buy land. We were told that that was because the Scottish Government was holding a review of the legislation, but we later discovered that that was an internal review of its own legislation. We now learn in the programme for government that there will be a consultation on the matter. Why did that not happen before the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill was introduced? The bill that is going through Parliament is half-baked and, in its current form, will make no change to land ownership patterns in Scotland. Will the Government be responsible for even more depopulation by doing nothing to help our next generations to remain on the land of their forefathers?

Years ago, we passed temporary legislation to allow farmers to be paid following Brexit. We were told that new legislation and a reformed scheme would be introduced at speed. We have had the enabling legislation, but no new scheme. We all know that the delay is because the £200 million computer system says no—another example of incompetence. However, in the programme for government—without apology for the delays—the Scottish Government boasts that it will publish a rural development programme. Although it must introduce a rural development programme, real change is impossible to achieve without the tools to do so.

As members can imagine, I continued to read the document with increasing trepidation. Then my eyes fell on the words:

“Building on having met all milestones set out in the delivery plan to dual the A9”.

The key delivery milestone was to complete the dualling of the A9 by this year. However, the Government sells that as an achievement, albeit 10 years late. If the situation were not so serious, it would make for a comedy sketch. I say to George Adam that these are the same old attack lines because they are the same old failures.

16:08

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** I welcome the programme for government. It is always easy for any Government or Opposition to come up with myriad ideas on how to raise taxes and spend money. Indeed, were all demands for cash to be met, we would need a budget of billions of pounds greater than the one that we have.

I am therefore pleased that, although the Deputy First Minister also mentioned the crucial support that the Government provides directly to families, pensioners and our public services, the programme for government leads on the economy. After all, before one can redistribute wealth, it must first be created. Scotland's gross domestic product—the goods and services that we produce—has grown by 10.3 per cent per person in Scotland since the SNP came into office in 2007, compared with 6.1 per cent across the UK under the Labour, coalition and Tory Governments. That clearly shows the benefits of SNP action in areas of the economy where the devolution settlement enables us to act.

For years, EY has consistently named Scotland as third among the 12 nations and regions of the UK, after London and the south-east, in attracting foreign direct investment. That has been reflected in enhanced inward net annual migration of some 30,000 people a year, one third of whom are from the rest of the UK. We need more people of working age to make their lives in Scotland. As we know, Brexit remains a barrier to that aim. Nevertheless, we must strive to main global competitiveness, particularly in industries where we excel—from life sciences and aerospace to food and drink.

Although trade barriers and tariffs risk causing real economic damage, they can be ameliorated to some degree by taking forward the new and ambitious programme of global engagement envisioned by the First Minister, which will showcase our domestic strengths, boost Scotland's profile and attract further investment to grow and raise living standards.

The new six-point export plan is, I believe, an exciting one. It will deliver an international growth support programme, with grant support for ambitious Scottish companies. It will support sector export plans for technology, life sciences, renewables and hydrogen in order to tackle and overcome sector-specific barriers, fund research and in-market promotion, while backing individual innovative companies. It will bring more global buyers and suppliers to Scotland through inward missions to showcase the strength of Scottish export potential and supply chains. It will expand Scottish Development International to help export-driven companies by scaling up go-to-market advice and increasing overseas missions, through which companies can get a deep understanding of the opportunities and meet buyers. It will increase funding for our international trade partnership programme with the Scottish Chambers of Commerce and expand access to business membership organisations, which can now bid for support for trade missions to established and emerging markets. Finally, it will provide information, advice and support to Scottish companies that are keen to export to America, helping them maintain market share or build new North American business, and develop a US export plan to identify the states that offer the best fit for Scottish exports.

Last year, the Scottish Government initiated a co-ordinated programme to attract capital investment to Scotland. That programme will be expanded by the launch of investScotland, which is a new portal that will showcase investment opportunities and information for investors while providing a single point of entry to Government, and by accelerating a targeted programme of proactive engagement with key capital investors. In my constituency, XLCC will bring 1,200 direct jobs, 2,300 jobs in the Scottish supply chain and a £2 billion investment to Hunterston by 2028.

It is crucial to strengthen SDI's inward investment activity in Europe and the US by targeting Silicon Valley and other tech hubs and persuading them to bring scaling companies to Scotland. We also need to engage with global financial hubs to strengthen Scotland's fintech and financial services sector, and leverage opportunities from SDI's partnership with the City of London Corporation.

Work to seek more co-investment from public and private pension funds in housing and businesses must be accelerated by working with the Scottish local government pension scheme to unlock resources. I know that the Deputy First Minister has been involved in that area.

Scotland has been renowned as a hub of innovation for generations. Our contribution to globally significant inventions and discoveries

across myriad spheres is truly astounding. I am delighted that Scottish ministers will continue to nurture and expand sectors that boost Scotland's profile as a modern, high-growth country, particularly in tech and innovation, where our international reputation is excellent.

Entrepreneurs are critical to our future prosperity. The Scottish Government will support innovators, increase start-up creation, develop business clusters in innovative market areas and build on Scotland's expertise in critical technologies. The First Minister's start-up challenge is a bold initiative to encourage and support young people from disadvantaged or underrepresented backgrounds in order to help them start and scale up innovative businesses through tailored ideation support, mentorship and grant funding.

Women are the key to much of our future economic prosperity. Transforming the number of women who start and scale up businesses by investing up to £6 million to implement the "Pathways" report from Ana Stewart and Mark Logan "Pathways" report, including through a further round of competitive funding opportunities and the delivery of pre-start support, will boost female participation.

Launching AI Scotland, a new national transformation programme that will be founded on a partnership of business, academia, agencies and government and will include a national artificial intelligence adoption programme for small and medium-sized enterprises, will keep Scotland at the cutting edge of the artificial intelligence revolution.

Establishing a technology council of global businesses and academic experts to advise the Government on applying and benefiting from emerging technologies while delivering financial support and guidance will enable industry clusters to emerge, grow and remain internationally competitive.

This year's increase in investment in Scottish Funding Council core research and innovation grants to more than £325 million will support the foundations of research in our universities, develop the talent pipeline, promote knowledge exchange and drive growth.

Frankly, I want even greater prioritisation to be given to that area, with provision of the skills that we need in order to grow our economy. We need to train more apprentices in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, not least among women. Employability support and training to reduce the number of working-age people who are neither working nor in education or training is also critical.

There has recently been a co-ordinated clamour for Scotland to widen the gap with the UK on benefits spending, but the best way out of poverty and all the ills that come with it is well-paid employment. We should never lose sight of that.

While we must work for now within the straitjacket of devolution, ultimately we want to build an enterprising, outward-looking and compassionate Scotland that will flourish with the powers of independence—a nation that understands that the prosperity of a country rests on ensuring the prosperity of every single citizen, and that takes our rightful place at the top table of Europe.

16:15

**Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con):**

I will use my time in this debate to speak up for the need for greater and more urgent climate action. To its credit, the Scottish Government has included some action in the programme for government, such as a sizeable investment in energy efficiency measures and setting targets for installing clean heating systems. It will extend the nature restoration fund and provide farmers with capital funding to achieve climate outcomes. There is more support for the transition to electric vehicles, at least in theory, and there will be a new national flood advisory service, which reflects the calls that I made for a unified body in the wake of the storm Babet floods.

Those are all welcome measures and I hope that they all do some good, but the reality is that they do not amount to the transformational change that we need in order to deliver net zero on time and build a circular economy. My concern is that Governments are facing and will continue to face increasing pressure to avoid taking those difficult but necessary steps to keep us on track.

Climate action is an issue where we had consensus on both the need for action and the price to be paid should we fail—I say “had consensus” because the climate debate is changing from how we act to whether we act. That is not a debate that we can afford, and it will come as a shock to many who thought that the case for action, backed by scientific consensus, had been won. The effects of climate change will be felt everywhere, with serious and lasting consequences for our communities. Everyone needs to think about which is worse: being ambitious in our targets and policies even if we might not always succeed, or stoking up a narrative against climate action?

Let me be clear that I am not for a moment suggesting that the Scottish Government should get a free pass for failure. I have held and will continue to hold it to account when it does not live

up to its promises. The Scottish Government would expect me to do that, such as when it failed to meet its emissions targets nine times in 13 years. That was disappointing, to say the least, as is the fact that the annual emissions targets have now been scrapped altogether, along with the interim net zero target.

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** I have an enormous amount of respect for the member and his views on the issue, but will he at some point in his speech deal with the elephant in the room, which is that the Conservative Party throughout the UK is walking away from net zero and the arguments for it? Kemi Badenoch has made that quite clear. Every single time the Scottish Government brings a difficult decision to the chamber, the Scottish Conservatives vote against it. I respect the member’s personal position, but does he feel a degree of discomfort about his party’s?

