



**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Meeting of the Parliament

**Thursday 12 June 2025**

**Session 6**



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# Scottish Parliament

Thursday 12 June 2025

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

## General Question Time

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

### National Health Service (Mental Health Services Spend)

**1. Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what progress it has made on ensuring that 10 per cent of front-line national health service spending is on mental health services. (S6O-04784)

**The Minister for Social Care and Mental Wellbeing (Tom Arthur):** We continue to work with national health service boards and integration joint boards towards delivery of the commitment that at least 10 per cent of front-line health spending will be dedicated to mental health by the end of this parliamentary session. The latest available cost book data confirmed that NHS expenditure on mental health has increased by £179.6 million to £1.486 billion in 2023-24. That is 9.03 per cent of total net expenditure, up from 8.53 per cent in 2022-23.

Although we remain committed to the delivery of the target, as we all know, there are continued and unprecedented challenges to public finances. Despite those pressures, since 2006, mental health spending across the NHS has doubled in cash terms, from £651 million in 2006-07 to more than £1.49 billion in 2023-24.

**Rhoda Grant:** The Scottish Government pledged that boards should spend 1 per cent of their budget on child and adolescent mental health services. However, I understand that only one board has achieved that, while NHS Highland is spending only 0.37 per cent of its budget on CAMHS.

Young people are spending years of their childhood on waiting lists, while others are being rejected from the service altogether. When will all boards fulfil that pledge, and when will the lengthy CAMHS waiting times be dealt with?

**Tom Arthur:** I would want to acknowledge the significant progress that has been made on CAMHS waiting times this year, which members will be aware of.

I am aware of the specific points in relation to NHS Highland and have been discussing the matter actively. My officials have been engaged on the matter. I confirm to Rhoda Grant that I will meet NHS Highland in the near future, as well as all the other territorial health boards, because I want to work constructively and in partnership to ensure that all our health boards meet those spending targets.

**Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP):** Will the minister outline how the Scottish budget—which Ms Grant and her colleagues did not even engage with, let alone vote for—provides record funding for mental health services across Scotland, and how that will benefit thousands across Scotland to access crucial services?

**Tom Arthur:** As I set out in my initial response, since 2006, mental health spending by NHS Scotland has more than doubled in cash terms. The most recent figures show that spend was £1.486 billion in 2023-24.

Mental health is an absolute priority for this Government. Even in the context of the past few difficult financial years, we have continued to invest wisely. That is evidenced by statistics that show that we have the best national performance ever recorded for CAMHS waiting times, and that we have record numbers of staff providing more varied mental health support and services to a larger number of people than ever before.

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** Working towards delivery, when there is only one year to go before the end of this Government's term in office, is simply not good enough. Fife is well down the league table in relation to spending on mental health and on CAMHS. The effect on other services, including the police, is dramatic, as is the effect on the economy, with lots of people unable to work, because this Government cannot give them the support that they need. When will there be a renewed focus on making sure that mental health is the priority that it deserves to be?

**Tom Arthur:** I recognise the seriousness of the issues that Mr Rennie raises, and I want to assure him that, although I have been in post fewer than 24 hours, I have already been actively engaging with my officials to take those matters forward.

We have seen an increase in spending on front-line mental health services—that much I have already referred to in my original answers. However, I recognise and appreciate that there is variation between boards, which will, ultimately, be part of any complex system that we are dealing with.

As I set out in my original answer to Rhoda Grant, I am committed to meeting all boards over the course of the summer, because I want to

ensure that, collectively across Scotland, we are all working to meet those spending targets by the end of the parliamentary session.

**The Presiding Officer:** There is much interest in this question time session, so I would be grateful for concise questions and responses.

#### **NHS Highland (General Practitioner Vaccination Services)**

**2. Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government when general practitioner vaccination services will be fully restored to GPs in NHS Highland, in light of reported concerns that the proposed hybrid model is less safe and more expensive. (S6O-04785)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Neil Gray):** In general, the model of health boards being responsible for delivering vaccinations is working well across Scotland, but I recognise the need for flexibility in some areas, such as those that I have discussed at various junctures with Mr Ewing, in order to account for specific circumstances that might negatively affect vaccine uptake.

That is why I have agreed to Highland health and social care partnership putting in place a mixed model. Oversight of how that will be developed and deployed to deliver local and accessible vaccination services in a safe and cost-effective way will ultimately remain the responsibility of Highland HSCP, with input and support from local GPs, practice managers, Public Health Scotland and the Scottish Government.

**Fergus Ewing:** Over the past three or four years, I have raised with the cabinet secretary and his two predecessors that a GP-run service would save millions of pounds a year—a fact that the cabinet secretary appears to ignore. More important, it would be safer because, as the cabinet secretary well knows, we have already lost the life of one infant, because of the negligence of a centralised national health service system. Given the concerns and the fact that the vaccination service will not, even now, be returned to GPs for this winter, will the cabinet secretary intervene and demand that NHS Highland return the service to GPs before any more damage is caused to patients in my constituency in the Highlands?

**Neil Gray:** In our interactions, I have listened to Mr Ewing's testimony and that of the GPs that he represents and, as a result, I have taken action. I am concerned by Mr Ewing's narration in the conclusion of his question about the pace at which the matter is moving. I would be more than happy to check in again with the Highland health and social care partnership to ensure that it is working at the necessary pace, and to stress that the

effectiveness and safety of the system are paramount.

**Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I have always joined with Fergus Ewing in calling for vaccinations to be returned to GPs in the Highlands, but NHS Highland seems to believe that the only place to deliver services is Raigmore hospital. That is why it has also pulled enhanced GP services across the Highlands. If NHS Highland cannot manage its finances, and as it appears that it will be £50 million in debt by the end of the year, is the answer to the problem that it should be put into special measures?

**Neil Gray:** We continue to work with all boards, including NHS Highland, on their financial positions, and we keep those positions under review. I know that Mr Mountain has an interest, as does Mr Ewing, in the position on vaccination services in the Highlands. I am happy to continue to interact with the member to ensure that the effective, safe delivery of vaccinations is achieved in the Highlands, and I will ensure that I keep in touch with Mr Ewing and Mr Mountain to that end.

#### **Scottish Attainment Challenge Funding (Dundee City Council)**

**3. Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of any impact of the reported reduction in Scottish attainment challenge funding for Dundee City Council. (S6O-04786)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Jenny Gilruth):** Since the inception of the Scottish attainment challenge in 2015, Dundee schools have received a total of £86.7 million. In refreshing the Scottish attainment challenge in 2022 to introduce strategic equity funding, the Scottish Government prioritised ensuring that funding was distributed equitably to all 32 local authorities, recognising that poverty exists in every local authority in Scotland. In taking that decision, an equality impact assessment was undertaken and published. The change in distribution, which was developed in close consultation with local government and agreed to by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, has taken place over four years, enabling challenge authorities to transition to their equitable share of SEF over time.

**Michael Marra:** Several constituents have contacted me, as their jobs as health and wellbeing workers in Dundee schools are being cut. Despite years of service, they are set to lose their jobs at the end of this school term.

In 2021, when the Scottish National Party did not refresh but cut Dundee's attainment challenge funding, I warned that the decision would inflict callous cuts on the poorest children in the poorest

areas in Scotland. What does the cabinet secretary have to say to my constituents who have provided such vital support to some of the most vulnerable young people in Scotland for a decade now? Will she speak to her colleagues in Dundee City Council and stop these senseless and damaging cuts?

**Jenny Gilruth:** I recall that, in May 2022, Mr Marra made comments in that regard. In a meeting of the Education and Skills Committee, he said:

“We all recognise that what we might call hidden poverty exists in every community.”—[*Official Report, Education and Skills Committee*, 4 May 2022; c 9.]

At another meeting of the committee, he appeared to welcome the shift in funding and said:

“It is good that money is now available to local authorities ... Fife is up £2 million.”—[*Official Report, Education and Skills Committee*, 18 May 2022; c 19.]

Across the piece, we know that, throughout the duration of the Scottish attainment challenge up to 2024-25, Dundee was allocated more than £43 million in challenge authority and strategic equity funding.

I go back to my original point that the request for us to move our approach in relation to that funding came directly from local government, and I note that Mr Marra appeared to welcome that at the time. I am more than happy to have my officials engage with officials in Dundee City Council on the substantive point that I think that the member was making.

**The Presiding Officer:** Question 4 has not been lodged.

### Racism and Racist Bullying (Schools)

**5. Foyso Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government how it is working to ensure that schools are tackling racism and racist bullying. (S6O-04788)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Jenny Gilruth):** I am clear that there is no place for racism in our schools. Incidents of discrimination or prejudice must be addressed whenever they arise, and it is important that we are vigilant in challenging any racist behaviour in Scotland's schools.

In November, we published updated anti-bullying guidance, “Respect for All: the National Approach to Anti-Bullying for Scotland's Children and Young People”, which included guidance on responding to prejudice-based bullying. In the coming weeks, the Scottish Government will publish new guidance for schools on responding to racist incidents, including guidance on recording and monitoring. That has been developed in partnership with the racism and racist incidents

workstream of the anti-racism in education programme.

**Foyso Choudhury:** I recently heard the story of Ekta Marwaha, who was forced to remove her daughter, Anisa, from school after months of racist bullying. The incident was reported and an apology was received from the bully, but records were not held, no follow-up work was done and the bullying continued.

There are many anti-racist toolkits, but can the cabinet secretary tell me how the Scottish Government is ensuring that they are put into practice? Will she meet me and Ekta to hear directly about the impact of racism on children?

**Jenny Gilruth:** I am happy to give Mr Choudhury an undertaking to meet him and his constituent. We know that, in the post-pandemic period, there are challenges in Scotland's schools in relation to the recording of racism and other incidents. That speaks to wider work that we are undertaking on recording and monitoring, which we will publish details on before the end of this term.

The bullying and equalities module on the schools management information system—SEEMiS—has a specific recording category for incidents where race was a factor. SEEMiS also enables us to record where racism intersects with other forms of prejudice.

As I said, I am more than happy to engage with Mr Choudhury on that point, and I hope that he will take some heart from the updated guidance that we will publish before the end of this term.

### Doctors and Dentists (Pay Recommendations)

**6. Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the recently published report from the Review Body on Doctors' and Dentists' Remuneration, which provides pay recommendations for doctors and dentists for the financial year 2025-26. (S6O-04789)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Neil Gray):** First, the trade unions for agenda for change staff, including those that represent nurses and midwives, unanimously accepted a two-year pay deal of 4.25 per cent and 3.75 per cent. The independent review body on doctors' and dentists' pay has recommended a United Kingdom-wide 4 per cent pay uplift for national health service medical and dental staff, and I intend to accept that recommendation. Resident doctors are excluded from that recommendation, and I will hold direct talks with them in the coming weeks. The pay recommendation will mean, for instance, increases of between £4,286 and £5,695 in consultants' salaries, and it will mean that, at the top of their

scale, a consultant will earn basic pay of more than £148,000.

**Collette Stevenson:** I am proud that Scotland is the only part of the UK where general practitioners and dentists have seen real-terms growth in their wages in recent years. I hope that that will drive recruitment in the sectors as we continue to improve access to healthcare across Scotland. However, the UK Labour Government's reckless increase to employer national insurance is hitting GP and dental practices hard. What discussions has the Scottish Government had with the UK Government regarding such damaging Westminster policies? Will he outline how the Scottish Government will work with stakeholders to retain and recruit health professionals in Scotland?

**Neil Gray:** The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government has repeatedly raised with UK Treasury ministers the increase in employer national insurance contributions and has pressed for the additional cost to public services in Scotland to be fully funded. That increase is having a profound impact across Scottish public services, which are paying for a UK Government tax rise. Our GPs, social care services and voluntary sector partners are all paying for UK Government decisions, so it is incredibly disappointing that, in the recent spending review, the chancellor has yet again failed to fund that additional cost. We will have to consider the implications of that as we continue to deliver services for the people of Scotland.

#### **National Resilience Strategy (Discussions with United Kingdom Government)**

**7. Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government, in light of the strategic defence review's emphasis on a "whole society" approach to national security, what discussions it has had with the UK Government regarding work to contribute to a comprehensive national resilience strategy. (S6O-04790)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson):** I am pleased to confirm that there has been ministerial and official engagement before and since the launch of the UK strategic defence review. Defence policy is reserved, but the security and safety of people in Scotland are the top priority for this Government, and that is why we have taken an active and constructive role in the strategic defence review process, from its initial stages last year—when the First Minister wrote, on 30 September 2024, to Lord Robertson, who led the review, with the Scottish Government's response to the SDR's propositions—through to the ministerial

discussions taking place in the days before and since the SDR was published on 3 June.

**Daniel Johnson:** It is clear that the strategic defence review is far more comprehensive and wider ranging than probably any defence review that we have had in the past 25 years, and its clear recommendations have implications in devolved areas.

In recent days, we have heard arguments and points about industrial strategy, but civil contingency is a clear concern, and there are recommendations on co-ordination between civil and military authorities, such as local authorities, health services and the police, as well as devolved Governments. I would be grateful if the cabinet secretary outlined what discussions the Scottish Government has had with military authorities and the UK Government to set up the structures that are required to undertake that civil contingency work.

**Angus Robertson:** I assure Daniel Johnson that efforts are under way to optimise relations, which will maximise resilience. That requires developing existing and emerging relationships between the UK Government, devolved Administrations and a range of agencies and departments.

I would like to give Daniel Johnson the confidence that that work is being progressed and that there is a shared interest in doing so. I will be happy to update him on that progress.

#### **Private Hospital Admissions**

**8. Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the reasons for there being more private hospital admissions in 2024 than in any previous year on record, according to recent Private Healthcare Information Network data. (S6O-04791)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Neil Gray):** Although a patient has the right, at any time, to exercise choice and seek private treatment, we recognise that excessively long waits for national health service treatment are not acceptable. That is why we are determined to reduce patient waits in the year ahead. Our investment of £106 million of additional funding will help us to deliver more than 150,000 extra appointments and procedures in 2025-26. This includes £25 million for orthopaedics and more than £12 million for ophthalmology. That funding is just part of our record investment of £21.7 billion in health and social care this year, which will expand capacity and reduce waiting times.

**Jackie Baillie:** Scots are forking out thousands of pounds—some are having to use personal savings or borrow from family members—to pay for cataract procedures, for hip and knee



replacements and even for rounds of chemotherapy. I hear what the cabinet secretary says, but it is a lot of words that cover up the incompetence of the Scottish National Party Government. When will he accept that, after 18 years of the SNP in charge, Scots face the reality of a two-tier health service in Scotland?

**Neil Gray:** I have set out—and have always been candid about—the challenges that our healthcare systems face. Those challenges are not unique to Scotland, but it is unacceptable for anybody to have to wait too long for their healthcare to be provided.

However, private healthcare is used much less in Scotland than in other parts of the UK. In England, for instance, the combination of the rate of admissions that are paid for by insurance and the uptake rate of private healthcare accounts for 1,445 admissions per 100,000, compared with 902 per 100,000 in Scotland.

Jackie Baillie looks to distance herself from those facts, which relate to her Labour Government's performance, but they are facts. That reality demonstrates that there are shared challenges across the UK in responding to the situation that arose during Covid. We have a plan to deliver for the people of Scotland and we intend to deliver against it.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes general question time.

## First Minister's Question Time

12:00

### Economic Performance

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

The Scottish Fiscal Commission conducts rigorous and independent analysis of tax and the economy in Scotland. Its most recent report outlines that Scottish National Party tax rises are costing Scottish workers £1.7 billion each year. We should have an extra £1.7 billion to spend, but we do not, because the SFC identifies what it calls an "economic performance gap" with the rest of the United Kingdom. That actually reduces the amount that is available to spend.

Does John Swinney know the size of the economic performance gap between SNP-run Scotland and the rest of the UK?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** The important point to consider is that the extra revenue that is raised as a consequence of the tax decisions that we have taken in Scotland enables us to invest in public services and other interventions that support the Government's policy agenda. Those changes and differences are well acknowledged and well understood in Scotland. For example, we have a much more significant provision of early learning and childcare in Scotland, which meets the needs of families. In addition, the Scottish child payment helps to keep children out of poverty. In Scotland, we have a falling child poverty rate, whereas child poverty rates are rising in the rest of the United Kingdom.

There are differences in policy outcomes that come from the Government's decisions to ask people on higher incomes to pay slightly more in taxation.

**Russell Findlay:** That is more smoke and mirrors from John Swinney. He does not seem to know the figures, so let me help him. SNP tax rises for hard-working Scots should result in £1.7 billion more to spend, but, because the SNP-run economy lags behind the economy in the rest of the UK, the Scottish Fiscal Commission says that the Scottish Government has only £600 million more to spend. Under the SNP, there is a £1.1 billion economic performance gap—and that is just this year. Last year, it was another £1 billion.

Over the past 10 years, according to the SFC, the economic performance gap between Scotland and the rest of the UK adds up to £5.4 billion. Does John Swinney now realise that anti-business SNP policies are costing Scotland a fortune?

**The First Minister:** What is clear from the data is that the improvements in gross domestic

product per capita in Scotland under the Scottish Government since we came to office have been superior to those in the rest of the United Kingdom. The data tells us that the Scottish economy in terms of GDP per capita has grown at a faster rate in Scotland than in the rest of the United Kingdom.

As a Government, we take a number of steps to invest in the economy. We are supporting investment in key sectors of the economy, such as renewable energy, and we are actively involved in investing in the skills system to support the development of the economy. We assist companies by having a competitive business rates regime in Scotland, which reduces the burden of business rates on companies, enabling them to invest in their business operations.

That is what Scotland gets from the business-friendly SNP Government. *[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** Thank you, members.

**Russell Findlay:** I will try to stop laughing for a minute.

John Swinney does not even seem to accept that the economic performance gap exists. It is peak SNP denial. The SFC is saying it—it is in its report, which the First Minister should try to read.

The SNP has failed to keep up with the rest of the UK. It has made the situation even worse by wasting billions of pounds of taxpayers' money on a national care service that does not treat patients, the endless CalMac ferry scandal, a £1 billion prison with bird and bat boxes and an annual benefits bill that will soon top £9 billion.

The SNP is costing Scotland £1 billion a year in lost growth and countless billions of pounds through its sheer incompetence. Is that not exactly why John Swinney cannot bring down bills or improve public services? He is throwing all the money away.

**The First Minister:** I will be clear with Mr Findlay: under the SNP Government, since 2007, GDP per person in Scotland has grown by 10.3 per cent, compared with 6.1 per cent in the United Kingdom. That demonstrates that our economic performance has been superior to that of the rest of the United Kingdom.

Russell Findlay highlights the fact that there are choices to be made about public expenditure. When he talks about the annual benefits bill, he has to be explicit about what he is talking about. What benefits would he cut? We believe that it is important that we support children out of poverty. Is that what Russell Findlay wants to stop? *[Interruption.]* I think that that is what we are talking about. Russell Findlay wants to end the

Scottish child payment and consign more children to poverty. *[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer:** Let us hear one another.

**The First Minister:** I am simply pointing out that there are implications to Mr Findlay saying things such as the annual benefits bill is too high. He has to set out where the cuts would come from. The cuts under Mr Findlay would fall on the children of Scotland. I want to lift children out of poverty; Mr Findlay wants to consign children to poverty.

**Russell Findlay:** The Scottish Conservative Party wants to lift children and families out of poverty, not keep them trapped on benefits.

The SNP wastes money on an industrial scale, but, unbelievably, Labour looked at the SNP's economic record and decided to copy it. It has already raised national insurance, but there is more pain to come. The spending review signals a return to tax and spend. Rachel Reeves is shafting business, workers, farmers and the oil and gas industry, but at least there is enough money now for John Swinney to give Scots a tax break. Will he commit to bringing down the burden on Scottish workers and families?

**The First Minister:** I suppose that there is one minor element of that question that I can find common ground with, and that is the damage that has been done to the economy by the decision to increase employer national insurance contributions. Statistics that were published this morning show that, in April, GDP in the United Kingdom contracted by 0.3 per cent.

That could reasonably have been predicted, given the increase in employer national insurance contributions—indeed, I warned about it. If we are to have an agenda that is focused on growth, I do not understand why the UK Labour Government decided to support a growth-reducing measure such as raising employer national insurance contributions, which the evidence now tells us is suppressing growth in the United Kingdom. That is the context in which we are operating.

I say to Mr Findlay that this Government will do what it always does. We will focus on the needs of the people of Scotland. We will focus on lifting children out of poverty, on improving our public services, on the journey to net zero and on improving the economic performance of Scotland, just as we have done in the past.

### **Alexander Dennis (Job Losses)**

2. **Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab):** Members will be deeply concerned about the planned job losses at Alexander Dennis in Larbert. Our thoughts are with the workforce.

Alexander Dennis is an industry leader in bus manufacturing, and that news was not inevitable—it is another result of Scottish National Party failure. Under the SNP, the Scottish Government is procuring more buses from China than it is from Scotland. The Mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham, has bought almost four times as many buses from Alexander Dennis as the SNP Government has. That is shameful. Why does the SNP always put foreign businesses and manufacturers before Scotland's workers?

**The First Minister:** Before I address Mr Sarwar's question, I would like to take the opportunity—as it is the first opportunity that I have had since the Parliament reconvened this week—to welcome Davy Russell to the Parliament as the member of the Scottish Parliament for Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse, and to wish him well.

On the important question about Alexander Dennis that Mr Sarwar put to me, I am deeply concerned about the situation. The issue has been occupying a great deal of my, the Deputy First Minister's and United Kingdom Government ministers' focus and attention since we became aware of the situation that has been developing over the past few weeks and which ultimately has led to the decision that was announced yesterday.

The Scottish Government has engaged with the company. Over a series of years, we have supported Alexander Dennis in the development of its facilities in Larbert and Falkirk, and we have assisted it in its research and development activity. Since 2020, through the Scottish zero emission bus challenge fund and its predecessor the Scottish ultra-low emission bus scheme, Alexander Dennis has secured more zero-emission bus orders than any other single manufacturer. Under the existing arrangements, to the extent that is permissible, Alexander Dennis has secured more zero-emission bus orders than anybody else.

