



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

DRAFT

Meeting of the Parliament

Tuesday 2 September 2025

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Tuesday 2 September 2025

CONTENTS

	Col.
TIME FOR REFLECTION	1
PRESIDING OFFICER'S ADDRESS TO THE PARLIAMENT	3
BUSINESS MOTION	5
<i>Motion moved—[Jamie Hepburn]—and agreed to.</i>	
TOPICAL QUESTION TIME	6
Crime Statistics	6
NHS Waiting Lists	9
Ardrossan Harbour	13
HOUSING EMERGENCY	17
<i>Statement—[Màiri McAllan].</i>	
The Cabinet Secretary for Housing (Màiri McAllan)	17
SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES	30
<i>Motion moved—[John Swinney].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Russell Findlay].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Anas Sarwar].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Ross Greer].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Alex Cole-Hamilton].</i>	
The First Minister (John Swinney)	30
Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con)	35
Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab)	39
Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green)	42
Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD)	45
George Adam (Paisley) (SNP)	47
Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)	50
Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP)	52
Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab)	54
Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)	57
Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con)	59
Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab)	61
Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)	64
Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (LD)	66
Ross Greer	68
Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab)	70
Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)	73
The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government (Shona Robison)	75
PARLIAMENTARY BUREAU MOTIONS	79
<i>Motions moved—[Jamie Hepburn].</i>	
DECISION TIME	80
NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE DENTISTRY	93
<i>Motion debated—[Alex Rowley].</i>	
Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)	93
Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP)	96
Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)	97
Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab)	99
Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD)	100
Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con)	102
Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)	103
Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)	105
Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab)	107
The Minister for Public Health and Women's Health (Jenni Minto)	109

Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 2 September 2025

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Good afternoon. The first item of business this afternoon is time for reflection, and our time for reflection leader today is Lorraine Currie, chief executive of the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund.

Lorraine Currie (Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund): Presiding Officer and members of the Scottish Parliament, thank you so much for the opportunity to address you this afternoon.

For many of us, the story of the good Samaritan is one of the most memorable parables in the gospels. When a traveller was beaten, robbed and left by the roadside, he waited a long time for anyone to help. Many saw him but hurried past, unwilling to interrupt their journey. He suffered alone.

Yet the good Samaritan chose differently. Instead of walking by, the good Samaritan drew close, cared for the stranger's wounds, lifted him on to his own animal and stayed with him throughout the night.

The Samaritan teaches us that true love is practical: it is about time being freely given and plans being set aside. It is not enough to look and feel pity; love requires that we stop, draw close and act. Charity, compassion, love and solidarity are all different faces of the same eternal spirit that moves us to action.

Sixty years ago this year, in a Rutherglen school, that same spirit gave birth to SCIAF's practical action. Over the past 60 years, SCIAF has lifted millions of people out of poverty—people of all faiths and of none. It has provided life-saving aid to others, such as those in Gaza, and has campaigned to change the systems that keep people poor.

The incredible generosity of people in Scotland, through SCIAF and our local partners, stands today as a beacon of hope that a better world is possible—a reminder to everyone, including our leaders, that it is compassion, charity, love and solidarity that still define our humanity.

The lesson of the good Samaritan is also a call to leaders to act with courage and compassion, even when the politics of division and selfishness

tries to consume us. Our world faces many trials: climate change, conflict, hunger, the crisis of global debt, and deepening division at home and abroad. Yet these challenges cannot be met with further division and conflict. The story of the good Samaritan reminds us that everyone is our neighbour. When a society grows used to ignoring the poorest abroad, it soon risks turning its back on the most vulnerable at home. Showing love for others enriches everyone; disregard for others diminishes all of us. We are all part of one human family, interlinked to each other's lives and destinies.

My hope for the Parliament, and for all of us, is that we take the good Samaritan's path. Thank you for listening.

Presiding Officer's Address to the Parliament

14:04

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

Before we move to topical questions I would like to say something about the deeply shocking situation that the Parliament has faced in recent days. Not a single person in the Parliament is unaffected. You will be aware that the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body met this morning. Following that meeting, a detailed note has been provided to party groups, individual members and staff.

I take this opportunity to reiterate a number of points.