**Maurice Golden:** What I say to colleagues on net zero is, “You turn if you want to, but this MSP is remaining committed to tackling climate change.”

I go back to the Scottish Government, because that is essentially what we are here to discuss. We have the rather strange and intriguing position of the Scottish Government repeatedly failing to meet the 2013 household recycling target. That was not a misquote by me; it really is the target from 2013. If we cannot meet the 2013 household recycling target by asking members of the public to put something in a bin in their house or near their home, there is no chance of achieving net zero.

We have the same story on the circular economy. The Circular Economy (Scotland) Act 2024 was watered down to deal only with waste and litter, albeit that I say to Murdo Fraser that those are important matters. Meanwhile, incineration capacity is ballooning past the point where the policy makes sense. There is a long list of failures. Only yesterday, Friends of the Earth Scotland felt compelled to say that the Scottish Government was “paying lip service” to climate action.

I call that out to highlight the failure to make enough progress. As I said in last year’s debate on growing the green economy, we cannot expect the public to lend us their support or businesses to invest their money if they are unsure that the government of the day will deliver. We have run out of time for yet more consultations, road maps, working groups, talking shops and strategies. Where there is action from the Scottish Government, it is too limited. Talk of a latte levy will not create enough behavioural change for a circular economy, but it would be a game-changer to throw the full might of public procurement spend behind circular economy choices.

Dundee's low-emission zone is too small and it does not cover the areas that would make the most difference, such as the outlying retail parks where people do most of their shopping. The focus on a tiny area in the city centre means that the most behavioural change that we are likely to see is from taxi drivers. In addition, the roll-out of thousands of electric chargers whose cost is double that of petrol disenfranchises all those who cannot charge at home, who are primarily the poorest in society.

Protecting our standard of living and providing for our children's future requires transformational climate action, and I believe that that is what the Scottish Government should deliver.

16:21

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind):** I am certainly supportive of encouraging the economy to grow. There are many factors involved in making that happen, including having enough workers with the appropriate skills and making Scotland an attractive place to live and do business. Scotland is well thought of by many people around the world. It is seen as an attractive place to live, with world-class universities, much innovative research, a good environment, high-quality food and drink, great scenery and golf courses—and the list goes on.

Yesterday, the Finance and Public Administration Committee was reminded by the Scottish Human Rights Commission that Governments have a duty to maximise the resources that are available to them and not only to make cuts when they are in a tight financial situation. Let us also remember that Scotland and the UK are low-tax countries. Other European countries such as Denmark and Norway have higher tax rates and better quality public services, and that scenario can be attractive to businesses.

While I am talking about other countries, I note that we should welcome investment from overseas, but it worries me how much of our whisky and salmon production industries are foreign owned. I am not sure that we have the right balance on that score.

Another factor that is relevant to growing our economy is whether we have enough people of working age. Some of the projections by the Scottish Fiscal Commission make concerning reading. Our population continues to age, so it is difficult to avoid the fact that we are going to need immigration for the foreseeable future.

Growing the economy is fine, but we need to share out the benefits in a better way. It is not automatic that poorer folk will benefit from a growing economy. I was encouraged to hear the

First Minister say in his statement yesterday that he wants to see

“a fairer Scotland, with Scotland's growing wealth shared more fairly”—[*Official Report*, 6 May 2025; c 15.]

However, I am less clear about how he proposes to do that.

The next big theme in the programme for government is eradicating child poverty. I suggest that, if we are to eradicate child poverty, we need to increase taxation. Clearly, we cannot do that in the current year—in 2025-26—but, during the next 12 months, we should certainly push ahead with plans to replace the council tax and, hopefully, introduce a wealth tax.

How we spend the money that we have is also crucial. As the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations points out in its briefing,

“more and better housing would make a major contribution to reducing child poverty”.

If we are serious about tackling the housing emergency that the Parliament and several councils have declared, we have to put housing right at the top of the shopping list, and good projects such as dualling the A9 should be postponed. We should take action of that kind. I question the point of saying that we have a housing emergency if it makes no difference to how we spend our money.

I urge the Government to take action and put its money where its mouth is.

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** We move to winding-up speeches.

16:24

**Jamie Greene:** I apologise for popping out for a brief break.

I have the joys of speaking twice in this debate, although I may have to get used to the deafening silence after I have spoken, which I am sure I will over time. [*Laughter.*] To be fair, attendance is looking quite slim on the other side of the chamber these days.

I mentioned in my opening speech that my remarks would be twofold in nature. My opening speech centred on common ground on economic growth, and it has been good to hear members across the chamber, including Government members, making quite bolstering comments. In my closing remarks, I will focus on public sector reform and how we target Government interventions to genuinely eradicate poverty, which is an admirable ambition.

Simply throwing money at a problem does not always solve it. I say that because I have sat on the Public Audit Committee for some time now.

The devolved welfare bill is now approaching 15 per cent of the entire Scottish budget, and that is likely to grow, as is the case when we devolve responsibility for matters.

As I know at first hand, poverty is not necessarily about how much money people have in their pocket on any given day—poverty is complex and wide ranging. Seeing the issue solely through the prism of day-to-day finances makes it incredibly easy for the Government to attribute its lack of progress on eradicating poverty solely to finances. That makes it all too easy for the Government to blame other Governments and other Parliaments for its inability to eradicate poverty.

However, poverty is much wider than that—poverty of health, of opportunity, of circumstance, of safety and of personal household resilience are just as important. Let me give some examples. On mental health, 21 per cent of adults living in Scotland's most deprived communities report two or more symptoms of depression, compared with 8 per cent of those living in the least deprived areas. What about addiction? According to the Poverty Alliance, people living in our most deprived communities are 18 times more likely to experience problem drug use.

**John Mason:** Will the member give way?

**Jamie Greene:** I am very short on time.

What about adverse childhood experiences? Children in the most deprived areas of Scotland are 20 times more likely to be care experienced. What about poor circumstances? Issues of housing quality, housing availability and housing affordability are also major causes of physical, mental and financial health issues. That national shame—it really is our other national shame—sees thousands of Scottish children living in temporary accommodation because there are no suitable permanent homes for them.

What about the crisis in our college and university sector? Pam Duncan-Glancy made the point that many of those great institutions are facing the wall financially, when upskilling and retraining a workforce should be the Government's number 1 priority. The young Scots of today are the business leaders of the future. I say to the Government that fixing those problems would fix the economy.

That is why I move on to comments that were made earlier and credited to the Wise Group. If members get the chance, they should pop out and chat to the Wise Group outside the chamber. It says that targeted, data-rich interventions that result in a one-to-one tailored mentoring opportunity for vulnerable households are the only way in which we will turn the tables on poverty.

Practical measures, not programmes for government, will fix the problem.

In the Wise Group's words,

"poverty in Scotland is not just about income. It's about the grinding reality of being trapped in a bureaucratic labyrinth where the help on offer is confusing, disconnected, and often dehumanising."

It describes Scotland's public sector as

"an exhausting maze of silos and short-term fixes."

Those are entirely the Wise Group's words, not mine, and that is from an organisation that is funded by the Scottish Government. How true that is.

The reality is that there is no one-stop shop these days to help people with housing, energy, debt, childcare and mental health issues. People are simply passed from pillar to post, and from one agency to another. There is endless bureaucracy and red tape, and people never actually get the targeted interventions that they need and which would reflect the uniqueness of their own personal circumstances.

That is why the Wise Group rightly calls for integrated public services and one-to-one assistance and mentoring programmes. It says—to give the Government credit—that the money is there, but it claims that the political will is not. Those reforms need to take place sooner rather than later, and I hope that there is the cross-party support and will behind them.

The Government's motion fails to acknowledge the SNP's dominance in Scottish politics over nearly two decades, and it does not accept that radical change needs to accelerate at pace. Although I agree with much of what is said in several of the amendments to the motion, Liberal Democrats will not be supporting the Green and Conservative amendments. However, I am happy to support the Labour amendment, because I agree that furthering regional economic development and growth, and using technology to do so, is one way to accelerate economic growth, in particular in the region that Paul O'Kane and I mutually represent.

Finally, I highlight the two themes of growth and targeted intervention. Poverty is complex, which means that the Government must spend its money wisely and on those who need it most. I close with the words of the Wise Group, which says:

"We have the data. We have the tools. We have the models. What we don't have—yet—is the political guts".

Does that not just sum up these 18 years of the Government?

16:31

**Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green):** We stand today at a crossroads. In the face of accelerating climate breakdown, deepening economic inequality and relentless attacks on the rights of the most marginalised, the choices that we make now will define our future.

Our constituents, our communities and our country need us to choose hope, justice and radical action to transform the structures and systems that drive social inequality and environmental degradation. We need bold, urgent action towards a very different model of economy and society in which people and planet are valued and supported, and social justice, environmental justice and economic justice are seen as one and the same.