Most bus orders are procured by private organisations in Scotland that are run by commercial operators in a deregulated market. Any decisions that the Government takes must be consistent with the United Kingdom Subsidy Control Act 2022, which is a material issue in this matter.

Having said all that, I want to make it clear to the Alexander Dennis workforce and to the Parliament that the Government is engaging very closely and firmly to see what we can do to help with the situation and to avoid any of the negative implications that yesterday's announcement suggested might occur.

**Anas Sarwar:** That was a rather weak response from the First Minister. If the Mayor of Greater

Manchester, Andy Burnham, can find a way under the existing legislation to procure more buses than Scotland has, why can the SNP Government not procure more buses? It is another example of weak leadership from John Swinney. When Scotland needs buses, the SNP Government buys from China; when Scotland needs steel for bridges, it buys from China; and when we need ferries, it buys from Poland and Turkey. All that the SNP Government wants to do is to manufacture grievance and all that it offers is waste and incompetence. It has the powers and the money, but, as always, it wants to blame someone else. That is weak, failing leadership from John Swinney. Even his own MSPs are now openly rebelling against him, with senior figures saying that he has two weeks—[*Interruption.*] They groan in private; let them groan in public now. Senior figures say that he has two weeks to come up with a new idea—[*Interruption.*]

**The Presiding Officer:** Let us hear one another.

**Anas Sarwar:** —to save his job. If he has not come up with a good idea to improve Scotland in 18 years, what chance does he have of coming up with something now?

**The First Minister:** The Alexander Dennis workforce will not be surprised that what I am doing is focusing on the situation that it faces. Let me tell Mr Sarwar what the Government has done—what it has done over many years—to support Alexander Dennis. We have provided £58 million of funding for zero-emission buses since 2020, through the Scottish ultra-low emission bus scheme. Scottish Enterprise has also supported Alexander Dennis with £30.3 million in research and development support as a contribution to its research and development activity. That has been part of the partnership between the Scottish Government and Alexander Dennis.

In his comments the other day—this is material to the answer that I just gave Mr Sarwar—Paul Davies, the president and managing director of Alexander Dennis, said this about bus orders:

“The stark reality is that current UK policy does not allow for the incentivisation or reward of local content, job retention and creation, nor does it encourage any domestic economic benefit.”

That is the implication of the 2022 act. What I and the Deputy First Minister are doing—this is what is commanding my attention and my focus—is considering how we can find a way in which we can remain legally compliant with the 2022 act and overcome these obstacles. In that endeavour, we are engaging very closely with the United Kingdom Government.

I welcome the fact that we have engaged with the UK Government. Indeed, in a joint letter to the

company, the secretary of state and the Deputy First Minister say:

“Our governments continue to work closely together on a range of shared issues to support domestic industries in Scotland, and we are keen to work closely with Alexander Dennis at this challenging time.”

That is us indicating that we will do everything that we can to find a way through the 2022 act provisions so that the Government can continue to both operate within the law—as we must do—and support manufacturing in Scotland, which is my priority.

**Anas Sarwar:** If John Swinney cannot figure out a way to order buses in Scotland, I suggest that he picks up the phone to call Andy Burnham and see how he managed to do it, because there are almost five times as many bus orders from Manchester as from Scotland.

John Swinney and the SNP are out of ideas, out of steam and out of time. Failing to support Scottish manufacturing jobs is only one example. After 18 years in charge, there are falling education standards; rising violent crime; a deepening national health service crisis; more lives lost to drug deaths; and billions of pounds of money wasted. Every day, Scots pay the price for SNP incompetence and are expected to be thankful for it, so it is no wonder that, as shown in Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse, Scots are seeing through the spin and are voting for a new direction.

However, it is not only the public who are doing that. One SNP MSP said of John Swinney that

“There is no energy, no fire, no boldness, no long-term vision.”

They are right, are they not?

**The First Minister:** Listen, Mr Sarwar can conjure up all the stuff that he wants—he can go through his press cuttings and practise them in the mirror in the morning to see how they sound—but I will be focused on delivering answers and solutions for workers who face difficulty in the country. While Mr Sarwar postures, I will deliver for the workers of Scotland.

### Universal Free School Meals (Expansion)

**3. Lorna Slater (Lothian) (Green):** Kids cannot learn if they are hungry. That is why the Greens campaigned for universal free school meals for primary 4 and 5 kids and for the expansion to primary 6 and 7 kids whose families receive the Scottish child payment. It is why we brought the next phase of roll-out to secondary 1, 2 and 3 kids who receive the SCP to the budget negotiations. In August, thousands more high school kids in Aberdeen, Glasgow, Fife, Moray, North Ayrshire,

South Lanarkshire, Shetland and the Western Isles will now get free school meals. Does the First Minister agree that the programme must be expanded to all council areas as soon as possible to ensure that no kid goes hungry in school?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** I unreservedly accept the importance of food provision in our schools and tackling the issue of children who come to school hungry. Ensuring that children have a good and solid meal during the day is addressed as part of the Government's policy programme, so there is no disagreement between Lorna Slater and me on that question.

The Government has taken pragmatic decisions within the finances that are available to us to expand the programme to primary 6 and 7 pupils who are eligible for the Scottish child payment, and we are obviously taking forward the pilot exercises for secondary pupils, which were the subject of constructive dialogue with the Green Party during the budget negotiations.

I am committed to doing as much as we can. The Parliament will be familiar with the financial challenges that we face, which were not eased by yesterday's spending review. We will, of course, engage constructively with other parties about how we can take forward the important commitments to enhance the educational opportunities of children and young people in Scotland.

**Lorna Slater:** Expanding free school meals is one way to build the fairer, greener country that we know Scotland can be. However, children in Scotland will still be forced into poverty thanks to a Labour Government that is balancing the books on the backs of the poorest while the wealthiest grow ever richer.

The United Kingdom Government could have scrapped the cruel two-child benefit cap this week, but it did not. Scotland is tired of mitigating Westminster's mistakes. Does the First Minister agree that now is the time to demand that Keir Starmer set out exactly what conditions he believes need to be met to trigger an independence referendum for Scotland, so that we can get out of this unequal union?

**The First Minister:** I agree with Lorna Slater about the importance of Scotland becoming an independent country. I think that it is democratically unacceptable—[*Interruption.*]

**The Presiding Officer:** Let us hear one another.

**The First Minister:** I think that it is democratically unacceptable for the will of the Scottish Parliament, which has demanded the power to hold a referendum on independence, to be ignored by the United Kingdom Government. I agree entirely with Lorna Slater on that point.

If anyone needs an explanation of why Scotland would benefit from being an independent country, it comes in the fact that, as was confirmed yesterday, the spending review is predicated on an attack on the poorest and the most vulnerable in our society by a Labour Government. Anyone who was thinking that attacks on the poor and the vulnerable in our society were the exclusive preserve of the Conservative Party got a rude awakening yesterday, because they are the preserve of the Labour Party into the bargain. The answer to the seesaw politics of Westminster attacking the poor and the vulnerable is for Scotland to be an independent country. The sooner that happens, the better.

### Spending Review 2025

**4. Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** To ask the First Minister what the impact on Scotland will be of the chancellor's spending review 2025. (S6F-04164)

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** The United Kingdom Government's spending review has left Scotland facing real-terms growth of 0.8 per cent a year for our overall block grant funding, which is lower than the 1.5 per cent average for UK departments. Had our day-to-day resource funding grown in line with overall UK Government spending, we would have more than £1.1 billion more to spend on our priorities by 2028-29. That all comes on top of the additional hike in employer national insurance contributions and the planned cuts to support for disabled people. Those are the realities of the spending review that need to be understood in Scotland today.

**Kenneth Gibson:** In April, the UK economy shrank by 0.3 per cent—that is more than £712 million—following the devastating impact of Labour's increase in employer national insurance contributions, which is a blatant jobs tax. Across the UK, 276,000 jobs have been lost since Labour's October budget, with another 109,000 losses expected in May. Annual UK debt interest payments now stand at more than £133 billion—£2,000 for every man, woman and child in the UK. Amid that economic mismanagement, what will be the impact on Scotland's economy of lower-than-average funding over the next three years relative to UK departments, with Scotland being short-changed by £1,100 million over that period?

**The First Minister:** The implications of the spending review are that the real-terms growth in the Scottish block grant will be 0.8 per cent a year, which is lower than the 1.5 per cent average for UK departments. That demonstrates the scale of the financial challenge that we face in Scotland. The Government will have to respond to that, and we will have to address those issues as part of the medium-term financial strategy, the spending

review and the budget for successive years. It demonstrates that the United Kingdom is not providing the sustained investment in public services that is required as a consequence of the years of austerity. We need to invest to grow, and that was not delivered by the spending review yesterday.

### Home Leave for Prisoners

**5. Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's position is on whether the home leave for prisoners system is operating appropriately and as intended. (S6F-04167)

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** The management of decisions relating to home leave is an operational matter for the Scottish Prison Service. All decisions are subject to robust risk assessment and risk management planning. If released, individuals are subject to licence conditions and can be recalled to custody if those are breached. The use of home leave and temporary release is a well-established and necessary part of preparing an individual for eventual release and reintegration to the community.

**Liam Kerr:** A year into a four-year sentence for repeatedly subjecting Demi Hannaway to appalling mental and physical abuse, even while she was pregnant, violent thug Andrew Brown will get home leave, with one week a month out of prison. Demi's mum, Helen, said:

"We had not been consulted or warned ... The very thought that we could have walked right into him ... has left us sickened to our stomachs."

A violent monster such as Brown should not be walking the streets just a year after being sentenced to almost four years. Is the First Minister seriously telling Helen that home leave is working as intended? If not, how will he change it?

**The First Minister:** As I indicated in my answer to Mr Kerr's first question, management and decisions relating to home leave are an operational matter for the Scottish Prison Service, which has to make careful judgments about each individual case.

Mr Kerr has put information into the parliamentary discussion just now. I understand that the individual in question has not been granted home leave; he has had unescorted day release, which is a different concept in the process.

As I have indicated before in the Parliament, Demi Hannaway's case is tragic, and I express my sympathies to her family. I will explore the details of the issues that Mr Kerr has put on the record today to determine whether any further action or

intervention can be taken, subject to respecting the operational independence of the Scottish Prison Service to arrive at its judgments. I note that the Lord Advocate has instructed an investigation into the circumstances of Demi's death, and that is under way.

**Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):**

As the First Minister is aware, I have raised the case of Demi Hannaway in the chamber before. As he recognises, the Lord Advocate has instructed a fresh investigation into Demi's death, which includes the role that Andrew Brown possibly played in it. Does the First Minister share my concerns about the decision on home leave? How can we maintain the integrity of the new investigation if Andrew Brown is allowed home leave and is looking at a release date for February?

**The First Minister:** The processes are distinct; the examination and exploration that the Lord Advocate has requested will be undertaken independently of any other processes. I cannot prejudge where the investigation and scrutiny might lead, and Claire Baker will understand that I cannot intervene in the actions of the Lord Advocate in that respect.

I will take away the issue that Claire Baker raises with me about any connection between the two different processes, one of which is undertaken by the Scottish Prison Service and one of which is undertaken independently of ministers under the supervision of the Lord Advocate.

I acknowledge Claire Baker's long-standing interest in the case and, if there is anything further that I can advise Claire Baker about, I will do so. The most that I can say at the moment is that these are two independent processes that are being undertaken. If there is any appropriate connection to be established, I will make sure that that happens.

**National Health Service (Treatment Waiting Times)**

**6. Foyso Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister how the Scottish Government is working to ensure that patients are accurately informed of waiting times for NHS treatments following referrals to a specialist. (S6F-04173)

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** We recognise the importance of transparent and regular communication with patients, which is why we have in place a standard package of communications that all health boards should be providing. Our revised waiting times guidance, which was published in December 2023, ensures that patients are provided with clear communications throughout their care journey,

setting out what they should expect while they are waiting for their appointment, test or treatment.

To assist patients in accessing waiting time information prior to treatment, Public Health Scotland offers an online platform that sets out initial planned care waiting times, indicating typical wait durations over the past quarter.

**Foyso Choudhury:** It has been more than a year since my constituent was referred to a dermatologist. He does not know when he will be seen, and his skin condition and mental health are getting worse. In NHS Lothian, the number of people who are waiting for more than 52 weeks to see a dermatologist has doubled in the past year. Will the First Minister admit that his Government has lost control of waiting times for specialist care, and will he apologise to my constituent?

**The First Minister:** As I have made clear on a number of occasions, there are individuals who are waiting too long for treatment. There are many people who are treated timeously in the NHS, but there are also many people who are waiting too long. I regret and apologise for the fact that people are waiting too long.

We are trying to recover services as quickly as possible following the Covid pandemic—that work has the focus of the Government.

Mr Choudhury specifically raises the issue of dermatology services. The Government is rolling out a digital dermatology service, which involves all general practices in the country. As part of the reforms that we are undertaking, the service aims to reduce the times for which individuals are waiting for dermatology processes by improving the flow and handling of cases. I assure Mr Choudhury that those measures are being progressed by the Government with the aim of addressing the issue that he puts to me.

**Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee City West) (SNP):**

The issue that Mr Choudhury raises is really important. Can the First Minister say more about what the Scottish Government is doing to reduce waiting times for my constituents in Dundee and people across the country? Specifically, can he give us an update on recent targeted investment and how that is supporting delivery?

**The First Minister:** In the past financial year, we invested an additional £30 million to drive action to address the longest waits. We expected that that would deliver 64,000 appointments and procedures; in fact, it delivered 105,500 appointments and procedures.

For the year ahead, more than £106 million of additional funding has been assigned to speciality services, where it can have the greatest impact on the longest waits. That will enable us to 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.

**Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con):** I declare an interest as a practising NHS general practitioner.

I was contacted by John, who had already waited 40 weeks for orthopaedic surgery. He had had no updates from the health board. He looked himself and found that his wait had increased—it had been 52 weeks in September and is now 67 weeks. The uncertainty is a major source of frustration and pain.

After the First Minister has just read out what is not happening, and at a time when we can track our online shopping orders to the minute, why is there no transparency about waiting times for hospital appointments?

**The First Minister:** The information about the length of waits is available. Mr Choudhury put a question to me about the visibility of that information and Dr Gulhane has just done likewise. That information is available.

I have indicated to the Parliament that the long waits are unacceptable. That is why the focus of our intervention is on addressing those long waits and ensuring that people do not wait as long as the person has done in the case that Dr Gulhane has put to me. The Government is absolutely focused on reducing those long waits, and I want to see more progress being made.

The issue is the subject of regular dialogue between me, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care and the leadership of the national health service. All health boards are seized of the importance of the issue, which I reiterate today.

**The Presiding Officer:** There is a particularly high level of interest in supplementary questions across the chamber. I would be grateful for concise questions and responses.

#### **Alexander Dennis (Job Losses)**

**Michael Matheson (Falkirk West) (SNP):** The First Minister will be aware of the deep concern in my constituency at the announcement that Alexander Dennis made yesterday. Given the risk that is posed to more than 400 jobs in my constituency, and having listened to the earlier exchange in the chamber, I would say that the last thing that the workforce and my constituents need is for their future employment to be turned into a political football. Indeed, they deserve much better. Now more than ever, the workforce needs the Scottish and United Kingdom Governments to work together to prevent the closure of the Camelon and Larbert sites. Those jobs are not lost

yet, and everything should be done to secure them for the future.

Bus manufacturing has taken place in Camelon for more than a hundred years; it is part of the local community's DNA. I have listened to the exchanges so far and I ask the First Minister to commit to taking forward two points with the UK Government. First, will he commit to look at maximising the potential for new orders from across the UK for Alexander Dennis in the weeks and months ahead? Secondly, will he address the fundamental point that the company has highlighted, which is the uneven playing field that it faces in competing with overseas manufacturers as a result of the Subsidy Control Act 2022? That needs to be addressed—

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Matheson.

**Michael Matheson:** —if we are to secure those jobs, and I ask the First Minister to do so.

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** I entirely understand Mr Matheson's deep concern about the implications of the situation at Alexander Dennis for his constituency. Throughout all his time in the Parliament, he has been assiduous in supporting the company and enabling and supporting its development.

As I indicated in my earlier answers, we have had a number of programmes of investment in Alexander Dennis. I hope that that gives Mr Matheson an assurance of the Government's commitment. Although bus orders have been undertaken with and delivered by Alexander Dennis, the company has highlighted to us the significant restrictions that exist in the current competitive climate because of the implications of the Subsidy Control Act 2022 for the ability of public sector procurement to take account of local content, job retention and job creation.

We are exploring those issues with the United Kingdom Government, and I give Mr Matheson an absolute assurance that the Scottish Government will enter the consultation determined to safeguard the future of employment in his constituency.

#### **Bus Funds**

**Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):** The Scottish Government has had various funds to help bus companies to buy electric buses. One of those funds was launched by Michael Matheson. That money—our money—has been used to buy Chinese buses. Years ago, some of us warned that that would end in tears, and that is where we have got to.

The First Minister says that there is a problem with the Subsidy Control Act 2022. Yes, there is,

but we have known about that for years. Why does he want to do something about that only now?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** As my answers today have shown, I am trying to handle the issue without making any party-political remarks. However, I must point out to Mr Simpson that the Subsidy Control Act 2022 was legislated for by the Conservative United Kingdom Government. It is UK legislation that we are obliged by law to follow. I cannot act in a fashion that is outwith the provisions of the law, because I will not be enabled to do so—I will not have a legal basis for acting in such a fashion.

There are ways in which we can work with the UK Government to address the issue. That is the spirit in which we have entered discussions on the issue. The Deputy First Minister has discussed it with the Secretary of State for Scotland, and I have discussed it with the company. We will do everything that we can to address the situation.

#### **Marionville Fire Station (Proposed Closure)**

**Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** Will the Scottish Government request that the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service reconsider its plans to close Marionville fire station, in the light of the recent fire at Cables Wynd house in Leith, the community petition, which now has more than 3,500 signatures, and reports that such plans would weaken fire services in Edinburgh and the Lothians, while our fire services are under increasing pressure, for example from wildfires, as we saw in West Lothian last month?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** The issue that Sarah Boyack raises is one that falls within the responsibility of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. I am not clear in my mind about what stage the Marionville proposal is at, but, in general terms, the SRFS's delivery review includes 23 options for change, which will be the subject of a full public consultation that will commence at the end of this month. I imagine that the proposal that Sarah Boyack has asked me about is part of that process, so it will be the subject of dialogue as part of the consultation.

As I said in response to a question a few weeks ago, which I think was from Rachael Hamilton, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service must, in coming to any operational decisions, be mindful of the demand for intervention and the pattern of activity that places demands on its services. There will be a full opportunity for the points that Sarah Boyack has made to be considered by the SFRS.

#### **Work Visas (Ukrainian Nationals)**

**Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP):** A constituent of mine is a displaced Ukrainian national as a consequence of

Putin's illegal war. She is a researcher at the University of Glasgow whose post will end shortly. Her efforts to secure a new post are being hampered by the fact that her work visa expires in October next year. Although an extension has been applied for, she is currently losing out on job opportunities. She wishes certainty for her and her daughter, who is excelling at Cleveden secondary school.

Will the First Minister get the Scottish Government to contact the Home Office to ensure that my constituent and other displaced Ukrainian nationals in Scotland can obtain the certainty that they need to continue to live and work here?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** The point that Mr Doris has put to me is an important one. I will ask the Minister for Equalities to discuss the specific case with Mr Doris so that she can obtain the details and make the necessary representations to the United Kingdom Government.

The point that Mr Doris raises will have wider application in Scotland. Many individuals are here on temporary arrangements as a consequence of the illegal invasion of Ukraine. Scotland has welcomed those individuals, who make a huge contribution to our society. There is a general issue, and the affected individuals would benefit from clarity. I will ensure that the minister gets in touch with Mr Doris, and we will make representations about that case and the wider issue to the UK Government.

#### **Clydebank Women's Aid (Closure)**

**Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con):** After more than four decades of tireless work, Clydebank Women's Aid in West Dunbartonshire, which is in my region, will be shutting down. West Dunbartonshire has the second highest rate of domestic abuse in Scotland, with 153 incidents per 10,000 people. We must not underestimate the excellent work that those organisations do by acting as lifelines for many survivors. I have been contacted by many organisations and constituents, who have told me that the decision will have an enormous and devastating impact on the local community.

What support will the Scottish Government provide to organisations that help domestic abuse survivors, so that they can continue the good work that they do, especially when the number of domestic abuse cases in Scotland is rising?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** I am sorry to hear that information from Pam Gosal about Clydebank Women's Aid. The Government has taken a number of steps to legislate for action on domestic abuse, not least of which is the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018, which created a



specific offence of domestic abuse that incorporates coercive and controlling behaviour.

This year, the delivering equally safe fund will provide £21.6 million to 115 projects that focus on preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls. Those projects will be available to ensure that there is support in communities the length and breadth of Scotland to assist women who are facing domestic abuse. I will take the opportunity after this question time to ensure that there is support under that funding scheme to provide relevant and appropriate access in the Clydebank area.

#### **Care Workers' Pay (Enable)**

**Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab):** Care workers who are employed by Enable are on strike and have been demonstrating outside Parliament today. This year, Scottish care worker pay is being raised to £12.60 an hour. Does the First Minister agree that Enable care workers deserve a minimum wage of £15 per hour now?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** The Government and I greatly value the vital role that social care workers play in delivering high-quality care services across Scotland. Pay negotiations are a matter for trade unions and employers, so I would urge both parties to work together to reach an agreement that is fair for the workforce and affordable for Enable. I would encourage that to be the case.

#### **Fife College (Funding)**

**David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP):** What assessment has the Scottish Government made of the impact that recent changes by the Scottish Funding Council to funding allocations will have on the ability of Fife College to deliver high-quality education and training opportunities?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** Colleges play a vital role in our communities, which is why the budget for this year sees a 2.1 per cent uplift to the college resource allocation. It is important to be clear that the Scottish Funding Council has ensured that no college will see a reduction in teaching funding during this financial year compared with the previous one.