I am absolutely appalled that anyone would have to face a situation such as this in the Parliament or, indeed, in any workplace or any other environment. We all feel shock and hurt at the recent allegations relating to an elected member and the reports of a shocking invasion of privacy.

The safety and welfare of everyone who works in this building are our priority. These circumstances are unprecedented for the Parliament, and it has been and continues to be a highly complex situation to navigate. There is an on-going live criminal investigation. The information available to the Parliament at different stages has, therefore, necessarily been limited, and parliamentary authorities do not have confirmation of any investigation details. If further information is confirmed or verified, we will share it.

It is important to be clear that neither officials nor the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body have the authority to remove the rights and privileges of an elected member. Officials have worked at pace to consider how this unprecedented situation should best be responded to, establishing appropriate lawful authority to act and carrying out a thorough risk assessment. Having considered that, the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body agreed to deactivate the member's pass.

Although procedures are a matter for the whole Parliament, for its part the SPCB is committed to reviewing online and physical security as a whole, in line with its remit and responsibilities.

As it remains a live criminal investigation, the matter is sub judice. We must avoid contempt of court, and nothing should be said or done that might jeopardise the investigation. We can comment only on information that is verified, and I will continue to keep party leaders and groups across the Parliament up to date.

Police Scotland has swept the facilities in the building, and no devices were found. Enhanced security checks of the building will continue as we seek to provide further reassurance to members and to each and every person who works in or visits the Scottish Parliament.

Teams at the Parliament have been working hard to put in place a range of additional support for all those affected. The chief executive and I wrote to building users yesterday to set out how that support can be accessed. Meetings have taken place with various groups already, and we will continue that process across the coming weeks, working with all staff groups in the building. I encourage everyone to access the support that they need. That is vitally important. I reiterate that you should feel able to contact me personally, in confidence, if I can be of any help.

I realise that people have questions about these matters. In the update given earlier today, the SPCB and I set out as much information as we can. I must remind members that, as this matter is sub judice, it would not be appropriate to comment further. I assure members that I will continue to keep them updated. I am acutely aware of the concerns that people have, and we are committed to doing everything that we can to address them.

Business Motion

14:08

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item is consideration of business motion S6M-18622, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on changes to the business programme. Any member who wishes to speak to the motion should press their request-to-speak button now.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees to the following revisions to the programme of business for—

(a) Tuesday 2 September 2025—

delete

followed by Scottish Government Business

and insert

followed by Ministerial Statement: Tackling the Housing Emergency

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Priorities for Scotland

(b) Wednesday 3 September 2025—

delete

followed by Scottish Government Business

and insert

followed by First Minister's Statement: Situation in Gaza

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Palestine

delete

5.00 pm Decision Time

and insert

5.15 pm Decision Time

(c) Thursday 4 September 2025—

delete

followed by Scottish Government Business

and insert

followed by Ministerial Statement: Drug-related Deaths in Scotland in 2024 and the National Mission to Reduce Deaths and Improve the Lives of People Impacted by Drugs

followed by Public Audit Committee Debate: The 2022/23 and 2023/24 Audits of the Water Industry Commission for Scotland—[*Jamie Hepburn*].

Motion agreed to.

Topical Question Time

14:08

Crime Statistics

1. **Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking in response to the overall increase in recorded crimes in the past year, including rape, violent crime, antisocial behaviour and shoplifting. (S6T-02626)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): Scotland continues to be a safe place to live, with recorded crime falling by more than half since 1991. However, I am very concerned about those areas of crime in which there have been increases, particularly sexual violence and domestic abuse. Although I welcome the fact that some of the increase will be due to an increase in reporting and trust in the justice system, it is abhorrent that such crimes, which are mainly against women, are taking place. That is why, through the equally safe strategy, we are aiming to tackle and prevent such violence. This year, we are investing £4.2 billion across the justice system, including a record £1.64 billion for policing.

Liam Kerr: The data actually shows that, in the year to June 2025, violent crime went up. Sexual crime is up, antisocial behaviour is up and shoplifting is up. The president of the Association of Scottish Police Superintendents asked:

“how bad does it have to get before we actually see some meaningful and credible steps to ensure policing is able to deal with these things”,

and added,

“What’s needed is actually a real credible response”.

Does the cabinet secretary have a real and credible response that she can provide, or will she continue to hide behind decades of statistics?