We cannot build a green future on a foundation of poverty wages and insecure housing. We cannot deliver a just transition for our climate without justice for workers—not only those in the North Sea but those in care homes and in our communities. We cannot claim to restore nature if the communities who live closest to it are locked out of land ownership and democratic power.

This programme for government takes some important steps forward, and we have heard a lot about that over the past couple of days, but it could have done so much more. Where is the courage to confront fossil fuel interests head on? Where is the urgency to democratise our economy and bring energy, housing and land into public hands, where they belong? Where is the ambition to redistribute wealth so that those who have profited from crisis pay their fair share for recovery and so that our public services are resourced appropriately?

We have so much more work to do. Rather than just tweak around the edges or manage decline, we must transform our economy and society, because we cannot allow net zero to mean zero hope for communities that are already struggling.

Lorna Slater, and even Maurice Golden, spoke about the need to phase out fossil fuels and tackle the climate crisis. We know from bitter experience that we cannot rely on voluntary corporate co-operation or vague timeframes, given the urgent action that is required. We need a planned, state-led transition away from oil and gas, with guarantees for workers and their communities, and their voices at its heart.

Just this morning, those of us who attended the Scottish Parliament information centre breakfast discussion heard about how the climate crisis is a public health issue—the biggest public health issue that we face. The failure to act will lead to the worsening of the physical and mental health of us all, and it will put additional pressures on our

public services—not only our NHS, but all of them. We cannot let our wellbeing, never mind the planet's survival, be left to market forces and corporate pledges.

The reliance on private sector investment and market mechanisms reflects a belief that just tweaking around the edges of the systems that we already have will deliver the results that we need. Scottish Greens believe, instead, that we need to challenge the economic system that underpins the climate crisis and social inequalities that are all too apparent in our society today.

There is also no meaningful move towards public or community ownership of key sectors such as energy, housing or land. Rhoda Grant spoke about the desperate need for land reform. Incremental and technocratic approaches lack the urgency that is needed to confront ecological breakdown and systematic inequality. We cannot achieve a better society without uplifting those who have been pushed to the margins for too long—disabled people, racialised communities, LGBTQIA+ people, asylum seekers, refugees and care-experienced young people. Pam Duncan-Glancy and Jamie Greene highlighted statistics on the inequality that many of those groups face, which should shame us all.

Although the policies that are in the PFG to address inequality are welcome, and we would like to go further by increasing the Scottish child payment to £40 by the end of the parliamentary session and by introducing rent controls that make rents cheaper, we know that we do not have all the levers that are needed to properly challenge the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few. However, the programme for government is silent on some of the things that we can do, such as taxing wealth or unearned income and democratising our land use and economic planning. That redistribution of wealth and power is essential if we are to maintain and improve the public services that we all rely on and to empower communities where they are.

Finally, the lack of action on equalities and human rights is a real concern. The broken promises on both the proposed misogyny bill and legislation to end conversion practices will not be forgotten soon. There is also little in the way of action on investment in care infrastructure, which was identified by the UK's Women's Budget Group as being essential for a more equal society, or on the systemic undervaluation of women's work. We know that child poverty is often women's poverty.

The Scottish Government has been urged, repeatedly, to have equality and human rights analyses at the core of all its policy development. I do not think that the programme for government adequately addresses the inability for women, disabled people, care-experienced people and so

many other minoritised individuals and communities to realise their basic human rights every day.

That is why we will keep pushing not for policy tweaks but for a different kind of politics: one that listens, empowers and tells the truth, which is that we cannot have a healthy society in a dirty economy; we cannot live well on a dying planet; and we cannot save that planet without justice for all who live on it. This is a moment not just to protect what we love but to reimagine what is possible. That is what we in the Scottish Greens are determined to do, for people and planet.

16:37

**Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab):** I welcome the debate. Following Maggie Chapman's contribution about the human rights element of the debate, it is interesting to note that one of the challenges for the Government with recent legislation, including the Housing (Scotland) Bill and the Education (Scotland) Bill, is about why the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is not being adopted in all those areas, as that assurance was made. However, that is perhaps a discussion to be had with the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice on another occasion.

I welcome the fact that there has been strong agreement across the chamber about the importance of economic growth if we are going to see any changes in future.

**Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Martin Whitfield:** I will, if it is short.

**Audrey Nicoll:** On the point about economic growth, earlier, my colleague Kevin Stewart intervened on the Deputy First Minister to highlight Harbour Energy's announcement on the loss of 250 jobs. I press the member to ensure that our Scottish Labour colleagues do everything that they can to persuade the UK Government that its fiscal regime—in other words, the energy profits levy—is damaging Scotland.

**Martin Whitfield:** We have heard on a number of occasions about the Scottish Government's strong and developing relationship with the UK Government. Let us see how those discussions go.

I turn to Jamie Greene's points about the complex nature and causes of poverty. The Government has identified poverty in different ways over the past 18 years, but I will use the phrase, "You know it when you see it." Some people who are outside the Parliament will look at the complex discussions around poverty and, quite

frankly and rightly, become exasperated, because they just need more money in their pockets.

It behoves members, and particularly the Scottish Government, to look at the reality of the complex nature of poverty, as we have discussed. John Mason raised the massively important question of housing and the complex interlinking parts of that jigsaw. Indeed, the Liberal Democrat amendment talks about the devices that are available for us to identify poverty. If nothing else from the programme for government debate can go forward—

**Stephen Kerr:** Will Martin Whitfield take an intervention?

**Martin Whitfield:** I will, if it is short.

**Stephen Kerr:** Martin Whitfield is talking about poverty. Kenny Gibson summed it up really well, and we should all agree: the best route out of poverty is a well-paid job. The Labour Government has just made it very difficult to create well-paid jobs. Does Martin Whitfield not feel a responsibility for continuing the poverty trap through that policy?

**Martin Whitfield:** I am always grateful for an intervention from Stephen Kerr. However, I also look at the pay rise that the UK Labour Government has given to some of the poorest-paid people across the whole of the United Kingdom, through the rise in the minimum wage. [*Interruption.*] Stephen Kerr is indicating from a sedentary position that it gives with one hand and takes with the other. However, the reality is that the money must be raised following the disastrous and catastrophic economic situation that the UK Government was left in by the previous party that entertained that.

I want to talk about the four priorities, and I am now very conscious of time. I welcome the Scottish Government's decision to concentrate on eradicating child poverty, growing the economy, tackling the climate emergency and ensuring high-quality, sustainable public services. In particular, it would be beneficial for the Government to organise a debate about how that last element can be achieved.

I raise the absence this year of what has existed in the past by way of a judgment on how well the programme for government has been achieved. Previously, we have had First Minister's mandate letters—in essence, a personalised letter to each cabinet secretary, setting out the outcomes that were expected of that cabinet secretary, how those were to be achieved and the time period in which those achievements had to be made. Clearly, we have a very finite time period of 12 months, so I wonder whether the cabinet secretary is able to explain why, this year, we have not seen the mandate letters for the programme for government. The previous ones were published

and I would like to see the follow-up on that, because they are an accountability mechanism—which it is extremely important to have.

The Deputy First Minister, in an intervention, when pushed by Murdo Fraser about the trade deal, turned the subject around to talk about failures of mandates in not complying with manifestos—which has been an aspect of a significant number of the contributions to the debate. Previous manifesto promises that were made by the SNP Scottish Government have failed to be delivered.

We have heard about the causes of a lack or potential shortage of a workforce; yet, as Pam Duncan-Glancy rightly pointed out, the 84,000 young people in Scotland who are not in education, employment or training are a pool, which, when it comes to apprenticeships and skills development for what the country needs, would be a marvellous place to start. Will 84,000 young people be in training in 12 months' time? As I come to the termination of my speech, I set that challenge down, along with a number of other broken promises.

I will finish on one of the finest contributions to the debate, which will stick with me. It was from Rhoda Grant. As she said, the programme for government is a “long letter of apology” and a promise to do better.

16:44

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Barring political accidents—which can happen from time to time—this will be the final contribution that I make to a programme for government debate. I ask members not to get too excited just yet. [*Laughter.*] If my records are correct, I have spoken in every such debate since I was elected in 2007.

I look back to that occasion, when the late Alex Salmond addressed the Parliament. He said:

“a minority Government ... can propose and lead, but cannot compel or dictate”,

and that, as such, a programme for government should be one that

“seeks to persuade, rather than one that asserts the domination of one party”.—[*Official Report*, 5 September 2007; c 1362.]

He went on to say that the SNP should be judged on competence, on consensus and on vision, and that central to all of that was the economic strategy, which would involve lower tax and regulation on business, boosting the nation's skills and boosting enterprise. Members can look back at the rest of the transcript of that debate.