Fife College will receive a 1.26 per cent increase in teaching funding and a 4.9 per cent increase in capital maintenance funding in the final allocations. Of course, next year, the college will be moving into new facilities in the Dunfermline learning campus, which have been supported by tens of millions of pounds of Scottish Government investment. Operational decisions, including those regarding course provision and staffing, are, of course, a matter for individual colleges.

I hope that that answer provides Mr Torrance with some context about the final decisions that have been made.

#### **Scotbeef (Closure)**

**Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con):** The First Minister will know that Scotbeef has closed its doors in Inverurie, causing the loss of 90 jobs. That is a devastating blow to the families affected and to farming in general in the north-east. Will the First Minister join me in meeting members of the farming community in the north-east to hear their concerns about how that latest closure will affect them?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** I am concerned to hear about that decision. The Government will make support available, through partnership action for continuing employment, to the employees who may well face the impact of redundancy.

I would be very happy for the Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity, Jim Fairlie, to meet Mr Lumsden and his constituents to discuss the issue.

#### **Carers (Support)**

**Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** This week marks carers week. This afternoon, I will host a round table in Parliament to discuss the Family Fund's new report "The Cost of Caring 2025" and the urgent challenges that it highlights for families who are raising disabled and seriously ill children. With that in mind, what action is the First Minister's Government taking to better support carers across Scotland?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** We take a number of actions to support the invaluable role of carers in our society. We are investing more than £88 million a year in local carers support through funding for local authorities under the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016. By the end of 2025, unpaid carers will be up to £4,400 better off due to the introduction of carers allowance supplement in 2018—a payment that is only available here in Scotland—with more than £330 million in payments to date.

Through the Care Reform (Scotland) Bill, which was passed this week, we will establish a right to breaks from caring to support carers' health and wellbeing. Ahead of that being introduced, we have increased funding for voluntary sector short breaks to £13 million, which includes £2.2 million for the Family Fund's take a break Scotland programme for parent carers. That is alongside £2.9 million this year for the Family Fund's Scotland grant programme for families on a low income who are raising a disabled child.

I hope that that gives Karen Adam some confidence that the Government is standing with carers and recognising the invaluable contribution that they make to our society today.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes First Minister's question time. There will be a short suspension to allow the gallery and the chamber to clear.

12:46

*Meeting suspended.*

12:49

*On resuming—*

## **Fornethy Survivors**

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-15136, in the name of Colin Smyth, on justice for the Fornethy survivors. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Before we start, I would like to make sure that all members who will participate in it are aware that there is an active case relating to the alleged abuse of children within Fornethy house, in which criminal proceedings in the High Court of Justiciary are imminent. For that reason, the sub judice rule is engaged. Although reference to alleged abuse at Fornethy house will be permitted to give context to the motion, in the debate, members should focus on the issues that are covered in the motion—the recommendations of the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee and access to the Redress Scotland scheme—and avoid discussing details of lived experience of abuse or alleged abusers and the upcoming trial.

I invite members who wish to participate to press their request-to-speak buttons, and I call on Colin Smyth to open the debate.

12:50

**Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab):** Presiding Officer,

"Trust is sacred. Our trust was broken as little girls—and now, trust in the system that's supposed to help us and do right by us has been shattered."

Those are the words of the Fornethy survivors. Some of those brave women are with us in the public gallery today. Hundreds more have shared their story.

For those who are unfamiliar with that story, those women, along with thousands of others, were sent to Fornethy as vulnerable wee girls between the 1960s and early 1990s. Fornethy was a sprawling 16th-century mansion in the Angus countryside, secluded and surrounded by woodland. It was one of the small number of schools run by Glasgow Corporation, later Strathclyde Regional Council, under its scheme of residential education for disadvantaged children.

Most of those girls stayed for four to eight weeks, sometimes more than once. Some were as young as five years old. They were sent away to somewhere new and exciting—a place to rest and recuperate. One survivor said:

"I remember getting on a bus with a suitcase. I was going on holiday for the first time. I recall the door opening and seeing a huge staircase. I was so happy and excited".

However, that excitement quickly turned to fear. Rather than rest and recuperation, many of those wee girls were subjected to appalling abuse. My constituent, Marion Reid from Carluke is one of those women. She said:

"I travelled in a black cab to Fornethy from Riddrie, where I lived at the time. I was taken in through the big arch door, and as soon as that door closed, my nightmare began—six weeks of hell I've carried with me all of my life."

Those wee girls' hell was concealed, covered up and kept from parents. The children were made to write "nice" letters home, copied word for word from a blackboard. One survivor said:

"On leaving that dark place, my older sister was asked to tell my mum what a good girl I'd been. My five-year-old mind could only feel horror that this was how good girls were treated".

I have listened to these testimonies. Some shared stories that they have never shared with their own families. Today, I wanted to bring those stories to Parliament to give a voice to those brave women, but I recognise that we must respect the on-going criminal and civil proceedings. My focus today will therefore be on the failures of Glasgow City Council and the Scottish Government to show that same respect to those women.

They have been campaigning for five and a half years against those failures, and they are still waiting for a full and meaningful apology. They are still waiting even for a meeting with Glasgow City Council. They are still waiting for access to the redress scheme. They are still waiting for answers about why the abuse at Fornethy went unchecked for so many years.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** Will Colin Smyth take an intervention?

**Colin Smyth:** I am happy to take an intervention.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** I am grateful to Colin Smyth for giving way—particularly because, regrettably, I am required to attend the First Minister's emergency summit on youth violence; otherwise, I would have contributed more fully to the debate.

The survivors who are in the public gallery know the love and respect that I have for them, and that Colin Smyth and I will never leave their side as we complete this journey towards justice. Colin Smyth and I took the survivors on a trip to Fornethy two years ago. There was much closure on that trip, as we walked the grounds of what is now a derelict house. However, does Colin Smyth agree that they will never fully have closure until their victimhood is recognised, justice is properly meted out to them, and they are recognised not only here

in this chamber but in the redress schemes that the Government has made available to survivors such as them?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I can give you the time back for that intervention, Mr Smyth.

**Colin Smyth:** I thank Alex Cole-Hamilton for the support that he has given to the Fornethy survivors, including on that visit with the women to Fornethy, which was an incredibly humbling and powerful experience. Alex Cole-Hamilton is right that that was part of that closure—however, we now need Glasgow City Council and the Scottish Government to step up to the mat to really give those women closure.

In September, the leader of Glasgow City Council offered what was a half-hearted apology at the end of a meeting, in an item of any other business. The women found out through the media. Senior council officers and the council leader continue to refuse to meet them and continue to refuse to offer a proper meaningful public apology. Instead, they circle the wagons, cover up and prioritise protecting the council over taking responsibility for why their predecessor authority failed to protect those wee girls.

Similarly, the Scottish Government has failed to take responsibility, putting barrier after barrier in the way of those women. In January 2023, the First Minister told the Education, Children and Young People Committee that it was possible for Fornethy survivors to be successful under the redress scheme, but the Government subsequently told the women that their records had been destroyed and that there was no evidence that they were at Fornethy. That was until the redress scheme made it clear that personal testimony is evidence. However, now, the Government says that they still will not qualify for the scheme because their care was short term and involved parents.

Those girls were sent to Fornethy by the state, not their parents. They were abused by staff who were employed by the state, and the state must take responsibility. Is the Government really saying to those women, "Your abuse was short term, so it doesn't matter"? Are we really going to pit one abuse survivor against another? Is the Parliament really going to ignore the unanimous recommendation of the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee, which called for the redress scheme to be extended, when we all know that abuse is abuse?

I know that the redress scheme is not the only thing that matters to those women and that many will never apply, but redress represents something—it represents recognition. The Government has chosen the redress scheme to be its formal acknowledgement of wrongdoing, its

recognition of the lasting trauma and its acceptance that the state failed the victims of abuse. By denying Fornethy survivors meaningful access to the scheme, the state continues to fail them.

The women want the truth. They want to know why they were sent to Fornethy in the first place. They want to know why no one checked whether it was safe. They want to know why no one stopped the abuse year after year. The on-going public inquiry must get to the bottom of it but, let us be honest, it did not end with Fornethy. Even today, whistleblowers and victims are, too often, still met with silence when they raise serious child protection concerns. There is a culture of cover-up in public bodies, which are more focused on protecting reputations than on protecting children. There is a fundamental power imbalance: public bodies are marking their own homework, and have unlimited legal and financial resources that they unleash against the victims of abuse to defend the state against allegations.

While we consider the Fornethy petition, we should acknowledge another one that is under the consideration of the petitions committee: petition PE1979. Once again, the Government has dismissed it. It dismisses the petition's call for an independent national whistleblowing office for children and education services, for independent investigations into unresolved allegations and to close the gaps in the child abuse inquiry. Whistleblowers are ignored, victims are ignored and public bodies are protected—that is the reality of child protection in Scotland today.

The tragic human cost of child abuse is incalculable—lost childhoods and lasting trauma. As a society, nothing should be more important than safeguarding our children. However, Fornethy and countless other failures by the state expose the brutal truth that we are failing victims again and again, every single day.

I began with the words of the Fornethy women. Let me end with some more:

"It only takes one event, one day, to change your world view forever—and the lasting trauma that brings. Are we not worthy because we were abused only for a short period?"

I say to the women who are in the public gallery today: you are worthy. You are owed a full and meaningful public apology. You deserve compensation. You deserve the truth. You deserve justice. I say to Glasgow City Council and the Scottish Government that those women are not going anywhere. They are strong and determined. Platitudes and warm words will not cut it any more.

I want the Deputy First Minister to see not just the women who are sitting in the public gallery

today but the five-year-olds, six-year-olds, seven-year-olds, eight-year-olds and nine-year-olds—the wee girls who suffered abuse at Fornethy. It is time that we did the right thing. It is time to restore their trust. It is time to show every survivor of child abuse that they are believed, they are valued and they will be heard. If there is no justice, there will be no peace. *[Applause.]*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I will just give a gentle reminder to those in the public gallery that this is a meeting happening in public rather than a public meeting, so I discourage them from participating, although I understand their sentiment.

13:00

**Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP):** I warmly congratulate Colin Smyth on his dogged pursuit of this issue and on the speech that he gave today, which is one of the finest that we have heard in this session of Parliament. I also commend members across all the main parties—Mr Cole-Hamilton, Mr Golden, Mr Greene and many others—who have supported the Fornethy victims in the meetings of the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee and in the chamber. It is a matter of some shame that this debate is so poorly attended. It reflects badly on us all.

Presiding Officer, you have given a ruling that we cannot talk about the abuse that was inflicted on these innocent girls. I will respect that, but, having read through the histories of abuse and the lifelong impacts that that has had on the girls as adults and for the whole of their lives, it is plain to me that this Parliament, if it stands for anything, must redress that injustice. I hope that we can all unite behind that.

The sad fact is that the palpable, egregious and serious injustice that was caused to the most innocent girls in the country over a sustained period of more than 30 years, for several weeks at a time, which is the truth of the matter, has still not been redressed by either the Glasgow Corporation or the Scottish Government. The Scottish Government must take the lead. We must accept the responsibility to do that. How it is done is a mere detail. If it requires legislative reform, that must be done. If it requires an executive direction to Redress Scotland, that must be done. We cannot hide behind legalistic arguments.

The idea that these children were put there for a holiday or respite care is an insult. As well as being an insult, it is factually wrong. Fornethy was a residential school. The corporation advertised for teachers. What do teachers do? They teach in schools. Therefore, that argument is just an insult to the victims. It is platitudinous, pedantic,

nitpicking and legalistic, and I do not think for one moment that the current Deputy First Minister would seek to invoke or stand behind it.

The other argument, as Mr Smyth has said, is that the girls did not cease to be under parental control. Are people really saying that the parents consented to the abuse that their children suffered? What arrant nonsense. What an absurd argument. The indisputable fact is that the girls were sent there by Glasgow Corporation. Glasgow Corporation owned the school. It was part of the state. The state is responsible for the abuse. It was young children who were abused. Abuse is always unacceptable, but it is despicable when it happens to young children.

With respect, Presiding Officer, I am not convinced that the sub judice law applies here in respect of the ability of the Government to provide a solution. It cannot hide behind that.

I was going to read from what the Deputy First Minister's predecessor said two years ago, but I will note only that she said that a solution would be found. That was two years ago. Why has a solution not been found?

The Government must admit its mistake and say, "We got it wrong." It takes guts to do that, and I believe that the Deputy First Minister has guts. All her colleagues are decent human beings. It is time for them to act, because, as Marcus Aurelius said,

"you can also commit injustice by doing nothing".

13:05

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

I thank Colin Smyth for bringing forward the debate. It is not the first time that he has done so, and that is to his great credit, because he has been a long-standing and tireless campaigner on behalf of the Fornethy survivors.

The motion makes clear the horrific experiences that these girls suffered at Fornethy—experiences that no child should have to endure. In those circumstances, I can only imagine the trauma of living with that for decades. We can sympathise with them and we can offer them support, but none of us can truly understand what that trauma would be like.

As Colin Smyth pointed out, some of the girls—now women—are here today in the public gallery, and I recognise the courage that it took to be here, as well as the great courage that they have shown over decades in refusing to be silent and in fighting for their voices to be heard.

That said, as the Deputy Presiding Officer has pointed out, there are live court cases, so care must be taken to ensure that discussion is only in

the context of the motion that is before us. Therefore, the language that I use and the issues that I raise should be viewed through that prism.

It certainly has not been easy for survivors. In March 2024, the former Deputy First Minister, Shona Robison, pointed to an absence of official records of the girls' time at Fornethy. I struggle to understand how that is possible. Who is responsible for it? I hope that we all agree that it was not the responsibility of children.

Scotland's redress scheme is a mechanism to help survivors of abuse, but it has been closed to the survivors of Fornethy, because it does not cover abuse that happened during short-term residential stays. I understand that the scheme was not set up to deal with abuse in short-term care, but, as the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee has recommended, the Scottish Government should consult on expanding it to include short-term institutions such as Fornethy.

I know that the Scottish Government has previously refused to expand the scheme's criteria, but I think that the public would find it outrageous that compensation was being declined because, in effect, the victims did not stay in a place of abuse and cruelty for long enough. For me, one instance is one too many and it will have ramifications for the rest of that child's life. Ms Robison appeared to suggest at committee that restrictions were put in place because expanding the scheme would set a precedent that would lead to many more cases. My view is that all victims of abuse should have access to redress no matter the length of time that they endured it for and regardless of how historical that abuse was.

Sadly, these roadblocks to restitution—whether they are missing records, unanswered questions or a lack of compensation—all help to keep old wounds open. These women should expect our current institutions to allow them access to natural justice in addition to formal legal proceedings.

Let us remember that the girls were sent to Fornethy by the state—Glasgow Corporation, as it was then, and, later, Strathclyde Regional Council. Those institutions had a duty of care, and a long-established legal and, indeed, moral obligation. It is a matter for the courts—as well as, in my view, the redress scheme—to determine the validity of the harrowing, horrific stories of abuse that I have heard.

Let us make sure that the women who are in the public gallery—and all those who could not be here today—know that we are with them, that we will listen to them and that we will speak up for them.

13:09

**Foyso Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab):** I join members in congratulating Colin Smyth on bringing this issue to the chamber once more, and I pay tribute to him for his long-standing campaigning for the Fornethy survivors. I also join members in welcoming survivors and campaigners who are watching in the gallery today, and I praise their bravery and resolve.

Since 2023, I have sat on the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee, where we considered the petition that calls for the Fornethy survivors to have access to Scotland's redress scheme. The committee does not often come to strong united conclusions on petitions, but in this case, we have directly recommended to the Scottish Government that the redress scheme be widened to allow those who experienced abuse at Fornethy access to the scheme. We have concluded that an injustice has occurred and that current legislation is not fit for purpose in this case.

To be clear, seeking redress is not about money. No amount of money can undo what those women went through or the life-long consequences of that abuse.

In considering evidence, we heard three major reasons why Fornethy survivors would not be eligible under the redress scheme: the fact that the redress scheme covers only abuse in long-term care; the lack of detailed records available; and the claim that children were sent to Fornethy with parental consent. However, let us be clear that these children were in the care of the state. They were sent to Fornethy at the recommendation of the state, through teachers or medical staff who were employed by Glasgow Corporation. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the state to step up and offer meaningful redress to those affected. It should not matter for how long a person was abused when it comes to getting recognition of the pain that has been caused. There is no time limit for trauma.

On parental consent, submitted evidence includes allegations that children were told what to write home to their parents, and that they could not contact them freely. That is hardly informed parental consent.

On records, we heard from Redress Scotland that there is a presumption of truth, and that it works on a balance of probabilities when considering cases, which means that a lack of detailed records should not be a barrier to change.

The committee recommended the Scottish Government consult on extending redress. If we believe survivors, which I am sure all members do, we should at least consider what more we can do to support them.

I again pay tribute to the brave campaigners who are here today, who have not stopped fighting for recognition of the abuse that they endured. However, paying tribute means nothing if we do not offer redress and change to ensure that this never happens again.

13:13

**Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green):** I thank Colin Smyth for lodging his motion and securing this debate, and for his very powerful and moving opening speech. I concur with every single word.

I am so immensely grateful, too, to the Fornethy survivors for their determination in their fight for justice. It is right that we recognise and commend that courage and perseverance today, although they should never have been put in the position of having to fight. It should shame us all—though I do thank them, and I am sorry that I cannot be there in person this afternoon.

I am also grateful to the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee for its sensitive discussions on the petition submitted by the Fornethy survivors. That petition begins—and I quote—

“Survivors need acknowledgement, closure and compensation.”

It is right that we voiced those words today, because they reflect the three time dimensions of the process.

First, the petition seeks acknowledgment of the past. Fornethy survivors experienced harm, not as objects but as children, young people and human beings. Redress Scotland's presumption of truth is important here. I am sure that we will all empathise with the stories told by survivors—children being taken from their homes in the city to a strange place and separated from their parents and their families for long weeks with no way of reaching them, and possibly with no way of knowing when their ordeal would end.

We have heard survivors tell their stories of the types of harm that they experienced and the losses that they bore—of childhood, joy and safety. We heard of the power imbalances, which affected not only them as children, but their parents and families, who experienced little or no choice in the decision to send their little girls away. We have also heard about the responsibility for that harm. Who should bear that responsibility, both individual and institutional? We should acknowledge that past, however uncomfortable it might be for us.

Secondly, the petition seeks closure in the present, through having the experiences of those women recognised appropriately; through

obtaining answers to their questions; through an apology that is full, precise and unstinting; and through assurances that, as far as is humanly possible, we will see to it that this wrong will never recur.

Thirdly, the petition calls for compensation to go into the future, as recognition of the reality of loss, as acknowledgement of responsibility and as seeds of future growth and flourishing.

Trauma-informed practice is not enough without trauma-informed policy, and I very much appreciate the petitions committee's work on this matter. It has worked exactly as it should have done, by responding to concerns, investigating the situation and making practical and feasible recommendations for action. As Foysol Choudhury has just said, there is no time limit on trauma, so it is time for the Scottish Government to act on the committee's recommendations.

The Redress for Survivors (Historical Child Abuse in Care) (Scotland) Act 2021 was, as Thompsons Solicitors has pointed out, based on principles of dignity, respect and compassion. The associated regulations turned out not to be consistent with those principles and not to consider the longer-term issues at stake. That was a mistake, but one that can and must be rectified. We must ensure that Redress Scotland is given what it needs to deliver justice, as Colin Smyth has said, and to provide justice for the Fornethy survivors. That is because this issue is not about process—it is about justice.

13:18

**Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab):** I am grateful to have the opportunity to take part in the debate. I congratulate my colleague Colin Smyth and commend him for securing it and for uniting members on this issue. Having listened to the debate so far, I am pleased that we are speaking with one voice.

I also pay tribute to the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee, which I know has taken this cause to its heart. It has listened to the women and to the evidence, and it has made really important recommendations to the Scottish Government. I was surprised to hear that we had not seen the action that everyone is fighting so hard for.

**Fergus Ewing:** I thank Monica Lennon for taking my intervention. She is almost like an extra member of the committee, so frequent are her appearances to stand up for various interests and constituents.

My question for her is this: is it not a matter of shame that the Scottish Government has failed to act on the unanimous recommendations of the

committee, which represents all the main parties? If the Government will not act, is it not time that one of the major parties brought forward a proper debate with a vote at the end, so that, if the Government is not willing to do the right thing by itself, it will, as we saw with Flamingo Land, be forced to do so?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I can give you the time back, Ms Lennon.

**Monica Lennon:** I am grateful to Fergus Ewing for the important points that he makes. It is not just a matter of whether it shames the Scottish Government—it shames Scotland that we are not doing the right thing by the survivors, and we should leave no stone unturned. It is good that we are having a members' business debate today, thanks to Colin Smyth's efforts, but the subject should be debated in the chamber again in Government time, or perhaps in Opposition time. This cannot be the last word.

It is good that, between the efforts of the convener, Jackson Carlaw; Maurice Golden, who is in the chamber today; and Foysol Choudhury, Fergus Ewing and Maggie Chapman, from whom we have also heard, we know that there are many members on all sides of the chamber who care. I know that there are some limitations on what we can say today, and time is always short in a members' business debate, but I wanted to speak briefly just to demonstrate, again, my solidarity with the Fornethy women.

I knew nothing about Fornethy house or about the survivors until I had a chance encounter outside the Scottish Parliament back in March 2022. I was walking on by—I was there to meet with other campaigners—when I was approached by some of the women. They asked me and my researcher, "Are you MSPs?" and we stopped to chat. I was able to refer some of the women, including Marion Reid, to Colin Smyth, given the links to his region, and to my friend and colleague Lynsey Hamilton. Lynsey is currently on maternity leave, or she would have been in the public gallery to support the women today.

That brings me back to Fergus Ewing's final remarks in his speech: doing nothing is not an option. For me, that chance encounter was a lesson in not being a bystander. Although I am a regular visitor to the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee to speak to other campaigns, I have watched other colleagues, including Martin Whitfield, take this campaign forward. There have been dozens of parliamentary questions, and there has been involvement at the highest level, including from the Deputy First Minister. I know Kate Forbes to be a good person with a good heart, and I know that she will be listening very carefully and will do everything that she can to ensure that we can, together, knock

down all the barriers that are apparently in the way.