Angela Constance: It remains imperative to acknowledge that Scotland remains a safe place under this Government. However, where we are seeing changes in the types of offences, it is imperative that we respond to that. For example, if we take crimes of dishonesty, housebreaking figures have fallen, but shoplifting has increased significantly. That is why we are investing £3 million in relation to retail crime, and we are seeing positive outcomes from that investment.

Over and above our record investment in policing, there is investment in the violence prevention framework and in work to deliver the equally safe strategy to tackle abhorrent crimes against women. That work is, in essence, about prevention and providing support for victims and

about changing men's behaviour and underlying attitudes.

Liam Kerr: It is important that the Government responds. Antisocial behaviour is up by 5 per cent and the use of offensive weapons is up by 13 per cent. In late July, I asked the Minister for Victims and Community Safety what actions have been implemented following the youth violence summit that the Government insisted was not yet another talking shop. The minister could not name a single action—not one. Can the cabinet secretary help the victims minister by telling us whether any new actions from that summit have now been implemented and, if so, when they will result in those figures finally beginning to fall?

Angela Constance: Any level of violence among young people, or by any citizens, is concerning. It is imperative that the Government continues investing in early intervention, and prevention is key to that. Following the summit, I advised the media and Parliament that the next phase of cashback for communities funding will increase from £20 million to £26 million. One of the additional actions that is being taken following the summit is the delivery of education roadshows on violence and weapons prevention, in targeted areas where levels of violence are high.

It is crucial that we listen to the voices of young people who are law abiding who seek to get on with their lives and to attend school, but we must also reach out to those in our communities who have become marginalised. Young people's voices are particularly important in all of that, as is work across Government, not least the investment in education which, of course, led to the excellent exam results that were published over the summer.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): I am keen to take supplementary questions, so it will be helpful if members can be concise.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): The vast number of charges under the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018 are being prosecuted, with more than 90 per cent proceeding to court. Does the cabinet secretary believe that such changes to our laws and culture will empower women to speak out and to have the confidence to go to the police, courts and support services?

Angela Constance: One important part of the equally safe strategy is to continue our work to empower victims to come forward to report crimes. When a crime has occurred, it is essential that people have the confidence and support to come forward.

What we have seen with the 2018 act, which is often described as gold-standard and world-leading legislation, is that crimes recorded under

that piece of legislation have increased by 26 per cent.

However, we can, of course, not just stop with our legislation on domestic abuse. It is important that we introduce other measures, and that is what we are doing in the remainder of the current session. In only a few weeks' time, we will debate the Victims, Witnesses, and Justice Reform (Scotland) Bill, which is about implementing a trauma-informed justice system and supporting victims of sexual violence with, I hope, the implementation of the new sexual offences court.

Ash Regan (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba): Given that crimes linked to prostitution are rising—a crime that is obviously rooted in exploitation and violence—does the cabinet secretary accept that Scotland's current laws are failing to protect those who are exploited by the global sex trade? Will the Government work with me in supporting my unbuyable bill to make the purchase of sex illegal in all circumstances, so that we send a very clear message that sex is not for sale in Scotland and the burden of criminality lies with the exploiters and not the exploited?

Angela Constance: I very much agree that sexual exploitation of women is a form of violence against women and girls. I also very much agree that the core root of the problem is indeed the behaviour of men who think that women are there for them to purchase as they please. Where Parliament will have to come to a view is on what course of action will best protect women now and in the future, and what course of action will now keep women safe. The Government, like every other parliamentary group, will look to see how Ms Regan's bill progresses in the course of parliamentary scrutiny.

Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con): Shoplifting is up by 124 per cent in the past four years, and that is an underestimate, as many retailers do not bother reporting it because they do not think that the shoplifter would face justice. They are right, because fewer than half of shoplifting cases in Scotland are solved, and most of those who are caught rack up fines that they have no intention of paying or get a slap on the wrist. It is clear that the current system is not working. When will the Government change course, bring in stronger punishments for repeat offenders and increase police visibility on our streets to deter thieves?