At that time, John Swinney was Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth. He made several speeches then on concerns about the weak growth in the Scottish economy and the fact that it was underachieving. He said that he wanted to focus on supporting business and on his ambition to deliver a smaller and more effective Government for Scotland. Well, that was then, and this is now.

With regard to supporting business, over the past two decades, it has been a pretty dismal picture for the Scottish Government, although I note some encouraging signs from among business leaders, who believe that there is now a slight change of focus from the Deputy First Minister in order to listen and address a lot of their concerns. However, they might well be concerned because they have witnessed a progressively higher tax burden being imposed on hard-working Scots over many years, without the requisite improvement in public services or a widening of the tax base, which I know that the Deputy First Minister is concerned about.

We saw an 8.3 per cent real-terms cut in the economy portfolio two budgets ago, when the real-terms increase in the overall budget was 2.2 per cent. There were further cuts this year to the enterprise, trade and investment budget and a failure to pass on business rates in full.

I listened carefully to what the Deputy First Minister said yesterday and to what she said today—that inward investment is strong and that Scottish Enterprise is working hard to stimulate growth in the business sector. She also implied that, when it comes to the difficult choices that the Government faces, there has been less success with the skills agenda. I agree with her on that point, because there has not been nearly enough focus on cutting out billions of pounds of waste and replacing it with preventative spend.

The Scottish Government must be much more focused on stopping that waste and it must think far more about the benefits of preventative spend. For example, many people in the world of sport are complaining about the cuts to budgets ahead of major events such as the Commonwealth games, the Tour de France and the Euros, when it has been said that it is wonderful that Scotland will be hosting them. Those people were assured of certain budgets in sport and, so far, the promises are wearing very thin.

With regard to John Swinney's promise in 2007 to ensure that Scotland had a smaller and more effective Government, the facts speak for themselves. The tentacles of the state in Scotland, particularly with regard to social policy, have only ever been increasing. The size of the state has burgeoned through the growth of quangos and a leviathan and unreformed public sector. Since

2022, we have had 500 additional civil servants in top pay grades—so much for a smaller and more effective Government.

The programme for government, like its immediate predecessors, remains stubbornly fixed on the social contract. That is all well and good in theory, but it cannot be paid for. As every economic forecaster is telling us, the main reason is the deeper and deeper fiscal hole due to the exponential rise in the benefits bill, which is predicted to be £1.3 billion over the budgeted amount for 2025-26.

The First Minister, yesterday and then today on the radio, was trumpeting the fact that he has public finances under control. I am not sure what economic briefings he has been reading, but it is certainly not those with a view from planet earth. For example, having read the programme for government very carefully, I can find no detail of how the Scottish Government intends to pay for its welfare spending, which is predicted to be £2 billion in deficit by 2030, nor, as the Fraser of Allander Institute pointed out yesterday, is there any real detail on the timetable for delivery of the mitigation of the two-child cap. Likewise, we do not have final details about the public sector pay deals.

If there is one current example of the damage from fiscal pressures, it is what is happening in our university and college sectors, not just in relation to the high-profile case of the University of Dundee but in relation to the pernicious underfunding that is affecting college and university courses, teaching grants, research and the morale of all those who work in those sectors.

Time and time again, I have heard from the Scottish Government that the ills of tertiary education have been imposed in the aftermath of Brexit or by pressures imposed by Westminster. However, ministers know, as do an increasing number of members of the public and other parties in the Parliament, that the current model of SNP funding—not anyone else's model—is simply not sustainable.

So existential is the issue—I know that the First Minister has had the full details explained to him by various vice-chancellors—that it is no longer a question of if the current model will be abandoned but when. We cannot go on with a model that is undermining the very future of our colleges and universities and that discriminates against domiciled Scots because of the artificial cap on places.

I will finish on that point and I hope that, in my future career, I will listen to debates rather than speak in them.

16:50

**The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice (Shirley-Anne Somerville):** I am grateful to all the members who have engaged constructively in the debate today, focusing—as we all have been, but perhaps from different perspectives—on the best future for Scotland.

As the Deputy First Minister said in her opening speech, eradicating child poverty and growing our economy go hand in hand. Without one, we simply cannot achieve the other. A strong economy will not only support investment in our ambitious anti-poverty measures and the public services on which we all rely; it will support a buoyant labour market that will provide the opportunities for parents and others to increase their earnings through fair work. That point was made by Kenny Gibson and other members.

In the programme for government that was published this week, the First Minister set out the Government's plans for delivery in the final year of this parliamentary session, building on the action that we have taken to date, and he highlighted the progress that we will continue to make.

We have delivered. Over the lifetime of this parliamentary session, action has been taken to reduce child poverty and to tackle its roots. We have expanded the Scottish child payment to eligible children under the age of 16 and more than doubled the value of the support that is available for families, helping families both in and out of work to meet the costs of raising a child. We have nearly doubled the number of funded childcare hours for all three and four-year-olds and eligible two-year-olds, helping to give the best start in life to every child and supporting more parents to access training, learning and employment.

We have helped to deliver more than 26,000 affordable homes and moved towards our ambitious target of 110,000 homes by 2032, helping families to access warm, safe homes. We have supported 28,000 parents through our devolved employability services. Those actions and the wider actions that we have taken are making a difference to families and to our economic prosperity.

Official statistics that were published in March show that, despite the considerable headwinds that we have faced, the proportion of children who are living in relative poverty has reduced and the 2023-24 rate was lower than it had been in any year since 2014-15, while the proportion of children who are in absolute poverty has also fallen, with the annual figure being the lowest in 30 years.

Our action is making a difference to families. On average, households with children who are in the poorest 10 per cent of households are estimated

to be £2,600 a year better off in 2025-26 as a result of Scottish Government policies. This Government is delivering for the people of Scotland.

However, it is also important to reflect on what the UK Government has delivered for the people of Scotland. At this point, I want to mention Murdo Fraser and his praise of Brexit. I point out to him that modelling by the National Institute for Economic and Social Research estimates that, due to Brexit, there was a 2.5 per cent hit to GDP by 2023 and that there will be a 5.7 per cent hit to GDP by 2035. That makes a real difference right across the country to every single business and community.

**Murdo Fraser** *rose*—

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** If Murdo Fraser would like to defend Brexit further, I am happy to take the intervention.

**Murdo Fraser:** What modelling can the cabinet secretary point to that gives the impact that independence would have on the Scottish economy and public finances? According to the Scottish Government's own economic adviser, the impact would be "Brexit times 10".

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** Murdo Fraser knows well the answer to that, as he consistently reminds members in the chamber that the Scottish Government has delivered a great deal of detailed work on the benefits of independence. If he wants to see that work, perhaps he should not complain when the Government delivers it.

It is also important that we recognise the successes in the economy. That is why it is important that we look at earnings growth, with median monthly pay for payroll employees having grown by 2.6 per cent in real terms, compared with 2.1 per cent in the UK. We are making a difference, despite the fact that the Tories have delivered Brexit and Labour is now defending it.

A number of members, including Jamie Greene, mentioned public service reform—and they are right to do so. I point him to the work that is in the programme for government on whole-family support and on the fairer futures partnerships, because that gets right to the heart of the challenge that he, quite rightly, presented to us today, which is to deliver public services for people when they need them, to ease the difficulty of finding that support and for it not only to be there at points of crisis.

**Fergus Ewing:** Many members have mentioned the dualling of the A9 and the A96. On the topic of delivery, when will the Nairn bypass be delivered?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** Fergus Ewing will be well versed in what Fiona Hyslop has told the Parliament about the on-going work on that. He

will note that Fiona Hyslop was on the A9 very recently to take forward the next stage of that, and she is taking forward the discussions and work on the bypass.

Pam Duncan-Glancy talked about education. I spare a thought for those parents who look forward to going home to see how today's higher English exam went—I do not think that I am the only one in the chamber in that position. I look forward to those discussions, as I am sure that others do.

It is important to look at what we have delivered in education. There have been record levels of literacy and numeracy attainment for primary and secondary pupils. There has also been a record-low attainment gap in literacy for primary pupils and for secondary pupils at level 3 in both literacy and numeracy between the proportions of pupils from the most and least deprived areas. That is delivering for our young people.

Of course, 95.7 per cent of school leavers are entering a positive initial destination on leaving school.

**Pam Duncan-Glancy:** Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** If Pam Duncan-Glancy would like to explain to the Parliament how, for example, taking away money to which under-22s are entitled due to their disability will help that young person and that family to get into employment, I would be delighted to hear about it.