I am grateful to you, Deputy Presiding Officer, for giving me a little bit of time back. This is about the pursuit of truth, and about justice. I hear what colleagues have said about the redress scheme and the fact that not everyone will want to pursue that route, but it is important that it is there for those who want to access it.

I know that many of the women have had to use a lot of their own money to pay for therapeutic interventions, including therapy. The experience has had an impact and left them with lasting trauma, and everyone's journey will be different—that should be acknowledged. We have previously united in the Parliament to say sorry to those affected by historical forced adoption, for example, and I was grateful to the former First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, for listening to my call to work cross-party on that issue. This is another issue on which we have to unite and come together, and I know that the Deputy First Minister will do everything that she can.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call the Deputy First Minister, Kate Forbes, to respond to the debate.

13:23

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic (Kate Forbes):** I thank Colin Smyth for lodging the motion and for his tireless work in supporting the Fornethy survivors. I give a huge welcome to the Fornethy survivors who are in the public gallery—I know, having engaged with many of them directly, that they have shown remarkable courage. There is an element of frustration—far be it from me to criticise, or be seen to be criticising, processes in any way, but it is a matter of significant frustration that, given the live criminal proceedings in relation to Fornethy house, there are limits on what I can say.

One of the agreements that I made with survivors when we first met was that we would have regular meetings and engagement. Sadly, under clear legal advice, I have been unable to meet again with the group. We have been talking today about the pursuit of justice, and I do not want to do anything that may prejudice or compromise a live criminal case—that would be totally at odds with my desire to see justice.

**Fergus Ewing:** I note what the Deputy First Minister says in relation to the sub judice rule. However, the sub judice rule relates to a criminal case that is due to be heard in the High Court in September. If nothing happens until after that case is over, nothing will happen in this session of Parliament. In any event, is it not the case that the

current legal proceedings may prevent us from discussing aspects today, but what they do not do—and what they cannot do—is fetter the powers of the Government to bring forward a solution? Therefore, with respect, Deputy First Minister, you cannot hide behind the sub judice rule.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Always speak through the chair.

**Kate Forbes:** There is absolutely no hiding going on, because I am about to outline some of the actions that I took directly in response to the five actions that survivors asked me to progress, and I will go through them in detail. As any fair-minded person can see, some of those actions are fettered as a result of the criminal proceedings, and I think that most members will understand what those fetters are.

I committed to continuing close engagement with survivors. Although I have the greatest respect for my colleagues across the chamber, to be blunt, I put more emphasis on what survivors ask me to do than I necessarily put on representatives. I know that Colin Smyth has sat in on the meetings that I have had with survivors and has heard directly what they wished me to do, and that has been my agenda.

There have been some suggestions that the Government is in some way unmoved by the necessity of protecting or acknowledging young girls who are at harm. Although I know that it was not suggested that that would necessarily be my approach, I absolutely emphasise that, not only as a mother of a little girl but also as somebody who currently engages with many survivors in my role, I do not need to be persuaded to care about these matters of injustice. I hope that every member hears that comment loudly and clearly.

During the first meeting that I had with Fornethy survivors, I committed to taking forward a number of actions, and I want to provide the Parliament with an update on those actions. The first was to engage directly with Glasgow City Council. The second was to look at how we could provide greater levels of emotional support, for the very reason that Monica Lennon outlined: that the responsibility for offering emotional support often fell on survivors themselves. The other action was to see whether the Scottish child abuse inquiry would consider Fornethy itself. That is because of the comment that somebody else made that this is not just a question of justice; it is also a question of truth—pursuing truth and understanding what the truth is.

On those actions, some survivors told me that the most important outcome for them is an apology, particularly from Glasgow City Council. I contacted Glasgow City Council and spoke directly to its leader. Colin Smyth has outlined the fact that



an apology was made. I do not necessarily argue with his characterisation, because that is how survivors felt. I subsequently wrote to Glasgow City Council, inviting it to attend a meeting with me and the Fornethy Survivors Group. The invitation was not taken up on that occasion, but I still encourage Glasgow City Council to meet the survivors at the earliest opportunity upon the conclusion of the relevant criminal and civil proceedings.

The other action was in pursuit of the truth. Survivors wanted to see dedicated evidence from the Scottish child abuse inquiry. Therefore, I welcome the announcement of phase 10 of the Scottish child abuse inquiry, which focuses on children's residential care establishments operated by local authorities, including Fornethy house. Although I know that some survivors have already given evidence to the Scottish child abuse inquiry, this will be a specific hearing on Fornethy. The public hearings for phase 10 of the inquiry will commence later this year.

The other two actions of the five are still pending. One is to follow up in a meeting with survivors, which I am extremely keen to do without compromising the criminal proceedings. That is hugely important for the reason that I outlined earlier, which is that, bluntly, I am more interested in what survivors have to say and the actions that they want me to take than I necessarily am in their representatives in the Parliament.

Secondly, there is a question about redress. I will not go over the commentary on the formal Scottish redress scheme. I think that it was Maggie Chapman who talked more generally about compensation. The Scottish Parliament voted for the criteria that are under debate. This has nothing to do with how long or how dreadful the abuse was. As I have already said to survivors in a private meeting—I am happy to say it again today—this is an area and these are issues that I want to pursue and proceed with, but the criteria that are in place right now for the redress scheme were agreed to by the Parliament. I have written to the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee subsequent to the first letter, which said that we were not going to reopen the criteria, to explain some of the challenges with reopening the criteria.

I hear members' calls for redress and compensation. The process for that has to be watertight and has to deliver what survivors are looking for, which is why I take my steer from them.

I have tried to be as candid as possible in my remarks while also recognising and respecting the courts and not wanting to compromise that. I have laid out the five actions that survivors asked me to take, the progress on those actions and the fact

that the only actions that we have been unable to proceed with—which are a minority of actions—are those that cut across live criminal proceedings. I am very happy to re-engage with survivors at the earliest opportunity, and I will continue to engage with members across the chamber. I reiterate my commitment to ensuring that we pursue truth and justice for all survivors of abuse.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes the debate.

13:32

*Meeting suspended.*

14:30

*On resuming—*

## Portfolio Question Time

### Net Zero and Energy, and Transport

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** Good afternoon. The first item of business is portfolio questions on net zero and energy, and transport.

#### Public Transport (Rural Communities)

**1. Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what support it will provide to ensure that rural communities have access to public transport. (S6O-04792)

**The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie):** The Scottish Government fully recognises the vital role that transport plays in our rural communities. We spend more than £2 billion annually to support public transport across Scotland. That includes direct support to operators and local authorities to help to extend the transport network, alongside initiatives to make transport more affordable for passengers, such as the national concessionary travel schemes.

We continue to support the provision of services in rural areas through the network support grant, the bus powers in the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 and funding for the Community Transport Association Scotland, which supports local community transport operators.

**Finlay Carson:** Given the essential role that buses play in rural communities such as Galloway and West Dumfries, what urgent steps will the minister take to address the collapse of services and potential job losses following the withdrawal of Stagecoach? Current funding models such as the network support grant and the concessionary fare schemes fail to meet the unique needs of rural authorities. Will the minister consider reforming those models, including by directly funding bodies such as the South West of Scotland Transport Partnership, to better support local transport and unlock wider social and economic benefits?

**Jim Fairlie:** I absolutely accept the point that Finlay Carson has made, but the local authority is the body that is responsible for providing bus services in his area. I take on board his point about the job losses that there could well be. My hope is that provision will be made available as the process between Stagecoach and Dumfries and Galloway Council goes on. It is for local authorities to decide how they spend their funding,

but the Scottish Government spends about £2 billion a year on supporting transport.

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** The minister will be aware that the MV Lord of the Isles was out of service again this week, leaving the people of South Uist without any ferry service—again. The Scottish Government announced a resilience fund. Will the people of South Uist, who are bearing costs for this week's cancellation, be able to apply for compensation from that fund?

**Jim Fairlie:** As Rhoda Grant has pointed out, there is a resilience fund, which is still in the process of being developed. As soon as a decision is made on how funding will be distributed, either the Cabinet Secretary for Transport or I will let her know.

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** Reflecting the concerns that Finlay Carson raised, I advise the minister that Orkney Disability Forum is partnering with the local council to pilot a new service in South Ronaldsay, where no public transport currently exists. A small electric vehicle that can hold fewer than nine passengers has been bought, which can operate on a section 19 permit but not as a scheduled service on a section 22 permit. As a result, it is ineligible for the network support grant and passengers cannot use concessionary cards. Will the minister take action to ensure that regulations do not prevent important initiatives that are tailored to meet the specific transport needs of rural and island communities from accessing the funding that they need?

**Jim Fairlie:** The regulations that Liam McArthur has talked about are outwith the powers of the Scottish Government, but, if he wants to give me the details, I am more than happy to look at the issue to see whether there is anything else that we can advise.

**Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP):** In my Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley constituency, reliable rural bus services are vital. Does the minister agree that it is wholly regrettable that the privately run business Stagecoach, on which my constituents rely, has failed to broker a deal with its employees over the strike period to ensure not only that they receive equitable pay in accordance with fair work principles but that such fragile transportation links are resumed?

Many constituents across rural Ayrshire, who, in the main, support the calls of the drivers, are now cut off from accessing health appointments, attending work and accessing food—the basics that we all take for granted. That simply cannot continue, so I ask the Scottish Government to work with local areas urgently to create sustainable bus services.

**Jim Fairlie:** I absolutely sympathise with Elena Whitham, who will be aware that Scottish ministers simply cannot intervene directly in such matters. We absolutely recognise the critical importance of bus services, particularly in more rural areas, which—as she rightly points out—provide a lifeline service for access to healthcare, education and work, as well as helping with social inclusion. I appreciate the disruption that has been caused and sympathise with all the communities that are affected by the process. I encourage Stagecoach and the unions to work together to resolve the issue as soon as possible and to come to a fair and sustainable agreement that not only supports the employees but ensures the long-term viability of those important services in the area.

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** As SWestrans and Dumfries and Galloway Council have responsibility for local bus services, the scope for the Government to directly intervene is clearly limited, particularly given that a tender process is on-going. However, will the Scottish Government consider providing local transport authorities with technical and professional support to equip them with the capacity to ensure that areas such as Dumfries and Galloway have a vibrant and sustainable bus network, regardless of the commercial decisions that are taken elsewhere?

**Jim Fairlie:** Emma Harper is absolutely right to point out that the Scottish Government cannot directly intervene, but my officials in Transport Scotland are there to give the technical support that the local authority might need in order to progress things.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 2 has been withdrawn.

### **Seafield Waste Water Treatment Works (Investment)**

**3. Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on planned capital investment in the Seafield waste water treatment works, including the no regrets funding commitment and what consideration is being given to further investment after the private finance initiative contract ends, to meet the needs of population growth, climate change and the Edinburgh waterfront development. (S6O-04794)

**The Acting Minister for Climate Action (Alasdair Allan):** The Seafield waste water treatment works involves a PFI contract that was awarded in 1999, and contractual obligations for its delivery and operations lie with the PFI company until 2029. The contract is funded by Scottish Water.

Some £34 million has been invested in Seafield since 2011 and, in 2020, Scottish Water committed a further £10 million to provide additional sludge storage capacity to improve odour performance. Scottish Water remains committed to delivering improvements for customers and will keep community representatives updated through the Seafield stakeholder group. Scottish Water is at an early stage in developing its plans to ensure a smooth transition of operational responsibility once the PFI contract expires.

**Ben Macpherson:** For many years, people in the north-east of Edinburgh have, unfortunately, experienced unpleasant odours at times. Although the situation is much better than it was in the past, that still happens. When I took the chair of the stakeholder group in 2016, I was determined to make improvements and deliver the necessary investment.

It is unfortunate that the no regrets funding investment has been delayed due to wider economic circumstances. However, it is reassuring to hear the minister clarify that the Government and Scottish Water are committed to that no regrets investment and that planning is already under way to meet the needs of our growing city and to ensure that the plant becomes a state-of-the-art 21st century facility once the PFI contract ends. I would be grateful if the minister could confirm that, in the months and years ahead, ministers will continue to engage with me, as the local MSP and chair of the stakeholder group, along with community organisations.

**Alasdair Allan:** First, I recognise the efforts that Ben Macpherson has made as the constituency MSP in raising the issue with the Government and others. Scottish Water remains committed to delivering the investment through its PFI partner. I understand that the delays relate to the PFI company's difficulty in procuring a suitable supplier in the busy United Kingdom marketplace. He will know that the PFI system was the creation not of this Government but of previous ones. I understand that Scottish Water has confirmed to the Seafield stakeholder group that the procurement strategy has been revisited accordingly. I am sure that Ben Macpherson will continue to raise those issues assiduously with future ministers.

### **Net Zero (Supply Chain and Skills)**

**4. Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the recent report, "Energy Transition: 41st Survey", by the Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce, which reportedly demonstrates that the United Kingdom is losing the supply chain and skills necessary to deliver net zero. (S6O-04795)

**The Acting Minister for Climate Action (Alasdair Allan):** Ensuring a just transition for Scotland's oil and gas sector is at the heart of our green industrial strategy. Those supply chains and workers will deliver net zero and unlock growth.

We are supporting businesses, including through our £500 million 10-year just transition fund. Our investment of up to £500 million over five years in offshore wind will leverage private investment and anchor Scotland's supply chain. A just transition depends on United Kingdom Government action across reserved areas, including providing clarity on the fiscal and regulatory regimes for oil and gas, as well as support for the Acorn carbon capture and storage project.

**Jackie Dunbar:** Aberdeen and, indeed, the rest of Scotland have the highly skilled workforce and natural resources to become the world leader in net zero, but independent experts are increasingly warning that that ambition is at risk due to UK Government energy policies. Does the minister agree that Westminster cannot continue to stand in the way of Scotland's just transition? What is the Scottish Government doing to secure Scotland's economic growth and thriving energy sector?

**Alasdair Allan:** As Jackie Dunbar rightly points out, both Governments have a role in that regard. I am pleased that, even in the minutes before I got to my feet, there was again discussion in Westminster about the Acorn project and a commitment to some part of that. However, timescales and funding for the whole project need to be allocated if we are to have confidence that it will go ahead. Clearly, both Governments have a role to play and, as I have indicated, we in the Scottish Government have not been shy to play ours.

**Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con):** We have now been waiting more than two years for an updated energy strategy. The chamber of commerce's survey has revealed that 90 per cent of firms believe that the absence of a Scottish Government energy strategy is damaging investor confidence. Will the minister wake up and listen to businesses in the north-east?

**Alasdair Allan:** As I indicated, we have not been waiting for a plan to take action—important as a plan undoubtedly is. I have mentioned the £500 million investment over 10 years and the many actions that the Government is taking.

Douglas Lumsden is right to point to the real anxiety that exists about ensuring that the north-east has the economic future and just transition that it deserves. The reason why I also pointed to the UK Government is that, for instance, the policy on the energy profits levy is continually raised by

the industry in the north-east as something that is making life more difficult. That is why we raise it with the UK Government.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 5 has been withdrawn.

### **Local Bus Services (Franchising Guidance)**

**6. Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government when the statutory guidance for local bus services franchising will be published. (S6O-04797)

**The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie):** I confirm that the guidance is undergoing internal review prior to final engagement on the franchising process with key parties, including the Competition and Markets Authority and the office of the traffic commissioner for Scotland. Once that process is completed, and prior to the finalisation of the formal publication, it is my intention to share the draft guidance with the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, along with the affected parties, including local transport authorities, regional transport partnerships and operators' representatives. The final timescales for publication will depend on the capacity of those stakeholders to consider and engage with the draft document.

**Claire Baker:** I thank the minister for his response, but I am disappointed because the Government previously committed to issuing the guidance by the end of last year. Six months on from that deadline, we are still waiting, and, given the minister's explanation this afternoon, we can expect to be waiting quite a while longer before we reach the final stage.

The length of time required for and the complexity of the overall franchising process in Scotland has been raised as a concern. In comparison with other parts of the UK, the process in Scotland is much longer and has additional requirements. Is the Scottish Government considering ways in which to speed up and simplify the process? Have lessons been learned from elsewhere, including on the potential removal of technical barriers?

**Jim Fairlie:** I take Claire Baker's point that there was a view to getting out the guidance sooner. We focused on getting the franchising legislation through, which has taken up considerable time. The guidance still has to go through the internal review process, and we still have to have discussions with all the stakeholders and people who will be affected by it. We will get it done and, as soon as we have done so, I will present it to the NZET Committee, and it will be there for further scrutiny.

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** A small island bus operator in my

constituency is concerned about the potential impact of bus franchising on its business, as the uncertainties already make it more difficult to secure investment. The operator worries that the Strathclyde Partnership for Transport is not considering the impact of franchising on small island operators, with the model appearing to favour larger companies. What reassurance can the minister provide that the unique challenges of Scottish island communities and their local bus enterprises will be considered?

**Jim Fairlie:** Franchising is not the only option that local authorities have available to them—the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 gives local authorities a number of different options to consider. If the member will provide me with the exact details of his concerns, I am more than happy to pick up the matter with him.

**Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):** Research from the Get Glasgow Moving campaign suggests that there will not be a single franchised bus in the Strathclyde region until 2030. I think that that is being optimistic, actually. That will be 11 years after the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 was passed. What is the Scottish Government doing to expedite the process?

**Jim Fairlie:** The member is well aware that the process will be long and rigorous. Claire Baker mentioned removing some of the issues that are making things difficult—I presume that that is to do with the role of the panel. The panel will be vital in ensuring that there is rigour in the franchising process. It is only right that there is a rigorous process to make sure that the franchising is done properly—that will allow us to ensure that we have a transport system that works.

### Net Zero Target

**7. Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what the implications and consequences of not achieving net zero by 2045 would be for Scotland, including the economy. (S6O-04798)

**The Acting Minister for Climate Action (Alasdair Allan):** As I know that the member appreciates, net zero offers huge economic opportunities for Scotland. The changes that are needed will put money into people's pockets, improve health and wellbeing and protect our planet for future generations. Net zero is a moral imperative and an opportunity to support future economic development.

Workers must be at the heart of a just transition. Our approach will maximise benefits of climate action and minimise impacts for workers and communities. Our next climate change plan will outline the costs and benefits of policies, supported by just transition plans, and our national

adaptation plan is driving our response to climate impacts.

**Maurice Golden:** I concur with that answer. The consequences of not meeting net zero would drive farmers out of business, destroy the rural economy and put our food security at risk. Does the minister agree that it is common sense to meet the target of achieving net zero by 2045 and that it would be utter madness and an act of national self-harm not to attempt to do so?

**Alasdair Allan:** I strongly concur with the member and agree with what he says about the essential nature of reaching net zero, and not only to save our planet—as if that were a small consideration—because doing so is also essential for our businesses, as the cost of adaptation to and coping with climate change will become increasingly expensive if we do not tackle the problem as we go. I very warmly concur with what the member has just said.

**Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** We know that urban and rural communities across Scotland are at risk from extreme weather and the impact of the climate emergency, with homes and businesses now at risk. What is the Scottish Government's plan to deliver the sustainable jobs that we need locally, both to increase our resilience and to reduce emissions? I give the example of the manufacturing of renewables and again ask: when will we see the energy strategy and the just transition plan to give the certainty that developers and supply-chain businesses urgently need in order to deliver that sustainable, low-carbon economy?

**Alasdair Allan:** As I said, some of the plans are dependent on something that is happening in another sphere—that is, on the United Kingdom Government's interaction with the courts. We must wait for some of the information from that. However, as I indicated previously, that fact does not keep us from action. For instance, we have allocated £125 million to the economy of Aberdeen and the north-east of Scotland; on top of that, we have allocated £75 million to the just transition capital fund for the north-east and Moray. As a Government, we are committed to putting in real resources and effort to ensuring that the transition is a truly just one.

### Heat Networks (Scotland) Act 2021 (Implementation)

**8. Lorna Slater (Lothian) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government what its plans are for bringing the requisite regulations—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Ms Slater, could you please resume your seat? The question that you are reading out does not reflect the language that is in the *Business Bulletin*. Could

someone perhaps give Ms Slater a copy of the *Business Bulletin*? Thank you.

Could you start again, Ms Slater, for the record?

**Lorna Slater:** My sincere apologies, Deputy Presiding Officer.

To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide further details of its plans for bringing forward the requisite regulations to fully implement the Heat Networks (Scotland) Act 2021, including the special rights and powers that the act foresees for heat network developers. (S6O-04799)

**The Acting Minister for Climate Action (Alasdair Allan):** We will provide more detail on the next steps in relation to the Heat Networks (Scotland) Act 2021 alongside the introduction of the heat in buildings bill. However, I can assure Parliament that we intend to deliver the rights and powers that are detailed in part 6 of the 2021 act, and that we are working to ensure we do that in a way that avoids duplication with Great Britain-wide authorisations so as to minimise the regulatory burden on the heat network sector in Scotland.

**Lorna Slater:** Will the minister give an update on the timescale for that? The issue of heat networks is a fully devolved matter, so why do we need to wait for the UK Government? The development of heat networks was legislated for in 2021, and we are still waiting for the related secondary legislation. Will the minister give us a clear timeline for when the Scottish Government intends to complete that work?

**Alasdair Allan:** I mentioned the heat in buildings bill, which we have committed to introduce in year 5 of this session of Parliament.

With regard to the points that were made about earlier legislation, it is worth saying that we are now exploring introducing an opt-in rights and powers licence via the heat in buildings bill, which would be akin to the installation and maintenance licence that is being introduced in the rest of GB. That is because many of the provisions of part 1 of the legislation, such as those to do with financial wellbeing, will be covered by Great Britain-wide authorisation. More detail will follow when the heat in buildings bill is introduced, but I assure Lorna Slater that that will happen in this parliamentary year.

**Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con):** When the Greens were in Government, we saw a massive expansion in incineration capacity, which is used to power heat networks, particularly in Scandinavia. Some might say that it was a case of, "Burn, baby, burn." What is the Scottish Government's view on using renewables to power those heat networks, as opposed to burning stuff?

**Alasdair Allan:** As we have seen in other parts of Europe, the helpful thing about many heat

networks is the move that has been made from "burning stuff", as the member put it, to other forms of power. My officials are working jointly with the UK Government to commission guidance that will look at the issue of waste heat. We are also looking at how to ensure that the heat in buildings bill incentivises renewably powered heat networks in the future.

**Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** Do we not need to support local authorities to work together to deliver low-carbon heat networks? Local authorities are discussing the issue now. Given that we have such a huge excess of electricity, is now not the time for the Scottish Government to step in and help them to get there?

**Alasdair Allan:** I am not sure that I would characterise the future situation as one in which we will have a huge excess of electricity, given the electrification of the country that is taking place. However, I understand Sarah Boyack's point about the need to ensure that different local authorities work together. We are seeking to support such work in the part of the world that she represents, and we will do that elsewhere in the country.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes portfolio question time.

**Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con):** On a point of order, Deputy Presiding Officer. In the portfolio question time that we have just had, the fact that two Scottish National Party members had withdrawn questions meant that other members did not have a chance to question the Government. One question was about the £80 million that the Scottish Government has committed to the Acorn project and when that would be forthcoming. Will you advise on whether anything can be done to ensure that members who put themselves forward to ask a question actually ask it?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I thank Mr Lumsden for his contribution. As a general rule, members will withdraw or not lodge questions for a number of reasons. In the instant case, it might interest Mr Lumsden to know that one of the members is not well and the other member has a special dispensation to participate in a committee meeting that is taking place at the same time as this meeting of Parliament. I hope that that assists Mr Lumsden. [*Interruption.*]

Excuse me, Mr Carson. Do you have something to say further to that point of order, or do you just want to mump from a sedentary position? I have stated what the position is, and I hope that that is accepted by all members in the chamber.

## Greenhouse Gas Emissions Statistics 2023

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** The next item of business is a ministerial statement by Alasdair Allan on the greenhouse gas emissions statistics 2023. The minister will take questions at the end of his statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:55

**The Acting Minister for Climate Action (Alasdair Allan):** Scotland's climate is changing. Severe weather events are becoming more frequent and we can expect future changes in the climate to be far worse than anything that we have seen in the past. Global emissions continue to rise and the locked-in impact of past emissions continues playing out in front of our eyes. We have just experienced the 10 warmest years on record and the World Meteorological Organization warns that there is

"no sign of respite over the coming years, and this means that there will be a growing negative impact on our economies, our daily lives, our ecosystems and our planet."

We are seeing the effects on our own doorstep. Flooding, coastal erosion, drought and storms are putting increasing pressures on our economy, society and environment. That is why tackling the climate emergency is a priority for the Government and must remain high on the agenda of the Parliament.

I am here today to update Parliament on Scotland's latest progress in emissions reduction, as shown in the Scottish greenhouse gas emissions statistics 2023, which were published on 10 June. Those statistics are the first emissions reduction figures published since Scotland moved to a five-year carbon budget approach last year. As part of that, the Scottish Government will continue monitoring our climate progress annually, including reporting on our rate of emissions reduction, but our path towards net zero in 2045 will be expressed in new carbon budgets, which we will set out in due course.

The official statistics, which were published on Tuesday, show that Scottish emissions in 2023 were 51.3 per cent lower than in 1990, which is a further reduction of 1.9 per cent on our position in 2022. By using comparable metrics, we can see that Scotland made the largest reduction in emissions in the United Kingdom between 1990 and 2023, reducing those by 51.3 per cent. Emissions in England in the same period reduced by 50.7 per cent, followed by Wales and Northern Ireland.

The majority of sectors saw reductions in 2023. In particular, there was a very large reduction in emissions in the electricity sector of 0.8 megatonnes of carbon dioxide emitted. Although electricity was historically the biggest contributor to our emissions, Scotland has made significant progress in decarbonising, outpacing other UK nations with a 93.4 per cent reduction in those emissions since 1990. That reflects the continued shift from fossil fuels to renewable energy. Over 12 months, renewable electricity capacity increased from 15.4GW to 17.6GW by the end of 2024 and gas-fired electricity generation has fallen. Reductions were also seen in fuel supply, buildings and product uses, domestic transport, industry and waste, which all reduced emissions by 0.1 megatonnes of carbon dioxide when compared to 2022.

Agriculture emissions were essentially unchanged between 2022 and 2023, falling very slightly by 0.1 per cent, but our focus on progress here remains strong. We all agree that Scotland's agriculture has a critical role in both supporting our climate ambitions and ensuring our future food security and economic prosperity. Indeed, our commitment to rooting our climate ambitions in just transition principles for that sector is undaunted. It underpins a considered, collaborative and clear approach to supporting agriculture's contribution to Scotland's economic and social vitality while addressing the climate and biodiversity crises.

Lastly, there was some increase in emissions from international aviation and shipping, which effectively returned to their pre-Covid levels, and in the category of land use, land use change and forestry, due to a reduction in the forestry sink as a result of historical planting reaching maturity.

We are taking decisive action to ensure that we continue to reduce emissions and make meaningful progress towards our goal of net zero by 2045, and we are committed to doing that in a way that is just for workers, communities and businesses across Scotland; that provides a greener, fairer future for all; that puts more money in people's pockets; and that contributes to our overall health and wellbeing.

It has been a privilege to be an acting minister in the Scottish Government for the past year. I hope that members will permit me to look back for a moment at some of the things that have been achieved in the four years since the previous climate change plan was finalised. We have scrapped peak rail fares for good; extended free bus travel, which now benefits over 2.3 million people; and delivered 6,800 public charge points, with a further 6,000 to come by 2030.

We have brought the new-build heat standard into force; introduced a ban on the supply and

manufacture of certain problematic single-use plastic items, including single-use cutlery, food containers and more; and created the landmark Circular Economy (Scotland) Act 2024, which establishes the legislative framework to support Scotland's transition to a zero waste and circular economy. That is complemented by our circular economy and waste route map to 2030, which will help us to achieve our sustainable resource and climate goals.

Since 2020-21, an average of 11,000 hectares of new woodland have been created each year, including over 15,000 hectares in 2023-24, which was the highest figure for 34 years. Since 2020-21, we have also restored over 43,000 hectares of degraded peat, including 14,860 hectares in 2024-25 against the programme for government commitment of 10,000 hectares.

We have published the vision for agriculture and created the Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Act 2024, which provides the powers that are required to deliver the agricultural reform programme.

We have launched a new bidding round that is worth up to £8.5 million for the just transition fund for 2025-26, which will drive forward our transition to net zero in the north-east and Moray and ensure that we continue to create jobs, support innovation and secure the highly skilled workforce of the future. More recently, we have already delivered on our commitment to ban the supply and sale of single-use vapes.

Further commitments will see the extension of our nature restoration fund, the establishment of statutory targets to improve biodiversity, and the introduction of our heat in buildings bill by the end of the current session of Parliament.

Despite the progress that we have made, however, we need others to act, too, on this shared ambition. We rely on the UK Government to act in several important areas to enable our future pathway to reduce emissions in Scotland. Carbon capture, utilisation and storage is vital for a just transition to net zero. The Climate Change Committee has advised that it

“cannot see a route to Net Zero that does not include CCS.”

The UK Government's spending review that was published yesterday provided some welcome support for the Acorn project. However, a commitment to providing funding is not enough. We urgently need the UK Government to commit to providing a full funding package and timeline so that the project can progress towards reality, creating jobs and investing in our communities.

We will soon set out our proposed emissions trajectory to 2045 based on five-year carbon budgets through secondary legislation. Key to that

has been the Climate Change Committee's advice on Scotland's pathway to net zero in 2045, which was published on 21 May. We are carefully considering the committee's advice before producing regulations to set our carbon budgets. That includes consideration of the target-setting criteria under the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 and an assessment of whether the pace of decarbonisation is appropriate for people, sectors and businesses across Scotland.

The carbon budgets that we propose will provide an achievable pathway to net zero in 2045 and they will be followed by a new draft climate change plan that outlines our policies and proposals for reducing emissions between 2026 and 2040 for consultation.

In Scotland, our emissions have halved since 1990. The 2023 statistics, which show a reduction since 2022, demonstrate the positive action that we have already taken to reach our goal of net zero by 2045, and the actions to which we have committed show that we are resolutely focused on achieving that.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The minister will now take questions on the issues raised in his statement. I intend to allow around 20 minutes for that, after which we will move on to the next item of business. It would be helpful if members who wished to ask a question could press their request-to-speak buttons now.

**Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con):** I thank the minister for advance sight of his statement, which is a statement of more failure from this devolved Scottish National Party Government—but, of course, this Scottish Government rewards failure. We need simply look at the promotion of the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Energy, who has presided over a long list of failures.

The Government has failed to publish a climate change plan; failed to publish an energy strategy; failed to publish a just transition plan; failed to meet community groups who are concerned about pylons and substations carpeting their communities; failed to publish carbon budget regulations when it said that they would be published; failed to protect thousands of jobs in the North Sea oil and gas industry from being lost; failed to prevent the closure of refining at Grangemouth; failed to back Rosebank, Cambo or Jackdaw; failed to remove the presumption against new oil and gas; and, today, we have heard of its failure to meet its own emissions targets.

I ask the minister: when it comes to the long list of failures, what have I missed?

**Alasdair Allan:** I will tell the member what he has missed. Apart from missing concepts such as



decency and manners, the member has missed out the great issue facing our world today: the need to get to net zero, which he seems to have overlooked. He seems to think—and this will be my parting word to him—that we can somehow get through the next 50 years without attempting to get to net zero. That is what he has missed.

**Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** I thank the minister for notice of his statement.

Environmental groups such as WWF say that progress has stalled; the evidence of this Government's net zero efforts is lacking; and the bold climate targets that the SNP pledged to deliver have all but disappeared. We are seeing those failures again today, but there is no acknowledgement of the need to do way more, and to learn from the failures to deliver the action that this Parliament supported.

What are we going to get for the transformational change that we need? If we are to address transport emissions, we will need to do more than dump peak rail fares, however much we campaigned for that. We also need to accelerate electrification; increase the use of rail freight; have buses that people can use their bus passes on; and, indeed, have buses that are built in Scotland by Scottish workers, and which are not imported from China.

Also, should we not be doing more to use our fantastic natural resources to remove, and not emit, carbon? When will we see the right trees in the right places, and the investment to support our peatlands at the scale that is needed?

Finally, will the minister outline specific new actions that the Scottish Government will deliver to ensure that the next set of statistics shows that we are on track to deliver the net zero change that we urgently need?

**Alasdair Allan:** The member rightly points to the importance of, among other things, tackling carbon emissions in the transport sector. I can point to many areas of activity; indeed, she herself pointed to the abolition of peak fares on trains. The Scottish Government recognises that the transport sector needs to do much more, and to do it in a fair way.

The emissions statistics that the member referred to point to the fact that the car remains the single largest contributor to transport emissions in Scotland. Indeed, it accounts for 5 megatonnes of emissions from domestic transport, including international aviation and shipping.

Those are areas that I am sure that future ministers, and the Parliament as a whole, will want to work together on. We need to invest—and we are investing—in our public transport system.

**Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP):** The Scottish Government has now adopted a carbon budgeting system to measure emission reduction targets alongside the rest of the United Kingdom and international counterparts such as France and Japan. Can the minister say any more about the lessons learned from the use of the carbon budgeting systems in those countries and how they have informed the Scottish Government's approach?

**Alasdair Allan:** As we have seen in recent years—not least during Covid—annual emissions targets are highly vulnerable to in-year fluctuations such as cold winters and, indeed, global pandemics. That does not mean that we will not produce annual figures; we are doing that, and I have just outlined them to Parliament.

However, multiyear carbon budgets provide a more reliable framework for sustained progress in emissions reduction by not only smoothing out volatility but allowing us to move to a carbon budget framework, as supported by the Climate Change Committee following its success in the UK and in other countries. It advised that carbon budgets are the most appropriate indicator of underlying progress in emissions reduction.

**Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con):** The most popular option that was chosen during the recent latte levy consultation was “No thanks”. I recognise that some climate change policies will not always be popular, but can the minister tell the chamber what the estimated reduction in emissions would be as a result of the proposed latte levy?

**Alasdair Allan:** I will write to the member—actually, I will not. Someone else will write to him in due course with the information that he seeks.

The member is right to point to the fact that not every policy will be popular initially. It is important that the Parliament consults meaningfully and listens to people but, ultimately, we must be clear in our message that we have to reduce our carbon emissions in the future. That particular policy might well be part of that work.

**Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP):** The statistics show a substantial reduction in emissions from electricity generation as we realise Scotland's renewable energy potential. Can the minister provide an update on the Scottish Government's work to promote and develop green energy projects and supply chains in Scotland?

**Alasdair Allan:** Our green industrial strategy seeks to ensure that Scotland secures the enormous economic opportunity that the transition presents in areas such as offshore wind, carbon capture, utilisation and storage, and hydrogen. To support that, we are enabling manufacturing to grow and transition through our £75 million

investment in the National Manufacturing Institute Scotland.

We are also investing up to £500 million over five years to support a highly productive offshore wind economy and to leverage additional private investment in the infrastructure and manufacturing facilities that are critical to growing the sector. We are also supporting improvements to electricity generation and network asset management, including network charging and access arrangements that will encourage the deployment and viability of renewables projects in Scotland.

**Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab):** Emissions from buildings remain largely unchanged, so the Government must go faster to switch households to clean heating sources and improve the energy efficiency of existing homes. The proposed heat in buildings bill has been delayed and concerns have been raised about its scope and ambition. Does the minister agree with Citizens Advice Scotland that the Government must make provisions in the bill that will contribute to a reduction in fuel poverty and an overall improvement in housing standards, given that environmental justice must go hand in hand with social justice?

**Alasdair Allan:** The member is quite right that social justice and environmental justice must go hand in hand. Indeed, as the years go by, we will see that they are, to some extent, the same thing.

On the member's first question, the Government has taken some time to come forward with the proposed heat in buildings bill because, first, our consultation received a large number of responses that we wanted to give due account to and, secondly, we want to get it right to ensure that we introduce a bill that will help decarbonise Scotland but which does not make people poorer.

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** It is crucial that we continue to support climate innovation, which is supporting new jobs across our rural communities, where employment can be more precarious than elsewhere. For example, there are initiatives that are creating employment in anaerobic digestion and biogas, such as the project at Crofthead farm in Crocketford, which has biogas and carbon removers and which the First Minister visited just before Christmas. Can the minister outline how the Scottish Government is working to support emerging technologies and climate entrepreneurs across Scotland?

**Alasdair Allan:** Climate innovation and entrepreneurship are not just good for the planet; as other members have talked about, the economic opportunities are enormous, and we want to help Scottish businesses innovate at home and export their solutions to the rest of the world.

We are pleased that we have been able to invest in projects such as the one at Crofthead farm via our Scottish industrial energy transformation fund, and we note the continued entrepreneurial development beyond the initial innovation. Our enterprise agencies provide Scottish businesses with specialist advice, funding and knowledge exchange opportunities to drive up productivity and innovation through net zero initiatives.

**Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** Today's statement shows conclusively that Scotland's emissions are now flatlining. I am really worried that the Government has no big ideas left. No climate change plan has been presented to Parliament, and we do not know when that is coming. What we got today was a revised car use reduction plan that has no action on road user charging, despite congestion in cities such as Edinburgh crippling the economy and the climate. How will the Government use its remaining few months in office to support councils that want to cut congestion and raise revenue to invest in solutions that can benefit ordinary people as they move around?

**Alasdair Allan:** The member will not be too surprised to hear that I do not entirely accept the premises of his question. However, to try to answer it, I will say that the Scottish Government remains fully committed to delivering net zero by 2045, and our next climate change plan will set out an approach to delivering on Scotland's net zero target in a way that is just and fair for everyone but is also ambitious, as the member rightly points out that it needs to be.

The forthcoming climate change plan, which will cover 2026 to 2040, will set out a comprehensive overview and approach not just to mitigating existing climate change but to tackling the underlying problems that we have to fix by 2045.

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** I thank the minister for early sight of the statement. The statement makes it clear that, although progress is being made, at a point where we need to accelerate, the opposite is happening and progress is slowing down. Scotland's progress on installing heat pumps is lagging behind that of the rest of the United Kingdom and, on transport, although peak rail fares have been ditched, so too has the commitment to replace diesel trains by 2035. What advice will the minister give to help whoever it is that he committed will write to Maurice Golden step up and accelerate the progress that we need to make if we are to achieve our targets?

**Alasdair Allan:** I do not think that there is any tradition in the Scottish Government of leaving notes on desks or anything like that.

The member makes important points about transport, which has proved to be a difficult sector to decarbonise. We are right to talk about how Scotland has transformed the way in which we generate electricity, but we are facing up to the fact that other parts of the charts that have been released this week are more challenging, and transport is one of them. The Scottish Government recognises that the transport sector needs to decarbonise in order for us to achieve net zero, and we are committed to doing that in a fair way.

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** Despite a fall in recent years, agricultural greenhouse gas emissions for beef and dairy production remain high. It is therefore vital that we adopt proven innovations that deliver immediate impact, such as the methane-reducing feed-additive Boevar, which is produced by DSM-Firmenich in Dalry, Ayrshire, following a £300 million-plus investment there.

The impact on global warming of methane is 80 times greater than that of CO<sub>2</sub>. Given that Boevar cuts methane emissions by up to 45 per cent in beef cattle and 30 per cent in dairy cattle, will the Scottish Government incentivise the low-cost, highly effective roll-out of methane-reducing Scotland-made feed additives, such as Boevar, across Scotland?

**Alasdair Allan:** The member is right to point to those issues. The Scottish Government recognises the significant impact of methane on global warming and the potential for innovations, including methane-suppressing feed products such as Boevar, to contribute to emissions reductions in the beef and dairy sectors, and we welcome the progress that is being made.

Officials are exploring the development of a pilot scheme to assess the appropriate use of methane-suppressing feed products in Scottish farms. The aim would be to support policy development and inform future decisions on the role that those products might play in reducing emissions.

We continue to monitor progress across the UK and internationally, and we are engaging with other Administrations, research institutes and industry initiatives, such as the UK dairy carbon network, to ensure that our approach remains evidence based and aligned with our net zero ambition.

**Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):** Last month, the Climate Change Committee advised that nature-based measures such as tree planting and peatland restoration could contribute 13 per cent of emissions reductions by 2045, but that would need the rate of tree planting to more than double in the next two decades. Will the

minister admit that—aside from one good year—we are not going to achieve that?

**Alasdair Allan:** Scotland has 1.5 million hectares of woodland, which covers 19 per cent of our country. The age structure of the forest estate and of the trees that are concerned means that the carbon sink that I referred to earlier will reduce over the 15 years to come. We need to plant more woodland, and we are planting more trees. Scotland is far more effective at planting trees than other nations of the UK. I think that 75 per cent of the tree planting that is presently going on in the UK is happening in Scotland. We are proud of that record and we will continue to work on it.

**Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP):** Despite the restrictions of devolution, Scotland continues to lead the rest of the UK in emissions reductions, with a 50 per cent overall reduction since 1990, as the minister said. Does he agree that Scotland would be in a better position to fight climate change if we had the same powers and financial levers as every other independent country has? Of course, I thank him for his considerable achievements for the people of Scotland during his term in office. *[Interruption.]*

**Alasdair Allan:** Despite the muttering from some quarters, we have plenty to learn on such issues from small European countries that have a population of 5 million and are independent, and we seek to do that. The member rightly points out that Scotland continues to lead in emissions reductions across the UK. The reduction that I mentioned earlier—of 51.3 per cent over the period—is higher than that in any other nation of the UK. We do not rest on that laurel but, in the constitutional settlement that we have, we do not have the powers that we need to make some of the choices that we would like to make as a country. The UK Government continues to hold the key policy levers for some policy areas on a net zero future, including critical areas such as Acorn, which I mentioned several times earlier.

**Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** The Scottish Government committed £80 million to the Acorn carbon capture project in January 2022 and said that that was contingent on UK Government funding being committed. That commitment has now been made, so when will the Scottish Government spend the £80 million?

**Alasdair Allan:** As I indicated, we are pleased that the UK Government has made commitments in that area. As the Climate Change Committee has said, Acorn is essential to our reaching net zero. It is also essential to the economy of the north-east, Grangemouth and Scotland as a whole. We are pleased that we took the lead in that area and that the UK Government is following it, but we need a timeline from the UK Government as to when that investment will come.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes the statement on greenhouse gas emissions statistics for 2023. Before we move to the next item of business, there will be a short pause to allow front-bench teams to change position, should they so wish.

## Migration

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-17906, in the name of Kate Forbes, on a migration system that works for Scotland. I invite members who wish to participate in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons.

15:23

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic (Kate Forbes):** Scotland's economic history is deeply intertwined with migration and emigration. Famines, industrialisation, the growth of cities, lowland and highland clearances, public health advances, bursts of emigration, wars, baby booms and freedom of movement are all key chapters that have formed the basis of our changing population and economic landscape.

We have a rich history as an open trading nation, and our future prosperity relies on that. Our natural resources, outstanding higher education institutions and growing reputation for innovation and technology make us a draw for international investment. We are renowned for our open-arms approach to welcoming others from around the world. Evidence from the latest nation brands index shows that we are recognised as the open, outward-facing country that we strive to be. Our people are our heart, and we are nothing as a nation without them.

We are prioritising action that maximises our workforce and removes barriers to employment. The programme for government and the budget outline the £90 million investment that we are making to help more people into work through our no one left behind programme and how, by the summer, local authorities will offer enhanced specialist support for disabled jobseekers and the improvements that are being made to support workers and employers to access health services to help to keep our workforce healthy.

Through our investment in education, reform of the skills system and targeted action in key sectors, we are not only increasing employment but taking action to increase productivity and earnings, too.

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** The Deputy First Minister is absolutely right to focus on how we maximise people's participation in the workforce. Has there been any analysis of why economic inactivity is higher in Scotland than it is in the rest of the United Kingdom?