**Pam Duncan-Glancy:** I note that the cabinet secretary quickly moved on from data on the attainment gap when she saw that I was about to seek an intervention on the topic. Does the cabinet secretary share the concerns of families whose young people have sat highers today that those who come from poorer backgrounds are more likely to have poorer results because the attainment gap for highers—she has failed to point this out—is now higher than it has been?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** I am sure that the young people who are going through their exams and vocational training and their parents will be heartened by the fact that 95.7 per cent of school leavers entered a positive initial destination on leaving school. That is the second-highest figure since records began in 2009-10.

Unsurprisingly, many members have come to the chamber to ask us to deliver more in different areas. I would like to touch on Kenny Gibson's point about policy coherence. I am afraid that economic incoherence is something that we have heard quite a lot of today—there has been a litany of demands for more money and disappointments about what is in the programme for government but no suggestions as to how to pay for them. I

suggest that that is all because members in Opposition parties do not believe that they will be anywhere near Government any time soon. If they did, they would not come forward with a list of things to do without constructive ways of how to deliver them.

**Paul O’Kane:** Will the cabinet secretary give way?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** I hope that Paul O’Kane will forgive me. I usually give way to him, but I am running short of time.

There is also policy incoherence. I point to Murdo Fraser. To be fair to him, he is an exceptionally busy man, so he probably had not caught up with the fact that Tory members on a committee yesterday voted to make rent controls easier. I have enormous respect for my Scottish Green colleagues, who have a very principled stance on that matter, and I look forward to continuing discussions on it. At least their approach has been consistent. I am not entirely sure how the members from the Tory party can defend their approach, but I look forward to those discussions continuing.

Martin Whitfield talked about accountability. The accountability for ministers—and, indeed, for all of us—is clear: it is the election. With one year to go, I look forward—in fact, I relish this—to taking the Government’s record to the people with our vision for hope for the future.

## Business Motions

17:00

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-17450, 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 13 May 2025

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)

*followed by* Stage 1 Debate: Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill

*followed by* Committee Announcements

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

7.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members’ Business

Wednesday 15 May 2025

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

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

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: Impact of UK Government Decisions on Scotland’s Social Care Sector

*followed by* Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party Business

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.40 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members’ Business

Thursday 15 May 2025

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister’s Questions

*followed by* Members’ Business

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Education and Skills

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: Secure Care and the Wider Care System

*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: Scotland

in Today's Europe

*followed by* Appointment of the Patient Safety Commissioner for Scotland

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 20 May 2025

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)

*followed by* Stage 3 Proceedings: Regulation of Legal Services (Scotland) Bill

*followed by* Committee Announcements

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

6.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Wednesday 21 May 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* 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 22 May 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* Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee Debate:  
Committee Effectiveness Inquiry

*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 12 May 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-17451, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on timetabling of a bill at stage 1.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Dog Theft (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be completed by 3 October 2025.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

*Motion agreed to.*

## Parliamentary Bureau Motion

17:01

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motion S6M-17452, on designation of a lead committee. I ask Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move the motion.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Children (Withdrawal from Religious Education and Amendment of UNCRC Compatibility Duty) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

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

## Decision Time

17:01

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** There are six questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Murdo Fraser is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Lorna Slater will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S6M-17437.4, in the name of Murdo Fraser, which seeks to amend motion S6M-17437, in the name of Kate Forbes, on programme for government—building the best future for Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

17:02

*Meeting suspended.*

17:04

*On resuming—*

**The Presiding Officer:** I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Murdo Fraser is agreed to, the amendment in name of Lorna Slater will fall.

We will proceed with the division on amendment S6M-17437.4, in the name of Murdo Fraser, which seeks to amend motion S6M-17437, in the name of Kate Forbes, on programme for government—building the best future for Scotland. Members should cast their votes now.

**For**

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

### Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)  
 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)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)

Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on amendment S6M-17437.4, in the name of Murdo Fraser, is: For 28, Against 88, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Paul O'Kane is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Lorna Slater will fall.

The next question is that amendment S6M-17437.2, in the name of Paul O'Kane, which seeks to amend motion S6M-17437, in the name of Kate Forbes, on programme for government—building the best future for Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My voting app did not work. I would have voted yes.

**The Presiding Officer:** We will ensure that that is recorded.

### For

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)

Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 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)  
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)  
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 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)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

### Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 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, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 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)  
 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)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (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-17437.2, in the name of Paul O’Kane, is: For 48, Against 68, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is that amendment S6M-17437.3, in the name of Lorna Slater, which seeks to amend motion S6M-17437, in the name of Kate Forbes, on programme for government—building the best future for Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

**Foysoyl Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My voting app would not connect. I would have voted no.

**The Presiding Officer:** We will ensure that that is recorded.

**For**

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)

**Against**

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)  
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]

Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on amendment S6M-17437.3, in the name of Lorna Slater, is: For 7, Against 108, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S6M-17437.1, in the name of Jamie Greene, which seeks to amend motion S6M-17437, in the name of Kate Forbes, on programme for government—building the best future for Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Jenny Gilruth):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I could not connect to the app. I would have voted no.

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

**Foysoyl Choudhury:** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I had the same issue again. I would have voted no.

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

I call Lorna Slater for a point of order.

**Lorna Slater (Lothian) (Green):** Thank you, Presiding Officer, but my app has now updated, so I think that I am all right.

**The Presiding Officer:** I confirm that your vote has been recorded, Ms Slater.

#### For

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)  
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

#### Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)

Choudhury, Foysoyl (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 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)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 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)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]  
 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)  
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)

Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley)  
(SNP)  
Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

### Abstentions

White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on amendment S6M-17437.1, in the name of Jamie Greene, is: For 30, Against 84, Abstentions 1.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S6M-17437, in the name of Kate Forbes, on programme for government—building the best future for Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer—

**The Presiding Officer:** I confirm that your vote has been recorded, Mr Mason.

### For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (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, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
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)  
McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)  
McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  
Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

### Against

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)  
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)  
Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)  
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)  
Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)  
Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)  
Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)  
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)  
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)

Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

#### Abstentions

Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on motion S6M-17437, in the name of Kate Forbes, on programme for government—building the best future for Scotland, is: For 59, Against 55, Abstentions 1.

#### *Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament recognises the actions outlined in the Programme for Government 2025-26 to grow the Scottish economy and eradicate child poverty; further recognises that these missions are inextricably linked, with a strong economy providing access to fair work opportunities and supporting investment in public services and ambitious climate and anti-poverty measures; notes that, over the year ahead, the actions within the Programme for Government will build on Scotland's economic strengths to address the additional challenges the country faces from economic volatility, capturing the economic opportunities ahead to drive improvements in living standards, reduce child poverty and build a strong foundation for the future, to weather the global economic uncertainty; welcomes the Scottish Government's continued focus on delivering action across the drivers of child poverty reduction, to increase earned incomes, reduce the costs of living and maximise incomes from social security and benefits in kind, and commits to working together to grow the economy, and deliver on the 2030 child poverty targets unanimously supported by the Scottish Parliament.

**The Presiding Officer:** The final question is, that motion S6M-17452, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on designation of a lead committee, be agreed to.

#### *Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Children (Withdrawal from Religious Education and Amendment of UNCRC Compatibility Duty) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes decision time.

## Mental Health Awareness Week 2025

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-17320, in the name of Roz McCall, on mental health awareness week 2025. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

I invite members who wish to participate to press their request-to-speak buttons, and I invite Roz McCall to open the debate.

#### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament notes that 12 to 18 May 2025 is Mental Health Awareness Week; welcomes the work of the Mental Health Foundation in driving this annual campaign across the country to raise awareness, and improve education and campaigning, to ensure that no one is deprived of the opportunity for good mental health because of who they are, the community they come from or where they live; recognises what it sees as the relevance of this year's theme of "Community" in emphasising that being part of a safe, positive community is vital for people's mental health and wellbeing; supports the idea that people thrive when they have a strong connection with other people and supportive communities that remind them that they are not alone; notes with concern reports that those living with a mental illness in Scotland continue to be left behind, despite targeted interventions by the Scottish Government and others, and still have a shorter life expectancy than the rest of the population; understands that waiting lists for child and adolescent mental health services remain too long and that access to psychological services is increasingly difficult; considers that the reported closure of autism assessment services around Scotland by health and social care partnerships has left many without access to a diagnosis; notes the belief that addressing poor mental health is something that needs to be done as a society, within communities and as individuals, and commends all who make this week possible.

17:16

**Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I am pleased to use members' business time this evening to debate an ever-growing and increasingly urgent issue in our society. I thank members on all sides of the chamber for supporting my motion and enabling us to discuss these matters today.

As the motion mentions, mental health awareness week runs from 12 to 18 May, and I welcome the vital work that is undertaken by the Mental Health Foundation in driving the annual campaign. This year's theme is community, reminding us of something profoundly important: the simple human need to feel connected and to know that we belong, and to understand that, however difficult the circumstances, we are not alone. We all recognise the value of strong, supportive communities and meaningful connections to other people. For those who are

living with mental health challenges, that sense of belonging can be quite literally life saving.