**Kate Forbes:** It is an excellent question. The figures fluctuate considerably from month to

month, and I am tracking them very closely. There are a number of elements to the drivers of economic inactivity. Some are historical, where particular demographics or communities have a significantly higher rate of economic inactivity rate and have done for many years. Some of that is quite stubborn, although it is difficult to use that word in relation to human beings. More recently, some of it has been driven by the experience of the pandemic—that is another element that economists and people in Public Health Scotland are pointing to. Where people left the job market during Covid, they have been slower to return to it. The third element is probably similar across the UK, and it relates to those who need to access healthcare support—either mental health support or other forms of support.

My answer to Daniel Johnson is that the interventions required to help each of those cohorts are very different. People often lump together people who are economically inactive as one homogeneous group, but they really are not. Some fascinating work is going on with Public Health Scotland as well as with employers to find how we reach different cohorts. For the cohort that needs healthcare intervention, in one sense, it is not on the employer to provide support, but where somebody is finding it difficult to access the labour market because of changes that an employer can make, Public Health Scotland is working with employers to make those changes.

That is the high-level answer, but I would be more than happy to involve Daniel Johnson—and Liz Smith, as I see that she is nodding at me—and anyone else in some of the work that we are doing with Public Health Scotland. I find it a particularly fascinating piece of work because there is a lack of homogeneity in that cohort.

The actions that I talked about are important, but they are not sufficient. It is no secret that our country is facing significant population challenges. Migration is predicted to be the sole driver of population growth for decades to come. Right now, we need people to come here to live and work, to bolster our working-age population. Our positive reputation helps, and we already see evidence of Scotland attracting people from all nationalities. In the year to mid-2023, net migration into Scotland was higher than in any other year in the past decade. Of the 61,581 people who moved here that year, the majority were of working age and probably therefore taxpayers, too. That is a great thing for Scotland.

Migration to the economy is like adding rich compost to the soil. Just as that brings nutrients to plants, migration introduces fresh talent, skills and innovation, and it boosts productivity in our sectors. When that is abundant, businesses expand, new jobs are created and economic

growth happens. Without that, plants struggle to survive and thrive.

Our economy, like many others, depends on migration to sustain our public services, fill gaps in the workforce and drive our long-term prosperity. The food processing sector, for example, has calculated that nearly 45 per cent of its workforce comes from overseas—27 per cent are from the European Union and 17 per cent are more international. Most come to Scotland through a skilled worker visa. The sector has a strong retention record and is an important employer in many of our rural communities.

Rural communities, especially, are facing challenges from population change. Areas where people traditionally built their lives, businesses and connections are now struggling as families and workers move away to follow opportunities, leaving local services and businesses struggling and local economies weaker for it.

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I do not need to remind the cabinet secretary of how important the rural depopulation issue is within all of this. That is not just a matter of migration policy; it is a collective policy issue that requires efforts from a whole lot of areas to encourage more people to stay in their local communities. Does the cabinet secretary agree with that?

**Kate Forbes:** I absolutely agree. The National Records of Scotland, among others, forecasts double-digit reductions in population, particularly across coastal and island communities. That focuses on the working-age population, which masks the fact that we also have an ageing population.

Reversal of the depopulation trend and the restoration of economic vibrancy will not result from a single action. I have enough respect for my opponents across the chamber to know that we will approach the issue by understanding the multifaceted nature of the challenges, but it is the package of actions that we take that will ease the strain. In rural and island areas, there is a requirement to support housing, to deliver on key infrastructure projects and to improve transport links. It is also key—this is what I want to talk about today—that we call for tailored regional migration routes, such as a rural visa pilot. It is interesting that the development of a rural visa pilot enjoyed support from a number of different industries and sectors—indeed, at the time, it had support from across the Parliament as well.

We are quite concerned that the discourse around migration seems to be focused solely on reducing numbers instead of focusing on the needs of our economy and our diverse communities. That is what a rural visa would do—

it would have us working very closely with employers to identify need.

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** Regarding the rural pilot schemes for visas, 48 per cent of Scotland's dairy herd is in the south-west of Scotland, and a lot of the cows are milked by persons from Europe. Does the cabinet secretary agree that we need to recognise how important it would be to support the south-west economy with a rural visa pilot scheme?

**Kate Forbes:** I do, and anecdotes like that could be replicated in many different parts of Scotland. Employers frequently put it to me that migration is an area where they want to see progress, because they see it as an effective solution to the challenges that they face.

We have data that demonstrates the huge impact that immigrants have on our economy. Research that was commissioned by the Federation of Small Businesses in 2019 found that immigrant-led small and medium-sized enterprises generated £13 billion in revenues and 107,000 jobs. We want to attract more entrepreneurs to Scotland, in line with our long-term vision.

Using existing devolved powers, we launched Scotland's migration service in 2024 to support migrants and Scottish-based employers in navigating the UK immigration system to meet their relocation and business needs. Through it, we are always looking at ways in which we can support businesses, short of having control over immigration.

It will come as no surprise that, like many sectors and industries, we are deeply concerned about some of the policy approaches that are contained in the UK Government's recently published immigration white paper. It failed to take on board our proposals for action that meets our needs. The plans are likely to have a severe impact on migration to rural areas of Scotland that already face significant demographic and economic challenges.

I strongly believe that we need an immigration system that reflects our distinct demographic, economic and social needs. For example, the hospitality sector was very reliant on workers from the EU before Brexit, and, in 2019, 20 per cent of hospitality workers were non-UK nationals compared with 8 per cent in the wider Scottish economy. In spite of concerted efforts to retain workers, however, there are still 30,000 fewer people working in the sector today than there were pre-Brexit.

There is a case to be made for tailored migration routes for Scotland. We proposed a Scottish graduate visa, which would allow international graduates from Scottish universities to stay in Scotland for two years to gain work

experience before transitioning to a skilled-worker visa. When I was first elected, I was often struck by the fact that there was cross-party support for the post-graduate visa from both the Conservatives and Labour. It was a tailored, nuanced approach that enjoyed cross-party support, and we want to see that again. UK ministers could choose to support us on that. We had the fresh talent working in Scotland scheme between 2005 and 2008, which I am very happy to say was a Labour Party initiative. The point is that I think we can still speak with one voice on the importance of migration to Scotland and of working collaboratively to have a tailored approach for Scotland.

Migration enriches our society and makes a net contribution to our economy, our public services and our public finances. It is the fertiliser that helps us to thrive, innovate and grow in the face of demographic challenges. We cannot wish those challenges away, but there are things that we can do within our devolved powers. However, we cannot expand the workforce completely without control over migration, so I invite members from across the chamber to join us in making this call.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises the contribution to Scotland's communities, public services and economy by those who have chosen to migrate to Scotland and build their lives here; notes that stakeholders from multiple sectors across Scotland have expressed significant concerns with the UK Government's immigration white paper, and that proposals submitted by the Scottish Government to the Home Office were not included in the published paper; further notes that the Parliament has previously endorsed a motion calling for the development of a differentiated, more flexible migration policy, tailored to meet Scotland's specific needs; calls on the UK Government to engage with Scottish Government officials urgently to ensure that the needs of Scotland's businesses, public services and communities are supported, rather than harmed, by the reforms outlined in the UK immigration white paper, and further calls on the UK Government to ensure that a new youth mobility scheme is designed, with engagement from young people across the UK nations, to be as broad and inclusive as possible, restoring the greatest freedom of movement for young people as can be agreed with the EU.

15:35

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I greatly welcome the Deputy First Minister's tone, because, as we all know, far too often, migration debates are highly contentious and framed by economic, social and security concerns. Sadly, nowadays, they are often framed by misunderstandings, negative perceptions that are sometimes very far removed from reality and, worst of all in this age of Trump and Farage, by increasingly unhelpful and damaging rhetoric that can border on racism and which clearly helps absolutely no one at all.

My contribution will be based very much on the facts—I hope that it will be an honest and open appraisal of the current challenges—and on my long-standing interest in labour market economics. However, before I begin that analysis, I want to be very clear about three things. First, I agree that the current system of immigration controls is not working. Secondly, in particular, the very high level of illegal immigration is a major concern, as is the associated fiscal cost of accommodation and public service provision. Thirdly, I quite strongly oppose a Scottish system of immigration, because of the inherent complications—although I will come to another aspect of that in a moment.

However, first, I come to the hard facts. Scotland has a very significant demographic challenge: an ageing population, as the Deputy First Minister said, a declining birth rate and worryingly high rates of economic inactivity.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** I also welcome Liz Smith's tone in the debate, and I recognise what she said at the outset about racism and misinformation about the facts of immigration. Does she also recognise that, particularly in the media, the nuance about the need to attract skilled workers, particularly to rural communities, is often lost in the heat and the hate that goes with the anti-immigration rhetoric?

**Liz Smith:** Yes, I absolutely recognise that. The media is partly responsible for some of that divisiveness.

I come back to the Deputy First Minister's point about homogeneity with regard to economic inactivity: she is quite right that there are lots of different aspects to economic inactivity, but we have worryingly high rates of it and very significant labour shortages in key sectors, such as agriculture, hospitality and care. We also have huge pressure on public services, which the Scottish Fiscal Commission set out last week; there are definitely challenges to a one-size-fits-all approach, which I will come back to; and there has definitely been a Brexit effect, which has changed the nature and the composition of the migrant population. More migrants now come from outside the EU—so it is a more diverse group, especially when it comes to languages and cultures.

However, I also make the point, which I think that the Deputy First Minister referred to, that, in the past five years, the UK has seen record levels of inward migration from abroad. However, Scotland has not always been able to attract what we would see as our percentage share of that. As I think that *The Sunday Times* pointed out at the weekend, we might be doing very well on attracting people from down south to Scotland, but there is an issue with regard to the fact that not so many people come to Scotland from elsewhere.

That is in marked contrast to what is happening down south.

With regard to the Scottish Fiscal Commission, I heard the Deputy First Minister's little comment about the tax base. The issue is about the tax increase that we need in revenue terms. Yes, people might be taxpayers, but, if we listen to an awful lot of people in the business community, particularly people like Sandy Begbie—I know that that message has gone back loud and clear to the Scottish Government—we learn that there is a problem in relation to attracting middle to higher earners to Scotland. That recruitment process is something that the Economy and Fair Work Committee heard a lot about when it visited Prestwick airport, and we need to take cognisance of that issue.

Last Wednesday we had a really interesting debate about entrepreneurship and innovation. Kate Forbes, who was leading for the Government, was quite right to say that entrepreneurs and innovators are the catalysts for economic growth. We should acknowledge both and welcome the very positive contribution that many of those people who are not indigenous to Scotland make when it comes to entrepreneurship.

Nonetheless, there are serious issues in relation to immigration policy, which is why I want to delve a bit deeper into the matter. I suggest that the debate should not be about Scotland against the rest of the UK but should be much more about different sectors across the UK. I do not like the fact that we often get into constitutional debate about the issue, when it has much more to do with the sectors.

I know from speaking to my local community in Perthshire that we have people there who are some of the best workers—indeed, some Polish workers are seen by their employer as absolutely outstanding in the contribution that they make to agriculture. That is the case in my community but people in Norfolk or wherever will say exactly the same.

We must be careful about how we play this, because I think that there is a—

**Daniel Johnson:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Liz Smith:** Will I get a little time back?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Yes.

**Daniel Johnson:** Liz Smith is making a really interesting contribution about some of the nuances in the labour market. Is there also a broader, global context, in which world population growth is slowing? We perhaps need to concentrate on how we manage that issue rather than try to

compensate for it with migration, which will only ever be a short to medium-term exercise.

**Liz Smith:** That is a very good point from Mr Johnson. I think that he is right that there is a global context to the issue, which is important.

When I was elected to this Parliament in 2007, I was part of the cross-party group on post-study work visas—I think that people know of my passion about education, particularly higher education and the university sector. I was very pleased to join that cross-party group, because I think that there is a case for post-study work visas. If Scotland is to attract the brightest and best—whether that is students or people in research and development and staff—we absolutely need to have a welcoming structure for the people who would like to come here.

I remember that, just before some of the debates around the independence referendum, we were able to attract probably about 14 per cent of research and development grants because Scotland was leading the way. As I understand it from last week's conference, that figure is now down to about 10.5 per cent. That is not a good direction in which to be going, so the case for post-study work visas is very strong.

**Kate Forbes:** Liz Smith talked about this being a UK-wide issue. First, although I agree that it is a sectoral issue rather than a uniquely Scottish one, we always come to the point that if the UK Government does not take a different approach, we will have to talk about why it needs to be different for Scotland.

Secondly, there is the question of illegal versus legal migration. We strongly feel that the reduction in the routes for legal migration—whether that is based on salary levels or otherwise—is not resolving the issue. Lots of countries around the world have a very relaxed approach to legal migration and therefore see very low levels of illegal migration.

**Liz Smith:** That is a fair point to make. There is a broader picture about how well we can navigate not only a global situation but the situation in the UK. Although I have some sympathy for the amendment that the Labour Party has lodged, I also have some worries about the white paper, just as I have about my party's on-going discussions about migration. I am not convinced that we have the right balance between those people who want to come to this country and whom we want to be able to welcome, and those people who are here through illegal means. A big discussion needs to be had about that.

The immigration system has to reward contribution and social integration, and any deportation system of illegal immigrants that we come up with must work. As yet, we are not there.

I move amendment S6M-17906.1, to leave out from first “notes” to end and insert:

“believes that there is an important policy balance to be struck between welcoming those migrants who make significant contributions to the economic, social and cultural life of the UK, and reducing the numbers of illegal migrants who place added pressures on the welfare system and public services, and believes that the future of migration policy across the UK should reflect the specific needs of different sectors of the labour market.”

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Michael Marra to speak to and move amendment S6M-17906.2.

15:44

**Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):** As we have heard, Scotland has long been—and remains—a welcoming country to people who want to settle here, to join our community, to enjoy this beautiful country and to contribute to our shared life. My family arrived as migrants to this country in the 19th century, coming from a country that was ravaged by famine. They worked in the jute mills of Dundee and made a life, a home and a community. That is my family's story, which I know is echoed in many MSPs' family stories. It is the story of people who have contributed massively to our nation's story and to the communities that we live in today.

Scottish Labour celebrates the many ways in which our country has been enriched by those who have made Scotland their home. In making the migration system sustainable and able to command the confidence and support of the public, we must also recognise that any immigration system has to be safe, legal and well managed. That is absolutely essential. Eleven months ago, the UK Labour Government inherited from the previous Government a chaotic, broken system that did not work for anyone. Without any doubt, fixing that system will take time. It is right that the UK Government is taking the necessary steps to ensure that immigration is safe, that it is fair and, crucially, that it meets the needs of our economy. Meeting the needs of the economy is part of the basis of making sure that migration enjoys public support, which is absolutely crucial.

**Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con):** I am grateful to Michael Marra for taking my intervention. One of my concerns with the white paper from his colleagues in London is that it does not recognise that in some sectors, such as the caring sector, there is a massive shortage because of the income that individuals in that sector earn. Is there a danger that people who give valuable care to disabled and older people in Scotland will be cut off from coming?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I will give you the time back, Michael Marra.



**Michael Marra:** I thank Jeremy Balfour for his intervention. I understand that he has personal experience of care, as he has often set out in the chamber. It is a very relevant point. The central challenge, which he alighted on, is the issue of income and the fact that those in the care sector have been far too low paid for far too long. We heard exchanges in the chamber earlier today on the exact issue of the amount of money that is paid to carers and making sure that people in Scotland and in other parts of the EU can take on that job.

**Kate Forbes rose—**

**Michael Marra:** I would appreciate it if I could make some progress, Deputy First Minister.

By contrast, on the economic side, the Scottish National Party is propping up a system that is undercutting one set of workers by exploiting and underpaying others. That goes back to the point of Mr Balfour's contention. We should be clear that there is absolutely nothing progressive about that situation. The SNP has presided over a scandal of low pay in our care sector, particularly across the whole of social care, which has driven people from the workforce. That is the SNP's record, and it is not one to be proud of. That is the substantial lacuna in the Deputy First Minister's considered remarks that opened today's debate.

There are multiple widespread and deeply significant skills gaps in Scotland's workforce across many industries. I cite the Open University's "Business Barometer 2024" report, which showed that 56 per cent of businesses—a clear majority—are experiencing skills shortages in Scotland. Audit Scotland's report on the Scottish Government's infrastructure spend singled out skills shortages as a key factor in delayed projects and rising costs, which pose a huge problem to generating growth in our economy.

Industries such as construction are needed more than ever if Labour's record investment in housing is to be mobilised by this Government. Instead, Scotland enters its second year of a housing emergency on the SNP's watch, and the sector is crying out for workers. A report by Scottish Engineering in January of this year found that there are skills gaps for welders, machinists, electricians, manufacturing and maintenance technicians and engineers. It said:

"The skills pipeline gaps for these roles are in an immediately stark situation".

The transition to net zero requires retrofitting and upgrades on a scale that requires more of those workers.

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

**Michael Marra:** I do not have the time, Ms Grahame—apologies.

However, the Scottish Government has not even managed to train enough workers to meet the current demand. Instead, it presides over the decimation of college budgets, is damned by independent report after brutal public assessment for its lack of leadership, and a skills system that is directionless, fractured and misfiring. That is at the core of the issue. None of those assessments is addressed. Watered down and rudderless legislation is limping by in this Parliament—that will be the case in respect of the Education (Scotland) Bill in the coming weeks. The SNP Government is running down the clock with weak leadership and no ideas. That is not my assessment—it is the assessment of SNP members and even MSPs.

As set out by Liz Smith, the SNP might also ask itself why, given that net migration to the UK is at record levels, people are choosing not to come to Scotland. From 2020 to 2023, Scotland received only 5.7 per cent of net international migration to the UK. That is well below our population share, and it is a trend in the wrong direction over time: five years ago, we exceeded our population share of net migration in the UK, and it is now going in the wrong direction.

The SNP Government might want to ask itself about its failure to grow the economy, with Scots paying higher taxes but, as set out by the Scottish Fiscal Commission, losing more than £1 billion as a result of the Government's incompetence. Could it be as a result of the Government's failure to provide enough homes, with record homelessness and thousands of children in temporary accommodation? Could it be down to the failure to invest in Scotland's infrastructure? There is no infrastructure plan; nothing is set out for years at a time, or projects are delayed time and again, and there are no plans to invest for the future. It makes it difficult for people to live in rural areas.

The SNP has an awful lot of tools at its disposal that could make Scotland a much more attractive place in which to be, live, work or study. However, the Government chooses not to use them. It limps along, trailing other parts of the UK and looking for the next grievance. The public know that we need to get a grip of our immigration system. The UK Government is getting on with the job, and the SNP Government should do the same.

I move amendment S6M-17906.2, to leave out from first "notes" to end and insert:

"supports the move towards a more sustainable immigration system for the whole of the UK; regrets that the care sector has become overly dependent on low wages and exploitative working practices for migrants; believes that Scotland's stagnant economy cannot be fixed through migration alone; calls on the Scottish Government to grow the workforce through using its devolved powers to build

more housing, strengthen public transport, increase pay for social care work and incentivise skills development, and welcomes the UK Government's deal with the EU, which includes increased trade, negotiation to rejoin Erasmus+ and co-operation on a youth experience scheme."

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I advise members that we have a little bit of time in hand. If members take interventions, they will certainly get the time back.

15:50

**Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green):** I am pleased to contribute to the debate, not only to support the motion but to speak to a principle that must guide us in everything that we do: every person who chooses to make Scotland their home brings with them value, dignity and the potential to contribute meaningfully to our shared future.

I also want to use my time to challenge the toxic narratives that continue to define UK immigration policy. We must be absolutely clear that immigration is a societal good and not a problem to be managed. We should celebrate it. Indeed, Scotland's communities, culture, economies and public services are strengthened every day by people who have come here from around the globe. They bring with them skills, ideas, cultures, care and resilience. They are nurses, teachers, farmers, carers and artists. They are our friends and neighbours. They enrich our society in every possible way. They are part of us. They are us.

However, again and again, we are asked to accept the cruel and divisive narratives that are pushed by Westminster. Those narratives cast human beings as threats, speak of illegal migrants as if legality ever equated to morality and promote a so-called hostile environment—words that are designed not just to exclude but to dehumanise.

We must ask ourselves why people migrate. Why are so many forced to uproot their lives, families and futures? Too often, migration is spoken of in isolation, as if it happens in a vacuum, but it is often a direct consequence of histories of empire, colonial extraction and economic injustice. For centuries, the British empire profited from the exploitation of people and land around the globe, from Africa to south Asia to the Caribbean. Borders were drawn, communities were displaced and resources were looted. Those legacies are still with us. It is both deeply unjust and bitterly ironic that the very states that built their wealth on global movement and domination now criminalise those who move in search of safety and dignity. Many migrants are fleeing the instability, poverty and conflict that imperial powers, including the UK, played a key role in creating.

Increasingly, climate change, too, drives displacement. We must remember that those least responsible for the climate change crisis are most affected by it.

When we speak of immigration policy, we must also speak of responsibility—not just legal but moral and historical. The UK Government's hostile environment approach is rooted in denial of our history and of the UK's role in creating the conditions that force people to move now.

The immigration white paper continues the legacy of harm. It ignores Scotland's specific demographic and economic needs, disregards proposals from our Government and deepens the dehumanisation of people who deserve compassion, not condemnation.

The Scottish Greens have long advocated for a migration system that is rooted in fairness, human rights and compassion and that recognises people not as economic units but as full members of society. Many of the most harmful migration policies—the raids, detention centres and deportations—are grounded in racist assumptions that must be challenged and dismantled.

We urgently need a migration policy that is tailored to Scotland's realities and that puts dignity and human rights first. We need a youth mobility scheme that rebuilds what was lost after Brexit and restores the freedom of movement that allowed young people to learn, grow and connect across borders.

Crucially, we must change the way in which we talk about migration. We must reject the language of scarcity and suspicion. We must insist that our communities are richer—culturally, economically and spiritually—because of the people who have chosen to come here.

Scotland has always been a nation of migration, both outward and inward. Our future depends on our ability to embrace that identity with open arms, to stand against the xenophobia that is peddled by the right wing and to say clearly, loudly and proudly that everyone who makes Scotland their home is welcome and that they belong here.

15:55

**Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in the debate, and I am also grateful for the tone that has been fostered by those on all sides of the chamber thus far. My remarks begin in large part where Michael Marra's began: I, too, am a product of immigration. My mother came here in the 1960s to undertake an English degree and never left. Perhaps that is not an advert for immigration on some sides of the chamber, but I am proud of it nonetheless.

All of us, whether we are in this Parliament or in Westminster, have a responsibility to speak up, clearly and confidently, in defence of the many benefits that immigration brings to our society. Too often, our political discourse shrinks from that responsibility and retreats in the face of rising hostility and negative press, instead of standing firm on what we know to be true.

Immigration is a fundamental part of Scotland's story. It has shaped who we are and it continues to shape who we will become—from Irish immigrants in the 17th century to those from Italy and Poland during the industrial revolution and after the second world war; from those who came to us from India, Pakistan and Uganda in the 1960s and 1970s to those fleeing war in Ukraine today, who have found refuge and such welcome and new beginnings in Scottish homes the length and breadth of our community. Each wave of immigration has enriched our culture. It has strengthened our economy and contributed to a more diverse, dynamic and successful society, bringing new languages, traditions and ideas that are now woven into the fabric of Scotland. It has created jobs, filled vital gaps in our workforce and brought fresh perspectives, drive and innovation.

These are not strangers; they are our neighbours. They are our colleagues, our friends, our lovers and our families. They are us. However, instead of valuing that, the aftermath of years of mismanagement by the previous Government in Westminster has left the UK's immigration system in tatters. Public trust has been eroded. The issue is the battle line of our political discourse, and that is deeply regrettable.

Brexit only made things worse. When the UK voted by a slim majority to leave the European Union, ties that matter deeply to Scotland and to all of these islands were broken. We lost freedom of movement and, with it, easy access to the people who kept our national health service going, worked in our care homes, picked our crops and powered our businesses.

Only today, I stood outside the Parliament alongside social care workers campaigning for fair pay and conditions. Scotland's care sector depends hugely on overseas workers. In fact, it relies on them—they are its backbone. Imposing thousands of pounds' worth of fees will only make the crisis worse and push more providers to the brink. That is why my Liberal Democrat colleagues at Westminster are calling for punitive Home Office visa fees, which were introduced by the previous Government, to be scrapped for care workers and NHS staff. The last thing that we need is more of a barrier to those who seek to come here to work in health and social care. We need a flexible migration system that meets the specific needs of each part of the United Kingdom

and works closely with the devolved Administrations. That is the best way to ensure that Scotland's economy is bolstered with the workforce that it needs.

I am pleased that the UK Labour Government is finally considering a youth mobility scheme with the European Union. My party was the first to call for such a scheme. Young people already have the chance to use similar schemes in many countries across the globe, so there is no reason at all why we should not expand such access to our European neighbours. It will offer amazing opportunities for generations to come.

Let us be clear: the issue is not only about giving people the freedom to travel and experience life across Europe, although that in itself is valuable and powerful. A properly designed youth mobility scheme would be a huge win for our economy. The Centre for European Reform has said that a youth mobility scheme could add nearly 0.5 per cent to our gross domestic product in the longer term, while analysts at the House of Commons library who were commissioned by the Lib Dems suggest that such growth could add roughly £5 billion to the Exchequer each year. That could mean that there would be about £5 billion of additional tax revenue each year in the long run. The 0.45 per cent figure was arrived at in a Centre for European Reform study on the economic impact of a youth mobility scheme between the UK and the EU.

Our hospitality and tourism sectors, our farms, our construction sites and our start-ups all need flexible and energetic workers. Local economies benefit when young people come here to work, to live and to spend. Such a scheme would be a two-way street, as young Scots would be able to access the same opportunities across the continent.

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

16:00

**Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** A lot has been said about immigration in recent days, particularly from podiums in Downing Street, but very little has been said from places where decisions about immigration land the hardest, such as places in my Banffshire and Buchan Coast constituency. There, immigration is not just an abstract debate; it is a practical necessity. Immigration is necessary to ensure that there are enough workers to staff our care homes, to keep seafood processing lines running and to support our public services and the local economy. We are talking about real jobs, real communities and real people, and what the UK Government is

proposing will make their lives and livelihoods much harder.

The UK Government's immigration white paper is not about supporting growth or meeting need, and it is certainly not about fairness. It is a political manoeuvre, dressed up as policy, that is aimed at placating Reform UK. It is not about helping Scotland, and it is certainly not about helping rural Scotland. It proposes raising visa thresholds to degree level, extending English language requirements to dependents, increasing the qualifying period for settlement from five years to 10 and—crucially for us—closing the overseas care worker route. In areas such as mine, that change alone could devastate care provision. Services are already stretched, vacancy rates in social care are at their highest, and now a key recruitment route is to be cut off. There is no plan to replace it—all that we have had are vague promises of training and home-grown staff. We have heard that before.

It is not only care that will be affected. Our essential seafood industry, which feeds the country and exports globally, is again being treated as expendable. Processing facilities in my constituency rely heavily on migrant workers. They are already dealing with the legacy of Brexit, from lost labour to increased bureaucracy, and we are now being told that the very workforce that has kept them going is no longer welcome. Those are not hypothetical concerns; they are genuine concerns that have been expressed directly to me in conversations that I have had with employers.

We are constantly told that migration should be controlled, but what is being proposed is not control; it is restriction for the sake of restriction. It ignores Scotland's demographic reality. Our working-age population is shrinking, our birth rate is falling and our population is ageing. National Records of Scotland and the Fraser of Allander Institute have both been crystal clear in saying that inward migration is essential if we are to sustain our economy and our public services.

The argument that we need to motivate more people into work falls flat when the evidence—especially in my constituency—shows that the working-age population numbers are simply not there. We need a migration system that reflects Scotland's needs, not Westminster's polling priorities and a culture war that sows division. We must reject hateful messaging and work together to ensure peace in our communities.

That is why I support the Scottish National Party Government's motion, because it not only rejects the damage that the white paper would cause but recognises the positive, vital contribution that migrants already make to our communities, our services and our economy. Their contribution deserves recognising, not scapegoating. I

underline the need for urgent and meaningful engagement between the UK and Scottish Governments. We cannot afford to be sidelined. If the proposed rules go ahead without adaptation, it will be Scotland's businesses, care providers and families who will pay the price.

I plead that we look to the future, including that of our young people, many of whom want the freedom to work, study and travel across Europe. A new youth mobility scheme must be broad, inclusive and shaped by young people themselves. They have lost so much to Brexit, and it is time to give them something back. Scotland's needs are distinct, and our values are even clearer. Rather than lying down to UK populism, we must use our voice in the immigration debate to stand up for Scotland.

16:04

**Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):**

This has been a really good debate so far and members have generally made good points. The Government is quite right to talk in its motion about the benefits of migration, a point that Kate Forbes made strongly. Liz Smith is also right to deal in her amendment with the difference between managed, legal migration and illegal migration, which is an issue not only on these shores. I might be wrong, but I think that I detected some consensus between Liz Smith and Kate Forbes, so perhaps Kate Forbes might consider voting for Liz Smith's amendment on that basis, as we are all being so friendly.

If I can be honest, some of the objections to immigration over the years have been rooted in racism, but others have not. Attitudes have changed for the better during my lifetime. There was a lot of racism about when I was at primary school in greater Manchester in the early 1970s and some of it was directed at my friends. Things have improved a bit since then, but not nearly enough.

In my early days in journalism, in the early 1980s, I took up the case of one of the Vietnamese boat people—some here will not be old enough to know what I am talking about. He was a chap called Mr Yip, who had settled in Daventry, where I was working at the time, and was fighting to stay in the UK. Those people were fleeing repression and were very welcome indeed. Reg Prentice, who had sensibly left the Labour Party for the Conservatives and was the town's MP at the time, took up the case but was on the brink of giving up and claimed that the immigration rules did not allow Mr Yip to stay. I was only in my 20s then, but I pointed out to the experienced Mr Prentice that the rules that were in force when Mr Yip first applied to stay in the UK were the ones

that counted, and that they favoured him, so the MP pressed on and we won.

Thousands of Vietnamese people still arrive here by boat, but they are now largely illegal immigrants and are in an altogether different category to their earlier counterparts. I will come back to that idea.

Fast forwarding to the here and now, last week, I visited a project in Hamilton that is looking after around 100 Ukrainians, most of whom have learned English—if they could not speak it before they came here—and have either found jobs or are at college. They all pay their way, but they are on time-limited visas that will expire in July next year, four months after the funding for that project is due to end. Although visas are a UK Government matter, the funding is not entirely a UK Government matter and I therefore ask Kate Forbes whether there have been any discussions about extending such vital schemes, because those discussions are necessary, and those people need to stay.

People who have come here via legal routes are to be welcomed and we need them, but those who arrive illegally are a different matter. The director general of the National Crime Agency, Graeme Biggar, last year highlighted the detrimental impact of illegal migration on Scotland when he said:

“The main issue may be occurring in the Channel but we have others flying into different airports in the UK every single day. That includes the likes of Glasgow and Edinburgh. It is a problem which we are seeing right across the world and it is happening in Scotland too.”

Glasgow City Council's convener for homelessness, the SNP's Allan Casey, has said that the asylum dispersal scheme is “damaging social cohesion” and placing unbearable pressure on the city's housing supply.

Like Liz Smith, I am not in favour of a Scottish visa and do not see how it could work, but there are sectors, such as care, that need help, and the Starmer Government's approach to that has been wrong.

I will end by mentioning students. I have been trying to help them through the Housing (Scotland) Bill. An amendment that I lodged would have helped foreign students who are asked to provide a UK-based guarantor, which is an impossibility for some. It is vital that we attract and welcome international students, just as it has always been vital that we welcome people from across the world who want to come here via legal routes. To that end, the Labour Government's plan to tax international student fees at 6 per cent and reduce the terms of graduate visas—

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

**Graham Simpson:** —is very unhelpful. Thank you, Presiding Officer.

16:10

**Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** The phrase “taking back control” is provocative. It is the language and policy of Sir Keir Starmer, but it comes straight from the Boris-Trump-Farage playbook.

Let me start with the following facts. Brexit has had a substantial impact on the mobility of employment in this country and, as others have said, it has particularly hit the hospitality, horticulture and care sectors and—I say this to Michael Marra—the construction industry. Brexit brickies. Polish plumbers.

The majority of migrants are here legally. The sad high-profile images of desperate people crossing the Channel in flimsy dinghies represent a small portion of migration to the UK.

Scotland has an increasingly ageing population. In the health debate yesterday, I advised that, currently, over 1 million people are over the age of 65, and that is predicted to rise to 1.4 million by 2040. That is 25 per cent of the population. In addition, the birth rate is falling. The ramifications are that we are short of people in necessary workforces, particularly in our health and care services, and that the tax take is reducing, which impacts on the delivery of public services, not simply through the workforce but in terms of revenue and funding.

Asylum seekers are trapped for long months and even years in the UK system and they are not permitted to work and contribute to the economy. Rural areas feel the brunt because of the nature of the employment there, which often involves farming, fishing and hospitality. It is abundantly clear that Scotland, unlike the overheated and pressurised south of England—I do have sympathy, given the pressures on public services there—needs a tailored migration system.

The Scottish Government proposed a rural visa pilot scheme for Scottish remote and rural areas, which was jointly led by the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands and the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care. It set out a practical and robust approach to delivering a pilot scheme between the UK Government, the Scottish Government, local authorities, employers and communities. Participating employers, in collaboration with Scottish Government and UK Government organisations, would have been responsible for ensuring that the scheme's terms and conditions continued to be met. After four years, restrictions would have lifted and migrants would have been

free to work anywhere in the UK outside their community pilot area.

In 2019, the UK Migration Advisory Committee, giving evidence to a committee in this Parliament, accepted that

“the current migration system is not very effective in dealing with the particular problems remote communities experience.”

What happened to the rural visa pilot scheme? It was blocked and binned by Sir Keir Starmer because he is desperate to keep tight reins on devolution, saying, “Keep and know your place,” and he is trying to keep Reform UK at bay. That is some message from him. He should remember that, at the election, Labour got only 33 per cent of the vote on a turnout of under 60 per cent. He hardly speaks for the UK, let alone for Scotland. “An island of strangers”—perhaps it is for Sir Keir Starmer, but not in Scotland and not in our name.

16:13

**Foysoyl Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab):** I begin by making it clear that migrants and migration have had a positive impact on Scotland. In my life and career, I have known many people who decided to build their lives in this country and now call it home. I have met and worked with organisations such as Edinburgh and Lothians Regional Equality Council—I draw attention to my entry in the register of members’ interests, as I chair that organisation—as well as Networking Key Services and Milan Senior Welfare Organisation here in Edinburgh, which support new Scots to integrate in and partake of their communities.

My family is a migrant family. We moved to the United Kingdom when I was very young. People who settle here work in our NHS and our universities and run businesses. Anyone who tries to claim that those with international heritage do not contribute or do not prioritise Scotland should be rejected. They do not represent my experience, and I know that they do not represent the views of Scots.

With all that in mind, it is important that our immigration system works for both Scotland and migrants. The previous Conservative Government took an approach that worked for neither. The health and care worker visa was a blunt instrument that put people at risk of exploitation and abuse, with harrowing reports of workers being placed into debt bondage and of others paying thousands to work at non-existent care homes. The UK Government’s Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner has said that that caused avoidable harm and severe exploitation. Migration should never be about the right to exploit vulnerable people. We need a sustainable system that prevents that from happening.

I welcome the progress that is being made on a youth experience scheme as part of the reset with the European Union, as well as the return to Erasmus+. We know how important Erasmus+ is in promoting cultural exchange. A youth experience scheme would add to that while providing our economy with greater flexibility. I hope that the UK Government will also ensure that working class and underrepresented groups can access those schemes, so that their benefit is shared across society.

It should be said that migration is not a sticking plaster solution. It alone will not resolve many of the challenges that we face. It will not end the housing emergency, fix our broken planning system, or stop the rise in violent crime. Migration will be necessary for our future in many areas, but it is a tool and we must use it correctly—not as a replacement for a skills strategy, or to contribute to exploitation, but for growing our economy and attracting highly talented people.

16:17

**Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP):** Scotland needs a migration system that works for us, not one that is imposed by a Westminster Government that, frankly, does not care about Scotland’s needs. Given our ageing population, migration is crucial to strengthen our public services and economy.

In recent years, many people have come to the UK as refugees and asylum seekers. Whether they are fleeing oppressive regimes, interpreters who supported UK armed forces in Afghanistan or Ukrainians escaping brutal Russian attacks, it is right that the UK offers refuge to vulnerable people. However, the UK Government’s use of hotels for refugees and asylum seekers is not appropriate.

Sadly, as a result of failed Westminster policies, many grass-roots organisations across the country have taken on responsibility for supporting refugees and asylum seekers. In East Kilbride, the East Kilbride Integration Network welcomes, supports and connects new migrants. It uses education, sports and campaigning to improve quality of life, wellbeing and integration into the local community. Its work in supporting asylum seekers in East Kilbride has been really important. I am looking forward to attending its footie and food community celebration this Saturday at K-Park, which will be just one of the many events that it has put on to boost integration and help people settle in.

It is a failure of the UK system that asylum seekers cannot work, despite many of them wanting to contribute to this country. That brings me to a key area of the immigration system, which

involves ensuring that businesses and our public services can recruit the workers that they need.

Since Brexit, our social care providers in particular have been struggling with recruitment. I have visited care homes in East Kilbride and heard about the challenges that they face, including a lack of available labour in Scotland, the fact that EU nationals have left or are not interested in moving to the UK, and Westminster's barriers to recruitment of people from the rest of the world. Some care homes sponsor applicants, which is quite an expensive task, to ensure that they can hire new staff to give residents the care that they sorely need. The UK Labour Government recently published its immigration white paper. I hope that it will improve the immigration system to support the social care sector.

Scotland's universities are world renowned and attract some of the brightest students from around the globe. However, as a result of the previous Tory Government's damaging immigration rhetoric, many international graduates left after completing their courses here. That is a huge loss to Scotland of some of the brightest minds. Those people have been educated here, have formed relationships here and have the ability to contribute to the social and economic life of Scotland, but they have been forced to leave by a hostile Westminster Government.

I support the Scottish Government's call for a Scottish graduate visa programme, and I hope that the UK Labour Government will reflect on the failures of the previous UK Government. The Labour Government must support the Scottish Government's proposals to keep talented graduates in Scotland. Indeed, the Smith commission, which was supported by all the main political parties, recommended exploring such a scheme. A decade on, it is time to put that into action.

Without bold action, there will be difficult challenges ahead. It is time for Westminster to deliver a tailored immigration system for Scotland or to devolve the powers so that the SNP Government can do that. Otherwise, as with many other areas, Westminster will continue to fail Scotland with a broken one-size-fits-all model, and more and more people will recognise the need for Scotland to have the full powers of independence.

16:22

**Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** My contribution will continue the factual and honest approach that has already been presented by my fellow Scottish Conservatives, as well as many other members in the chamber, including the Deputy First Minister.

When we are trying to find the solution to a problem, it is essential to first understand the root of the problem. To adequately answer the question of how we can produce a migration system that works for Scotland, we have to know why we are in the position that we are in. Many well-made points in the debate so far have set out some of the reasons, including our ageing population, changes to migration patterns from outside the EU, labour shortages in specific areas and illegal immigration.

I will expand on population decline. Although it is not unique to Scotland, we are in a far worse position than any other country in the UK.

The Office for National Statistics predicts that the UK's population as a whole is projected to grow by 6.9 per cent in the next 20 years but, in Scotland, growth is predicted to be just 0.2 per cent. Scotland's fertility rate sits at just 1.31 children per woman, which is the lowest in the UK and well below the replacement rate of 2.1 that is needed to halt Scotland's population decline. As has already been mentioned, the outlook is even more worrying in rural Scotland, with a predicted 12 per cent population decline.

A Scottish Government qualitative study showed that an individual's financial, social and personal circumstances are a key consideration when they decide on their family size. Some people—especially women—are delaying parenthood in favour of an established career. Appropriate housing, workable and affordable childcare, job security and financial security all play a part. Equally, the fact that more Scots are delaying parenthood into their mid-30s and early 40s is contributing to smaller family sizes.

Quite simply, Scotland's population and workforce are affected by all the issues that are directly within the Scottish Government's remit, including the housing emergency, economic inactivity, income taxation and inadequate childcare—I could go on. If societal pressures make Scotland a less attractive place to live in, we will be forever battling a reduction in our population. That is why migration policy needs to have a UK-based solution.

Scotland receives about 6 per cent of migrants into the UK. That is lower than its 8.4 per cent population share and lower than the UK average. We have open borders in the UK, but people are not coming north. We have to understand the root of the problem before we can fix it. We need to encourage people to live in Scotland, but why would they, when the disadvantages outweigh the benefits? Issues including a lack of housing, inadequate childcare, transport difficulties and taxation are all working against us.

The average wage in Scotland is £38,315. At that level, a person in Scotland pays more tax on £8,000-worth of their salary than they would in England. That goes against the aspirations that people have to advance and progress, especially when they are migrating to another country. Assuming that personal taxation is not a factor is simply naive.

Someone who wants to pack up and move away from everything that they know and love to go to Scotland for a better life and future has a drive and a determination to succeed and thrive. They aspire to be wealthier, healthier, happier and more secure in their new country than they were in the one that they plan to leave. If we continue to ignore the underlying issues behind our population decline, we are destined to repeat the same mistakes. As much as that might facilitate a political grievance in Scotland, it is the people who will pay the price.

16:26

**Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP):** As I am someone whose life journey took them across the Atlantic as an economic migrant, to Canada—a place that has long shown how migration can be shaped by the hands of local communities, not just central Governments—it was important for me to speak today to offer a tried and tested alternative to the status quo that is hampering Scotland's vitality and the viability of many of our communities and industries.

Growing up in Ontario and Quebec, I witnessed at first hand how a distinct migration model that was designed by and for the people of each province could be both compassionate and practical. Quebec's unique tailored immigration system does not just fill labour market gaps; it strengthens communities, nurtures diversity and reflects the province's unique identity and values. That experience shaped who I am and, crucially, what I believe is possible here in Scotland. So, today, I ask the chamber to consider this question: why can Scotland not do the same?

Migration is not simply about numbers; it is about people: the care worker in Girvan; the engineer at the Prestwick aerospace cluster; the Gaelic teacher in the Hebrides; and the family rebuilding their lives in a new land with open hearts—a feeling that I remember all too well from when, as a wee six-year-old, I found myself in a place that welcomed me with open arms. It welcomed my dad as well: as an engineer, he helped to fill the skills gap in Canada at the time. Skills gaps are not unique to Scotland.

We know that, in relation to all the issues that have been outlined today that go beyond the issue

of migration, there is a huge amount of things that we need to sort. However, we also know that our economy relies on talent—often international talent—in sectors such as agriculture, health and social care and hospitality. Therefore, let us look to Canada not just as an idea but as a proven model.

The Canadian federal system is built on a constitutional framework that recognises and respects the autonomy of provinces, allowing them significant powers over areas such as education and healthcare—like we have in our devolved system—and, crucially, immigration. Quebec has its own autonomous immigration system, with unique visas reflecting its distinct society status. The other provinces and territories can enter into agreements with the federal Government to run their own provincial nominee programmes, enabling them to tailor migration policies to local, economic and demographic needs. Provinces can nominate migrants based on specific criteria—for example, languages, skills and community ties—and ensure that migration works for them. They can create incentives to entice people to areas where they are needed, for all the reasons that we have just heard. The process is iterative—it is continually evolving and being tailored. That is what happens when there is trust.

In contrast, the United Kingdom's highly centralised system denies Scotland similar powers, even though immigration deeply affects devolved areas such as health, social care and education. Despite repeated calls from the Scottish Government and widespread evidence of differing demographic needs, Westminster has continually refused to devolve immigration powers. That refusal undermines Scotland's ability to address its unique challenges and opportunities, and creates a glaring inconsistency when compared with the more flexible and collaborative arrangements in countries such as Canada. That flexibility fosters trust, brings more accountability and, crucially, brings people into communities that want to welcome them—not because of quotas but because of shared purpose.