However, although awareness campaigns are valuable, the truth is that, without adequate services to back up such campaigns, those who are affected by mental health issues are being left behind. I will focus my remarks on the current state of mental health provision in Scotland, for both adults and children, and on raising serious concerns about underfunding, service cuts and a lack of coherent, joined-up provision, in particular in the Mid Scotland and Fife region, which I am proud to represent.

I begin with children's mental health and early years support, which is—as members will know—a particular passion of mine. There remains a significant gap in provision for children in primary schools. While funding exists for counselling services in secondary schools and children aged over 10 in primary schools, there is no equivalent therapeutic mental health support available for children below that age.

However, the Scottish Government's own pandemic wellbeing study showed that almost 20 per cent of five to seven-year-olds were already experiencing mental health difficulties, with the figure rising to 23 per cent for eight to 11-year-olds. Those are our youngest children, and almost a quarter of them are struggling before they even reach secondary school. One in four children is experiencing mental health difficulties by the age of 11, and the Scottish Government's existing provision is quite simply too little, too late.

The evidence from Place2Be could not be clearer. Its services show that one-to-one counselling in primary schools makes a measurable difference, with 70 per cent of primary school children reporting improved mental health outcomes, alongside better classroom learning for 55 per cent of children and improved behaviour for up to 57 per cent of pupils. We recognise the importance of early interventions in almost every other area of public policy, so why is the mental health of our youngest children still being treated as an afterthought? The outcomes are obvious and the benefits are clear, so it is utterly unacceptable that, in 2025, we are still failing to act.

Turning to adult mental health provision, the picture is equally concerning. Scottish Action for Mental Health, in its briefing for tonight's debate, highlighted that the number of people in Scotland reporting a mental health problem has more than doubled since 2011—it is up from 4.4 per cent to 11.3 per cent in the most recent census. Even more harrowing is the rise in probable suicide deaths, which increased again last year, to 792 lives lost.

Statutory mental health services are stretched to breaking point. For too many people, those services, despite being underresourced and overburdened, remain the only available support when they reach crisis. That is why it was deeply disappointing that the Scottish Government abandoned its 2021 commitment for every general practice to have access to a multidisciplinary mental health and wellbeing service. Primary care access to mental health support is essential. It is the front line of early help and prevention, and withdrawing that commitment has left countless people facing delays, deterioration and, in some cases, tragic outcomes.

I also want to address a vital, and often overlooked, dimension of mental health provision. Too often, when we discuss mental health, we forget the devastating psychological impact of certain physical health conditions. I highlight two in particular: stroke and Huntington's disease. As the deputy convener of the cross-party group on stroke, I have heard all too often about the profound life-altering impact that stroke can have on mental health. The Stroke Association's latest figures for my region, which covers three health boards, show that 70 to 75 per cent of people who suffered a stroke in 2023 were likely to experience mental health issues. That correlates with United Kingdom-wide research in 2019, which found that three quarters of stroke survivors experienced mental health difficulties ranging from loss of confidence, anxiety, depression and, tragically, suicidal thoughts.

Stroke is not only a physical event. It changes every aspect of a person's life, including their independence, relationships, employment and sense of self, and yet psychological aftercare is patchy at best. Although the Scottish Government's "Stroke Improvement Plan 2023" rightly identified psychological care as a priority, the delivery of that care remains shockingly poor. Measured against the standard red-amber-green rankings, most health boards remain stubbornly in the red or amber categories, and that is simply unacceptable.

I also highlight Huntington's disease, which is a rare but cruel genetic condition that devastates families, affecting people physically, cognitively and mentally. Scotland is believed to have one of the highest rates of Huntington's disease in the world and yet, despite that, some integration joint boards are now proposing to cut funding for the Scottish Huntington's Association, which would effectively end specialist Huntington's disease support services in those areas. That decision would be not only heartless, but a dereliction of duty.

I hope that the Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport will take the opportunity

tonight to join me in opposing those cuts and commit to ensuring that families that are affected with Huntington's disease in Scotland receive the support, including specialist mental health care, that they so desperately need.

In conclusion, I applaud the incredible work of the Mental Health Foundation, SAMH, Place2Be, the See Me campaign and the many other charities, organisations and grass-roots groups that work tirelessly to raise awareness and provide services where the state so often falls short. Support at the right time, in particular through early intervention, transforms outcomes, and I urge the Scottish Government—not for the first time—to take responsibility for the issue once and for all. Our communities and our children deserve better; stroke survivors and families who are living with Huntington's disease deserve better; and our mental health services staff and those whom they serve cannot wait any longer.

17:23

**Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** I congratulate the member on securing the debate.

These days, issues with our mental health or wellbeing are recognised as having a status and significance equivalent to that of physical illnesses. Of course, that was not always the case. I am referring not to the bad old days of asylums, which were not so long ago, but to the general acceptance now that it is no longer a weakness or an embarrassment for someone to admit or recognise that their mental health is not in a good place. That change will have contributed to more people identifying as having mental health issues.

The Covid-19 pandemic must also have exacerbated mental health issues for many people, perhaps as a result of isolation, illness, the loss of a loved one or financial worries, or a combination of any of those. For the young, there are the pressures of social media. How do your looks conform to fashion? Are you too fat? Bullying follows you into your bedroom, and is at your fingertips in the ever-present social media.

For the single parent, there are money worries; for the pensioner, there are money pressures, loneliness, failing health and mobility limitations, with family perhaps far removed or even estranged. Those are just some examples.

So, how to cope and where to find support? I accept that there are huge pressures on those across all age ranges, for which I do not have solutions. However, there are well-known agencies such as Citizens Advice Scotland, for debt support; bereavement services that are run by the national health service and Samaritans Scotland; and more localised help, too. For

example, I did not previously know about the Scottish Borders widowed community, which is a peer support group for men and women in the Borders who have lost a partner. It offers a mix of private online discussions, in-person meetings of the widows hope group in Galashiels and social activities, giving widowed people a chance to give and receive support through their grief in a trusted safe space as well as making friends and combating social isolation and loneliness.

The Scottish Borders widowed community has been described by its members as a lifeline, being the only group in the area that is exclusively for widowed people. One said:

"I joined the group in 2023, five weeks after I lost my husband Sean. Losing Sean so suddenly and unexpectedly was devastating to me, but the Scottish Borders widowed community gave me hope for the future and brought me so much joy."

Being widowed is very different from other losses and is widely recognised as one of the most traumatising and stressful life events. Having access to that type of support locally is, therefore, crucial to the health and wellbeing of the community's members.

There is also an online service called Togetherall for residents in the Borders aged 16 and over, which provides an anonymous peer forum offering self-assessment for anxiety and depression. There is a 24-hour service for online chat, with wellbeing advisers to support people to maintain their mental health and wellbeing.

There are what matters hubs offering drop-in sessions across the Borders. Looking across to the other part of my constituency, there are men's sheds—we are all aware of those. For example, there is one in Penicuik that brings men together to chat, taking them away from their isolation once they are no longer working in teams. They make useful items—for example, they have made a bench and bird table for Broomhill day centre, which in turn provides support to keep elderly people away from loneliness and isolation by providing not just lunches but company and a chat.

There is the Kellock club at North Kirk church in Penicuik—that is not easy to say—where men meet for an afternoon tea and chat. They often have a speaker; I was one such at their inaugural meeting. I introduced myself with the words, "Is this where the speed dating takes place?" It more than broke the ice, but disappointingly I am still unattached—I will leave it at that.

There are many more examples of support for those who are suffering. For example, as I know members will be aware, there are groups providing support for baby loss, suicidal thoughts and drug and alcohol addictions. I know of many such

groups across the Borders—there are too many to mention, but I know who they are and I thank them, as they do much to help people through the mental stresses that they meet in today's modern world.

17:28

**Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con):** I thank my colleague, Roz McCall, for securing a members' business debate on such an important topic. As we approach mental health awareness week, which takes place between 12 and 18 May 2025, we need to take a step back and reflect on how mental health issues truly affect people across Scotland.

So many individuals suffer from mental health challenges that make their lives hard for them, both at work and in relationships. Recent insights from Public Health Scotland show that mental health referrals shot up by 22 per cent in just a year, and it is alarming to see that more than a third of all general practitioner visits are now related to mental health concerns. That becomes even more concerning as the Scottish health survey states that one in four adults in Scotland faces mental health issues—an increase that cannot be ignored. The rise in anxiety, depression, and stress is striking, and points to an urgent need for on-going support and intervention.

I share those serious concerns about mental health issues in our communities, and I want to shine a light on the remarkable efforts to tackle them that are taking place in my West Scotland region. Initiatives such as the men's sheds in Milngavie, Bearsden and Kirkintilloch aim to tackle loneliness and mental health problems and to alleviate depression through community-focused projects.

The FACT charity in Bishopbriggs, the name of which stands for Families of Auchinairn Coming Together, works to build stronger communities and provide mental health support by breaking down social isolation. East Dunbartonshire Association for Mental Health offers mental health and wellbeing support to individuals through peer support. Group Recovery Aftercare Community Enterprise in Kirkintilloch supports people's mental health through peer support groups that focus on stability, hope and confidence for the future. I encourage members to visit the exhibition that GRACE is hosting this week in the Parliament's garden lobby.

The many great organisations in my region, and all across Scotland, do a fantastic job, and I thank them all. Unfortunately, due to time constraints, I cannot mention them all in my contribution.

I want to highlight how people from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds see mental

health issues. In some communities, it is taboo to discuss poor mental health, which is seen as a sign of weakness. Such stigma prevents people from getting the treatment that they need, which leads to further isolation and suffering. The Scottish Government's "Mental Health Equality Evidence" report of 2023 highlights that BAME individuals are less likely to access mental health services and more likely to face poor mental health outcomes. The rates of delayed discharge among BAME patients in mental health specialties are significantly higher than those for the general population. We must work to dismantle those barriers and foster an environment in which conversations about mental health are encouraged and supported.

I was fortunate enough to meet representatives of Scottish Asian Counselling Services, which works with people of south Asian descent and those from other BAME communities. Since 2023, it has delivered 180 counselling sessions to 30 individuals, including children, young people and adults. It has delivered workshops and collaborated actively with Sikh and Muslim communities, visiting gurdwaras and mosques, and has created a monthly online drop-in platform to support open conversations about mental health.

If we are to tackle the mental health disparities in BAME communities, we need to take a comprehensive approach. We must work on breaking down cultural stigmas, improving accessibility to services, addressing socioeconomic barriers and providing care that respects cultural sensitivities. By fostering strong communities and investing in targeted support, we can make a real difference in mental health outcomes for BAME individuals in Scotland.

I look forward to hearing in the minister's closing remarks how the Scottish Government proposes to tackle the mental health issues that I have mentioned.

17:32

**Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab):** I, too, thank Roz McCall for securing this important members' business debate, the motion for which I was pleased to sign and support.

Mental health awareness week is an important time in the calendar when we recognise the significant advances that we have made in raising awareness of mental health issues while also acknowledging that, as a nation, we still have a long way to go to achieve a society and an economy that promote good mental health.

The theme of this year's mental health awareness week is community, and its aim is to recognise the role that community resilience plays

in providing a positive environment for good mental health to take root. Yet, across Scotland, we see community mental health services being stretched to breaking point, with punishing cuts taking place from Aberdeenshire to Dumfries and Galloway, leading to vital services being reduced, if not closed completely.

In my home city of Glasgow, the cuts have been particularly brutal this year. In an age when increasing awareness of mental health enjoys cross-party consensus, it is all the more incredible that Glasgow's health and social care partnership has cut its funding for Flourish House, a groundbreaking mental health recovery community that has been based in the Woodlands district since 1997. It is the last remaining example in Scotland of the international clubhouse model. It is not just Flourish house that faces an uncertain future. Glasgow's Notre Dame Centre for children, the Sandyford clinic's counselling service for survivors of sexual assault, and even the Scottish Huntington's Association's specialist services for Huntington's disease sufferers are all in danger of being closed due to funding cuts. That means that while we in Parliament rightly celebrate the importance of community groups in providing good mental health, the same community groups in Glasgow and elsewhere in Scotland are now deeply worried about their future.

According to research carried out by See Me Scotland, 60 per cent of Scots surveyed think that "a great deal or fair amount of shame"

is still associated with mental illness, I am sure that everyone in the Parliament would agree that that is simply unacceptable. In this mental health awareness week, we must recognise that if we want to lift that shame we must be willing to finance services that provide help for people who are brave enough to ask for help. It is not good enough to say, "It's okay to not be okay." It is the duty of everyone who is elected to Parliament to support critical services. We must work together to end the cruel cuts to mental health services across Scotland and instead create a process that will guarantee the long-term funding of such vital support. Government at all levels must be reprogrammed to prioritise long-term value creation over short-term cost savings.

I thank Ms McCall for lodging her motion, which addresses a topic that I am passionate about. I congratulate the Mental Health Foundation on its persistence in working to raise awareness of mental health issues in Scotland. I hope that the debate will play an important role in raising awareness of mental health and the importance of properly funding community-based mental health services, as well as dealing with the critical triggers and causes of mental ill health at all stages of life. We all need to play our part in

dealing with the root causes of poor mental health and securing better support for people in Scotland who suffer from it. For that reason, I am very happy to support the motion, which places such focus on community resilience.

17:36

**Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green):** I, too, extend my gratitude to Roz McCall for securing the debate.

Since 2001, mental health awareness week has marked a time to challenge stigma and push for action. The week's events, which this year run from 12 to 18 May, are led by the Mental Health Foundation and aim to raise awareness and to advocate meaningful change.

As the members who spoke prior to me have pointed out, this year's theme is community. That should serve as an important reminder of how connection, belonging and mutual support can strengthen mental wellbeing. Community is not just about where we live; it is also about our feeling supported and valued by others around us, which reminds us that we are not alone.

There is some way to go to improve mental health support in Scotland. As SAMH points out, although the Scottish Government's mental health and wellbeing strategy rightly emphasises early intervention and prevention, the reality on the ground is that access to local services remains inconsistent.

Too many people can access help only once they have reached crisis point, and statutory services that are designed to support the most complex needs are overwhelmed. The number of people who report a mental health problem has more than doubled since 2011, and 11.3 per cent of people who responded to the 2022 census said that they had a mental health problem, compared with 4.4 per cent in 2011. In a way, that should absolutely be welcomed. Enabling people to recognise that they are struggling is a hugely important part of raising awareness and tackling stigma.

Primary care remains a crucial route for accessing mental health support. SAMH welcomes the increase in the primary care mental health workforce, with 356 new full-time equivalent posts being funded through action 15 of the Scottish Government's mental health strategy. However, community link workers are meant to be a core part of those services. They play an essential role in helping people to access wider community support and to address the underlying causes of their distress. Important work continues to be needed, such as committing to long-term multiyear funding for community link worker provision across the country, with continued work

with partners to standardise the community link worker role.

The Scottish Government must act urgently to work with IJBs, local authorities and health boards to ensure that community mental health provision is maintained and sustainably funded to meet the needs of our communities.

I want to turn members' attention to the challenges that the system faces in meeting diverse needs across the population. Services that were designed for people with severe mental illnesses such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder are now also expected to handle rising demand for neurodevelopmental condition assessments, such as those for autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, which now affect about one in 10 people. Around the country, we are seeing the removal of some of those pathways for people with autism or ADHD diagnosis needs. During the debate on the programme for government, I mentioned that, although we should encourage workplaces and education settings to put support in place, regardless of people's diagnoses, we cannot rely on those settings to do the right thing, and nor can we underestimate the positive impact that a diagnosis can have for some people. We need the pathways that we have lost to be reinstated.

Initiatives such as See Me Scotland highlight that their research clearly demonstrates the need for on-going investment and a sustained focus on addressing stigma and discrimination in Scotland, especially on how those factors affect the experiences and outcomes of people who live with mental illness. They also underline the scale of the challenge that lies ahead and the transformative change that will be required if we are to meaningfully reduce such stigma and discrimination.

The importance of community extends to recognising the impact on carers and families. The Scottish Huntington's Association has, I am sure, shared powerful examples with many members. The condition affects physical, cognitive and mental health, and it places enormous strain on family members who provide care.

For 35 years, families in Scotland have been supported by Huntington's disease specialists from the Scottish Huntington's Association. That proactive and community-based support has been shown to prevent crises and reduce the number of hospital admissions. It is precisely the kind of service that we should be protecting. Despite that, services are potentially being cut, so the Government needs to work with IJBs in that regard.

I echo Roz McCall's comments on psychological support for people who have had a stroke. At the

cross-party group on stroke, we have heard people describe how, following their stroke, some survivors find themselves coming to terms with their new life while disliking pastimes and even food that they used to like. Families find themselves coming to terms with a new person who has come home following their stroke. The Stroke Association has a brilliant report on that, if anybody wants to see it.

Awareness matters, but it is only the starting point. To build a fairer system, we must listen to those who are directly affected and commit to creating services that are properly resourced, responsive and equitable.

17:41

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** I thank my friend and colleague Roz McCall for bringing the debate to the chamber ahead of mental health awareness week.