Let us imagine a Scottish rural visa, shaped by local councils and the voices of farmers, crofters, teachers and local businesses. Let us imagine a system that prioritises those who will contribute to Scotland's society and economy while recognising their humanity and dignity. The Government's motion is asking not for something radical but for something reasonable. This is not just about policy but about fairness. It is about devolution in action and Scotland having the tools to serve its people, communities and future.

We often hear that this Parliament is the most powerful devolved legislature in the world, and yet it is blatantly clear that a Canadian province wields



much more power than we do in this chamber. Let us take a lesson from Canada. Let us take a page from Quebec and its unique circumstances that are reflected in its immigration policy, which is distinct from the policy in the rest of Canada. Let us write Scotland's chapter on how immigration can work fairly, flexibly and for the common good of everyone.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The final speaker in the open debate is Emma Harper. You have up to three minutes, Ms Harper.

16:31

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** Thank you, Presiding Officer. I will see how far I get with my notes in three minutes.

My South Scotland region has seen centuries of migration to and from our shores. In past centuries, boats would depart the ports of Galloway for North America, carrying thousands of souls across the Atlantic in search of a new life.

More recently, many people from across Europe have been welcomed into our communities. Despite the impact of Brexit, many of them have stayed and are a fundamental part of our society. Meanwhile, our country has exported people all over the world.

I was an economic migrant, too. I moved to California in 1990 and spent 14 years working in Los Angeles. Scotland has also received people who are looking for a better life in our communities, and my husband is one of them. He is an immigrant from the USA who owns a business, pays his taxes and employs people.

Today, as the cabinet secretary mentioned in her opening speech, my part of the world is going through demographic challenges. Dumfries and Galloway has the oldest age profile of any local authority area and the lowest proportion of working-age population. There is also a continued sharp decline in D and G's overall population, while the rest of Scotland's is increasing, unlike what members have said across the chamber.

People are moving to Scotland. Without families and workers coming to our communities, our schools will close, our health service will contract, our community facilities will dry up, and rural communities, not just in the south but across Scotland, will wither on the vine.

Our agricultural sector continues to struggle with employment. Again, I thank the cabinet secretary for taking my intervention about our dairy industry in the south-west. Those people who throw out rhetoric and policies that aim to block migration to Scotland need to answer for the consequences that their ideology is having for rural Scotland.

The SNP has been criticised for talking up Farage's Reform agenda, but we certainly need to talk about Farage's policy proposals and about how the xenophobic policies would utterly decimate our rural economies and leave communities such as the ones that I represent economically shattered. We need to talk about how the policies would strip our national health service of the skills and talent that migration has brought to it, because those people are saving lives and improving our health every day. As a nurse in the operating theatre I worked as part of a multicultural team, and we all benefited from the ideas and innovation of that multicultural experience. That has been the case every day in my job, both here and in Los Angeles.

It is high time that the UK Government stopped being the problem and got behind the migration policies that recognise Scotland's specific needs, history and potential, rather than hiding behind its copies of the *Daily Mail*.

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

16:34

**Maggie Chapman:** It has been interesting to listen to the various contributions this afternoon. I am grateful to those who have recognised and celebrated the many and varied contributions that migrants make to our lives.

Of course, immigrants keep many of our public services going, and I am grateful to Karen Adam for her very clear description of the damage to our north-east communities that will ensue if we allow the xenophobic populism that is all too often promoted by politicians and the media to continue.

I want to pick up on two points. The first is the awful phrase that Keir Starmer used not long ago when he said that we are "an island of strangers". That claim is both false and harmful. It feeds the myth that migration weakens us, when, in truth, Scotland has always been shaped by movement and cultural exchange. From Norse and Gaelic roots to newer communities from south Asia and beyond, our history is one of connection, not isolation.

That narrative also ignores Britain's imperial past—a past that drove global displacement and bound us to the world. People are not strangers here; they are already part of our schools, hospitals and communities. The real question is not whether they belong—they do—but whether we are ready to embrace that truth and build a future that is rooted in justice, solidarity and shared humanity.

The second point to challenge—again—is the notion of illegal immigrants. I would challenge

those who have said that we need to tackle illegal immigration to describe the legal routes for those who are fleeing from war and persecution. What is at the heart of that? We need look only at the difference in approach that is taken to those who are fleeing from the illegal invasion of Ukraine compared with those who are fleeing from other conflicts. We opened our borders, our homes and our hearts to Ukrainians—rightly so—but when bombs rain down on Gaza or Yemen, where are the compassion and love? Where are the processes to get people here safely, rather than people risking their lives by crossing the Channel in dinghies? Where are the systems and structures of support into employment, housing and community? There are none. We have become inured to the racism that is embedded in our systems, but that is not new.

I do not often speak of my experience of being an immigrant—a foreigner—here, but I have witnessed at first hand the prejudice and xenophobia of the UK immigration system because of the colour of my passport. However, because I am white and sound like I do, I am still immensely privileged. I have witnessed people with exactly the same colour of passport as me, with exactly the same visa as me, in the same immigration queue as me, being treated with suspicion and disrespect. The only difference was the colour of their skin.

We can do so much better, and we must do so much better in Scotland. I say again that we need a system that is based on justice, dignity and care—a system that recognises people as whole and valuable human beings, not as statistics or threats. That is why we support a differentiated migration system for Scotland, and one that looks to the opportunities of the connections that we make when we travel beyond these borders, too.

It goes beyond policy; it is about how we talk, how we lead and how we imagine the kind of country that we want to be. We must reject the language of illegality. We must challenge the lie that migrants take more than they give, and we must root our response in solidarity, not suspicion.

Our future is multicultural, it is interconnected and it is built on the principle that everyone who chooses to call this place home—regardless of where they come from—belongs. Let us say that clearly, proudly and without apology.

16:38

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** It has been an interesting debate—calm and considered in the main, which is useful. As a number of members have pointed out, the debate occurs in a context, particularly a global context, that is worrying.

We have seen three key facets to the debate. There has been a debate about the values around migration, a debate about the economics and a debate around the practicalities. It is worth considering each one with care.

On values, it is important that we welcome migration, not only because of the values that it brings but because it is the human thing to do. A number of members have reflected on their family histories and talked about being descendants of migrants. Both of my Labour colleagues did, as have others across the chamber. My family on both sides is not originally Scottish. My mother's family is of German derivation, and my grandparents were interned during the war.

The Scots themselves—that ethnic group—were migrants from Ireland who settled in Scotland. Our country is actually named for migrants, and we should celebrate that in the face of rising intolerance around the world.

However, in order to celebrate and embrace the economic and cultural benefits of migration, we need a migration system that is trusted, that works and that is fair. Graham Simpson made an excellent point in that regard. He juxtaposed very well the need to confront racism with the need for fairness in the system. I will carefully tread through that issue.

One thing that we need to do, as Roz McCall pointed out, is to look at the facts. The reality is that, in mid-2023, net inward migration to the UK reached more than 900,000, and in Scotland it reached more than 60,000. That represents the highest-ever level of inward migration for both the UK and Scotland. It is incorrect to say that Scotland is not receiving inward migration—because it is—but it is absolutely accurate to say that Scotland's proportion of that has reduced. I do not pretend to understand all the reasons for that, but, having had our share of inward migration fall from 14.5 per cent in 2020 to around 6 per cent in 2023, we need to ask what is going on.

There has been conflation of issues in the debate. We need to take care about what it is that we claim to value. One of the employment areas that has become almost synonymous with migration is the care sector. I understand the worker shortages that occur there, and that is of deep concern. However, if we value social care workers so greatly, why is it that, at £12.60 an hour, the pay rate for social care workers is just 39p above the legal and statutory minimum wage?

**Jeremy Balfour:** Is the member arguing that everybody in the care sector should be on £32,000 a year? That is the pay threshold that his party at Westminster is setting for people coming in. We must either increase wages dramatically or we must reduce that figure. We cannot do both.

**Daniel Johnson:** I understand the member's point, but I think that even he would accept that that is a false binary choice. It is not the case that the only possible source of people to carry out those roles are people who currently live elsewhere. It is possible to attract people if we pay them a correct amount.

**Kate Forbes** rose—

**Daniel Johnson:** I see that the Deputy First Minister is getting to her feet—I will give way to her in a moment.

We have been arguing for years that we need to increase that pay rate, and that we need to value, train and equip social care workers adequately if we wish to attract them to the sector, because pay is not the only issue. The terms and conditions of social care workers in this country are a scandal.

**Kate Forbes:** What Jeremy Balfour highlights is that the approach in the immigration white paper equates high pay with skills. There are people with incredible skills who are not permitted to come to this country purely on account of the jobs that they could fill not reaching that level of pay. The care sector makes that point better than any other sector, because the skills that are needed to work in it are incredibly valuable, but they do not meet the pay threshold.

My point is that the white paper equates skill with pay. I think that we should take a different approach—a sectoral and skills-based approach, not a pay-based approach.

**Daniel Johnson:** If the work is valuable, we should pay for it at a commensurate rate.

**Kate Forbes:** That is not what I am saying.

**Daniel Johnson:** But it is! The Deputy First Minister is saying that those are valuable skills but those with them are not going to be highly paid. At the heart of the debate is the fact that we have relied for too long on a broad range of occupations in our society and economy having low levels of pay.

Other economies have made different choices. Across the service sector, we see higher levels of investment driving higher levels of productivity, and workers in those same sectors—whether it is social care, hospitality or others—enjoy higher rates of pay than they do in this country. That is the issue that has been danced round in the debate. If we value work, we should pay for it.

Pay and migration are not the only factors at play. There are a number of other things that the Scottish Government has in its control that would enable it to deal with labour shortages, yet it does not use them. Listening to the Scottish Government, we would think that migration is the

only source of labour—the only way to attract it—and that simply is not true.

We are now training enough doctors—we are just not employing them. Furthermore, if we want to look at why we have labour shortages in rural areas, we are not building enough housing—

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** Mr Johnson, please conclude.

**Daniel Johnson:** Housing starts and completions are falling to levels that we last saw immediately after the financial crash.

I absolutely welcome the debate, and it has been useful to flesh out some of the economic arguments. However, that needs to be done in the round and in context.

16:45

**Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con):** I want to begin by recognising, as many members have today, that immigration is a sensitive topic and that we owe it to our constituents to refrain from reckless generalisations. There has actually been a fair amount of consensus across the whole chamber. I suggest that, instead of making such generalisations, we ground our arguments in facts, as Liz Smith and others have done, reflecting the world as it is, not as we idealise it to be or fear that it might be.

In that spirit, I associate myself with the remarks of my colleagues and others when they acknowledged that illegal immigration should not be accepted or—what is worse—encouraged. I fundamentally disagree with Maggie Chapman. Illegal immigration has harmful effects in all the areas that are dealt with by Government portfolios, but especially in social security, which is already at breaking point in Scotland. It is clear that the matter needs to be addressed swiftly and effectively.

**Christine Grahame:** [*Made a request to intervene.*]

**Jeremy Balfour:** We must also admit that the previous Government did not get it all right.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** Will Jeremy Balfour take an intervention?

**Jeremy Balfour:** I am happy to give way, but I think that Christine Grahame was first—my apologies.

**Christine Grahame:** I hope that the member will make the distinction—I am sure that he will—between illegal immigration and asylum seeking. Sometimes, those become conflated, and that is a very wrong perception.

**Jeremy Balfour:** I absolutely agree with Christine Grahame on that point. However, it is a

fundamental role of the state to ensure that we have secure borders, so I support efforts to curb the number of people who illegally enter the United Kingdom.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** Christine Grahame has made the point that I was initially looking to intervene to make, but, to expand on that, does the member not recognise that the rhetoric of the previous Conservative Government, which did not institute safe routes for asylum seekers to make it to Britain without taking their lives and the lives of their families in their hands on leaky craft in the Channel, has led to the problem that we are now encountering?

**Jeremy Balfour:** I think that it was one of the factors, but I am not sure that it was the only reason, which is why we need to look at the issue as a whole. Therefore, I support the curbs on the number of people who illegally enter the United Kingdom.

That said, I also agree with a number of speakers in the debate that legal migration can be a real positive force in the United Kingdom. Bringing in skilled workers from other countries helps us to build world-leading industries, which should be an ambition of all political parties in Scotland. We want to attract talented people to Scotland. We want to see people coming to contribute to our economy, whether they are doctors, engineers or scientists. They all contribute to improving standards across the UK.

At the same time, we should recognise that other sectors benefit from an increase in their workforce. As I said previously, and as Daniel Johnson debated, jobs such as care work do not require high levels of education, and the sector is not currently attracting enough people into that workforce in Scotland. Even if we could bring everybody who is currently economically inactive into employment, that would not solve our long-term problem.

More and more care organisations are struggling to provide suitable packages for disabled and older people because of staffing pressure, and the truth is that people in this country are not going into the care sector in the numbers that we need them to. I accept that we need to look at conditions and pay, but, if we are serious about ensuring that disabled and older people's rights are respected and that those people are treated with dignity, we need to fill those jobs. The easiest and best way of doing that is to make allowances in the immigration system for carers to take up the jobs. I can personally vouch for the fact that carers from other countries can be excellent, as is demonstrated by the number of wonderful people who help me each morning.

To be clear, I am not saying that we should totally outsource those jobs away from British and Scottish people. I am in favour of any efforts that either Government can make to encourage more British young people into the caring profession, which is an incredibly rewarding career path indeed. However, unfortunately, any such scheme would take a number of years to bear fruit, and we have a short-term problem.

In the meantime, we have to play the ball that is on the pitch, not the ball that we wish was there. We have a need, and the rest of the world can help us with it. To bring in people who are ready and willing to contribute to our society and meet the needs, who can also help with the taxation system—is that not how any successful immigration system should function? However, at the moment, we are turning away people who could fill those jobs. It seems to me that a good way for the Scottish Government to promote more migration into Scotland would be to work to make it a more attractive place for people to move to, instead of pursuing anti-growth and anti-wealth policies.

The Scottish Government does not and should not have the powers to act on immigration law. What it does have is the power to make Scotland as attractive a place to live and work in as possible within the United Kingdom. It has the levers; it is time that it started to pull them.

**The Presiding Officer:** I call Kaukab Stewart to take us to 5 pm.

16:52

**The Minister for Equalities (Kaukab Stewart):** First, if you will indulge me, Presiding Officer, I would like to speak directly to migrants in Scotland. I understand that they might be concerned about the uncertainties ahead, and I want them to know that their contributions in Scotland are valued.

Secondly, I thank the Deputy First Minister for highlighting migration's economic value in her opening remarks. I thank colleagues from across the chamber for their mainly measured and thoughtful contributions, and I acknowledge the constructive tone that Liz Smith set.

The Government will continue to support migrants and employers to navigate the existing immigration system through Scotland's migration service. We will continue to listen to our stakeholders' needs and to push the UK Government for change that recognises our distinct demographic challenges.

We are reforming our approach to skills at a national level. We need sustainable communities, and our population strategy is helping us to work

towards that goal. Those efforts reflect the approach of this internationalist, outward-looking Government, and we continue to do all that we can to support migrants.

Let me be very clear that the Government completely rejects the hostile approach that the UK Government is taking. That point has been reinforced by contributions from across the chamber, including from Maggie Chapman, Karen Adam, Collette Stevenson, Emma Harper and Foyso Choudhury.

Migration benefits all sectors of our community and has a key role in Scotland's prosperity. However, talking solely in numerical terms paints an incomplete picture. Migrants are more than numbers going up and down and are about more than innovation, productivity and skills; they are, in fact, woven into the very fabric of Scotland's communities. Our society is enriched by culture from around the world that migrants bring with them to Scotland, and, indeed, by hearing people's personal stories at the heart of this chamber, which all helps to develop the vibrant, multicultural Scotland that we see today.

Regarding the white paper, the most recent UK election offered an opportunity to reset the relationship between the Scottish Government and the UK Government. Unfortunately, Scotland's needs are still being ignored. The Scottish Government issued comprehensive, evidence-based proposals for the white paper, and yet the white paper offered no evidence that Scotland's needs were considered. There was no substantive engagement on the proposals that we submitted.

The UK Government's proposals threaten our essential public services. It is not just us saying that—Donald Macaskill, the chief executive officer of Scottish Care, has warned:

"Without the ability to attract and to retain international colleagues, it is no exaggeration to say that care would not be able to be delivered in whole swathes of our nation."

How does the UK Government expect us to develop domestic skills when policies threaten the viability of our education landscape, for instance? Where will we see growth if businesses cannot access the essential skills that they need?

Enoch Adeyemi, chief executive officer of Black Professionals (UK) Ltd, shares our calls for a tailored immigration system that reflects Scotland's needs. His organisation endorses initiatives such as the Scottish graduate visa to retain diverse talent and ensure that Scotland remains a global hub for innovation and opportunity. Workforce shortages cannot be solved by training alone. The Migration Advisory Committee has cautioned that increasing domestic skills does not guarantee reducing migration, as

migrant and domestic workers are not perfect substitutes.

The white paper regards social care as low skilled, but providers in Scotland have disputed that characterisation. They argue that providing care compassionately, day in, day out, is highly skilled and valued. International recruitment is already expensive, and organisations would not be doing that lightly. If the UK Government is not listening to stakeholders, experts or evidence, who are the proposals for? Who benefits from that approach? It is not Scotland; it is not our social care workforce; and it is not our higher education sector, our rural economy or our islands community. The UK Government must stop pandering to Reform, acknowledge the damaging nature of its proposals and change course.

Net migration figures reduce the entirety of migrants who come to the UK to one number. They erase the diverse contributions within that figure and force us to calculate migrants in terms of net good or net bad. The UK Government wants to lower that one number. It wants to reduce the number of talented individuals who contribute to Scotland's economy and public services, restrict international knowledge exchange and innovation, and restrict people bringing family members here to build their lives in Scotland.

**Graham Simpson:** I do not want to interrupt Kaukab Stewart mid-rant, but in my contribution I mentioned a very important project for Ukrainians in Hamilton that is run by the Salvation Army. I mentioned that visas and funding are due to expire next year. Will she commit to looking at the funding issue and possibly have discussions with the UK Government, which she has been keen to mention so far, on the visa issue?

**Kaukab Stewart:** I can give that assurance—I have already done that regarding the visa situation. There are clear tests in place with regard to the pause that we currently have in place. It is not a decision that we take lightly. There are clear tests that have to be met, I can share further details of that with Mr Simpson, should he wish to have them.

The Prime Minister talks of "incalculable" damage being caused by so-called open borders. I disagree with that. I would like to address some points that were raised by Jeremy Balfour and Graham Simpson regarding legal migration versus illegal migration.

We have a moral obligation to offer a place of safety to desperate people who are fleeing conflict and persecution. The lack of safe and legal routes to the UK does not prevent, and has not prevented, people from coming, and it forces already vulnerable people to make extremely dangerous and life-threatening journeys across

the Channel. Any damage has come from short-sighted, restrictive immigration policies and dehumanising language inflicted by, unfortunately, successive UK Government Administrations.

Last month, the First Minister chaired a round-table meeting with stakeholders from across Scotland's businesses and institutions and heard directly from them about the issues that the immigration white paper risks causing to our communities and economy. In the coming weeks, the Scottish Government will publish a position paper outlining the concerns that were raised at the meeting. We will also publish the proposal document that was sent by the Scottish Government to the Home Office during the development of the white paper.

I come to my final two sentences, and I thank Maggie Chapman and Alex Cole-Hamilton for inspiring me, because they talked about heat and hate. I think that we definitely need more light and more compassion. The moral case is clear; this afternoon, we have also made the economic case.

## Decision Time

17:01

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):**

There are three questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Liz Smith is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Michael Marra will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S6M-17906.1, in the name of Liz Smith, which seeks to amend motion S6M-17906, in the name of Kate Forbes, on a migration system that works 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.

17:01

*Meeting suspended.*

17:04

*On resuming—*

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

We come to the vote on amendment S6M-17906.1, in the name of Liz Smith, which seeks to amend motion S6M-17906, in the name of Kate Forbes, on a migration system that works for Scotland. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is closed.

**The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice (Shirley-Anne Somerville):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I was unable to connect to the app—I would have voted no.

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

**For**

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)

Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

### Against

Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by Ross Greer]  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]  
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 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)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)  
 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)  
 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)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on amendment S6M-17906.1, in the name of Liz Smith, is: For 24, Against 84, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S6M-17906.2, in the name of Michael Marra, which seeks to amend motion S6M-17906, in the name of Kate Forbes, on a migration system that works for Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

### For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)

### Against

Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)

Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 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)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 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)  
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by Ross Greer]  
 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)  
 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)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

#### Abstentions

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)

Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)  
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 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)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on amendment S6M-17906.2, in the name of Michael Marra, is: For 19, Against 62, Abstentions 27.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The final question is, that motion S6M-17906, in the name of Kate Forbes, on a migration system that works for Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

#### For

Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 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)  
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by Ross Greer]  
 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)  
 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)  
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 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)  
 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

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 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)

Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 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)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on motion S6M-17906, in the name of Kate Forbes, is: For 67, Against 42, Abstentions 0.

### *Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament recognises the contribution to Scotland's communities, public services and economy by those who have chosen to migrate to Scotland and build their lives here; notes that stakeholders from multiple sectors across Scotland have expressed significant concerns with the UK Government's immigration white paper, and that proposals submitted by the Scottish Government to the Home Office were not included in the published paper; further notes that the Parliament has previously endorsed a motion calling for the development of a differentiated, more flexible migration policy, tailored to meet Scotland's specific needs; calls on the UK Government to engage with Scottish Government officials urgently to ensure that the needs of Scotland's businesses, public services and communities are supported, rather than harmed, by the reforms outlined in the UK immigration white paper, and further calls on the UK Government to ensure that a new youth mobility scheme is designed, with engagement from young people across the UK nations, to be as broad and inclusive as possible, restoring the greatest freedom of movement for young people as can be agreed with the EU.

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

*Meeting closed at 17:10.*



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