Members will not be surprised to note my direction of travel in this debate—I can almost see their eyes rolling already. On the wall in my office, I have an ever-present poster that says that food is the most abused anxiety drug and that exercise is the most underutilised antidepressant.

I keep quoting "Food for Thought", a Mental Health Foundation report that is now becoming quite old, which discusses the importance of nutrition to our mental health, not just our physical health. That makes sense—of course it makes sense—because the brain is an organ like any other organ in the body, and if we feed it properly, it will work better.

SAMH is a great exponent of the need to be physically active to tackle poor mental health. As I always say, SAMH sponsors jogscotland not out of the goodness of its heart but because it promotes an active lifestyle in tackling poor mental health.

Access to physical activity is important. I was pleased to hear Christine Grahame talk about the impact of social media and the omnipresent mobile phone. We have to give our youth, primarily, the opportunity to disconnect from social media and their mobile phone. I have not seen too many kids running about a hockey pitch, a netball court or a football pitch while carrying their mobile phone. The ability to disconnect and not have to worry about what our peers are saying about us on social media for a period of time gives us an outlet for anxiety and energy.

That is why I will continue to promote the need to be physically active and the need for sport, music, art and drama to be available in our schools. Our schools are such a battleground when it comes to tackling health problems and poor mental health. In our schools, we are trying to

tackle poor mental health, poor physical health, poor attainment and poor behaviour. I go back to my point that a good diet and being physically active tackle those issues better than just about anything else that we can do.

I was interested to hear Roz McCall talk about the plight of stroke victims. I want to highlight some really good practice in Kilmarnock with the Killie Heartmates, whom I visited not that long ago. Those who have a stroke get about six weeks of rehabilitation in hospital, but, after that, they are kind of left to their own devices. When I spoke to the people who go along to Killie Heartmates, they talked about going home and almost waiting for, and being frightened about, their next stroke. The group put together an exercise programme for people who have suffered a stroke, which is supported by a stroke physiotherapist from Kilmarnock hospital. I went along, and let me tell you: I got a fair sweat up. However, the reality is that the most important part of it is the community. After the exercise class, people get a cup of tea, a biscuit and a chat, which is unbelievably important.

I could talk about this all day, as the Deputy Presiding Officer well knows. However, for me, the three pillars are good nutrition, physical activity and inclusivity in our communities. If we tackle those issues, we can perhaps get away from the need to increase capacity, because we are always behind the curve and always playing catch-up, which is unsustainable. Instead, we should work on reducing need.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Whittle. It takes less and less to get a big sweat up these days.

17:46

**The Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport (Maree Todd):** I can certainly empathise with that sentiment, Deputy Presiding Officer.

I thank Roz McCall for lodging the motion for this year's debate. The theme of community is a great one. I have spoken previously about how community-based supports, including from the third sector, are a vital part of our mental health system. That is reflected in our mental health and wellbeing strategy, which outlines a long-term vision of a Scotland that is free from stigma and inequality, and where everyone achieves the best possible mental health and wellbeing. The strategy addresses a range of needs to ensure that people get the right support while focusing on the wider social and economic factors that can impact people's mental health.

This mental health awareness week, the Scottish Government will be raising awareness in a number of ways. I am looking forward to visiting

Gairloch museum, in my constituency, which runs weekly activity sessions for unpaid carers and people living with dementia. That project is one of thousands that have received funding from our communities mental health and wellbeing fund for adults. Since 2021, the fund has provided grass-roots groups across Scotland with £66 million to support those who are most at risk of poor mental health.

Likewise, since 2020, the children and young people's community fund has provided local authorities with more than £65 million of funding for more than 300 community mental health and wellbeing supports and services.

**Roz McCall:** Does the minister agree with me, and with Place2Be, that we need to do more focused work with young people in our schools to ensure that they have early support and that there is early intervention, which will, we hope, mean that they will not need support as they grow older?

**Maree Todd:** Absolutely. I have met the very impressive group of people at Place2Be. The funding that we are providing to support communities is very much focused on early intervention, prevention and tailored support to keep people mentally healthy.

I have seen for myself the difference that such funds are making in people's lives. On a recent visit to Empower Women for Change in Glasgow, I saw how minority ethnic women are being supported to improve their mental health and wellbeing through shared learning and peer support.

The inclusion of our adult fund in the Scottish Government's third sector fairer funding pilot will result in multiyear funding for the first time, with £15 million being invested in each of the next two years. That will give community organisations the security to continue the great work that is being done across the country.

We are also supporting a number of other programmes across Scotland that are targeted at specific groups that are most at risk of poor mental health. That includes the national rural mental health forum, which provides tailored support for rural and island communities with the unique challenges that they face. Another great example is SAMH's changing room extra time programme, which uses football to bring men together to talk about mental health while reducing stigma and isolation in the process.

However, not everyone is comfortable with face-to-face support, so we have also funded a range of online supports to provide mental health information and advice. Those include the mind to mind and Parent Club websites for adults and the AyeFeel and Mind Yer Time resources for children and young people.

In relation to specialist supports, I am sure that all members will be aware that, for the first time ever, national performance against the 18-week CAMHS standard has been met, with more than 90 per cent of children and young people starting treatment within 18 weeks of referral. That has been achieved alongside an increasing number of referrals to CAMHS for support. We remain committed to meeting that treatment time standard and clearing backlogs by December 2025 to ensure that our young people receive appropriate mental health support quickly.

**Brian Whittle:** The minister detailed how the waiting time for CAMHS is coming down. Should we not also acknowledge that too many children are falling into poor mental health? Anxiety is a natural state and a natural part of life, but the fact that we are not giving children outlets for that anxiety is leading them to CAMHS.

**Maree Todd:** I will come to that point in a moment. Although anxiety is a natural state, it can be pathological. There is no doubt that anxiety disorders cause an immense level of disability to those who suffer from them, so I do not want to diminish the experience that some people have, but we can do things to increase people's coping skills and resilience.

I recognise the significant increase in the number of children and adults who are seeking support for their neurodivergence. Although that has challenged services, NHS boards and health and social care partnerships must prioritise funding to ensure that those who need it most can access assessment. We fund the national autism implementation team to support NHS boards to develop, enhance and redesign local neurodevelopmental services.

I recognise, as my colleague Gillian Mackay has said, that receiving a diagnosis can be important. However, a formal diagnosis should not always be needed to access support, and not all people with neurodivergent support needs will meet diagnostic thresholds. Such support for those who need it should be made available in their local community, whether that relates to education, employment or something else. We are working across—

**Christine Grahame:** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Maree Todd:** Yes.

**Christine Grahame:** My intervention is not relevant to what the minister has just said, but I want to give a plug for Trellis Scotland, which I failed to mention. It offers therapeutic gardening and horticulture for children and adults. Unlike Brian Whittle, I do not have running shoes, but I have a fork and a spade.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I am glad that you did not raise that as a point of order, Ms Grahame.

**Maree Todd:** Let me assure members that, through the efforts of Christine Grahame and Jim Fairlie, I am well aware of that organisation's amazing work in using horticulture as a therapy and as a way to connect and improve mental wellbeing.

We are working right across policies and services to raise awareness and to ensure that people who provide services are able to respond to the needs of neurodivergent people. We are also investing in our autistic adult support fund, which provides support to autistic adults without the need for a formal diagnosis. We have invested almost £250,000 in assessment and support for children, in addition to the significant investment across all the services that I have mentioned.

When we raise awareness of mental health, it is important that we raise awareness of suicide, too. We know that supporting people to talk openly about suicide saves lives. Last month, suicide prevention Scotland launched a powerful new campaign to reduce stigma and support anyone who is at risk of or affected by suicide.

On Brian Whittle's points, I smiled as he said that he was going to bore the chamber—I thought that he was going to talk only about exercise, which is a passion that we share. The evidence is growing on the role of exercise not only in prevention but in the treatment of mild to moderate mental illness. There is huge evidence that exercise is a solid investment for our children. The Daily Mile evidence has shown that, if we want our children to read and write better and to perform better at school, we need to get them moving, and I commend it to everyone in the chamber. Sometimes, mental health interventions do not look like mental health interventions, and the Daily Mile is one of them.

I am glad that a number of people mentioned the social determinants of ill health. The rise in mental ill health comes on the back of 15 years of austerity, a pandemic, geopolitical forces, war, discussion about tariffs and an immense cost of living crisis. We must recognise the social determinants of mental ill health, and I am proud to be part of a Government that is tackling child poverty, which will have a lasting benefit for the mental wellbeing of our population.

I emphasise that improving mental health and wellbeing remains a priority for the Government, even in the context of the past few difficult financial years. The direct programme budget for mental health has more than doubled, and I am grateful for the opportunity to draw attention to that

today. I thank everyone who took part in the debate.

*Meeting closed at 17:55.*



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