Angela Constance: Our independent courts do very much take into account people who are involved in repeat offending. A key aspect of the retail crime task force, which the Scottish Government has supported with additional funding of £3 million, is to stop people becoming perpetrators of acquisitive crime and to bring perpetrators to justice, with a focus on repeat

offenders and organised criminals, as well as to strengthen the collective protection against retail crime.

The task force bulletin for July 2025 reported on significant results in Edinburgh since April, with 234 charges being brought against retail crime offenders. The cases that were dealt with relate to an estimated £25,000 of stolen goods, and the team's work has led to 230 offender identifications across the city. I would be happy to provide more information.

The Presiding Officer: We move to question 2. Again, concise questions and responses would be very gratefully received.

NHS Waiting Lists

2. Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to reduce national health service waiting lists, in light of new analysis reportedly showing that waits of over two years are now more than 800 times higher in Scotland than in England. (S6T-02642)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Neil Gray): We are investing a record £21.7 billion in health and social care this year, in a budget that Jackie Baillie refused to support. The focused investment coming from that budget is delivering tangible improvements in health and social care performance. Statistics that were published this morning, which I am sure that Jackie Baillie will wish to welcome, show just a few examples.

In July 2025, the number of operations performed was at its highest level in more than five years. For planned care, new out-patient activity and in-patient and day-case activity have increased, with in-patient and day-case waiting lists down compared with the last quarter. Child and adolescent mental health services waiting time standards have been met for a third time in a row, and we had the lowest number of eight and 12-hour waits in accident and emergency departments for any month since September 2023, despite July attendance being the highest of any July in the past six years.

Those are encouraging signs that efforts to improve access and efficiency are delivering results, and my thanks go to the staff for their incredible efforts.

Jackie Baillie: That was so much spin from the cabinet secretary that he must be positively dizzy. I am afraid that his excuses will not wash with the 14,963 people who have been waiting for more than two years for an operation. The numbers of operations are still lower than the pre-pandemic level. Despite John Swinney's promise of action last year, the number of people waiting in Scotland has gone up and is at a staggering 880,000—a

record high. Can the cabinet secretary tell us why it has gone up?

Neil Gray: I note from that question that Jackie Baillie refused to offer thanks to the staff for their efforts in improving performance over the recent quarter or welcome the progress that has been made. However, we are making progress. We have delivered a record number of hip and knee operations in the national health service over the past year. We continue to make improvements, as this morning's figures demonstrate. That is why the most recent comparable analysis, to go back to February, shows that we are delivering faster levels of increased activity than the NHS in England. That is the difference that a Scottish National Party Government can make.

Jackie Baillie: That is interesting, because I spend most of my time listening and talking to staff, and the cabinet secretary's response is an indication of how desperate he is. He does not like the message, so he simply attacks the messenger.

New figures from yesterday show that the number of private hospital and clinic admissions in Scotland are the highest on record. The cabinet secretary failed to mention that. Is it not the case that the SNP's neglect of the NHS has led to a two-tier health service, is letting down staff and is continuing to fail the 880,000 patients who are waiting in pain?

Neil Gray: Of course I want to ensure that NHS capacity in Scotland is able to deal with demand. That is why we are delivering a record settlement for health and social care services and directing targeted interventions around waiting times. However, it is a bit rich for Jackie Baillie to criticise the Scottish Government for private admissions, given that there were 240 private admissions in Scotland per 100,000 of the population, whereas the figure in England is 54 per cent higher, at 370 admissions per 100,000.

Jackie Baillie has come here with negativity. She has not supported the positive interventions that have come forward. However, I have one area of positive intervention—this is serious—that Jackie Baillie could support us with. Home Office figures show that there was a 77 per cent reduction in the number of health and care worker visas that were approved by the United Kingdom Government in the year to mid-2025. We need international workers in health and care—Donald Macaskill has said so, clearly. Perhaps Jackie Baillie could help us in recruiting the staff that we need for health and social care by convincing her Government to deliver a migration system—

The Presiding Officer: Briefly, cabinet secretary.

Neil Gray: —that works for the health and social care system in Scotland, rather than making it harder for us to recruit.

Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): I declare an interest as a practising NHS general practitioner, in which role I worked over the summer. After nearly two decades of SNP mismanagement, one in six Scots is now trapped on an NHS waiting list; GP vacancy rates remain high; there are continued nursing shortages; despite promises, waiting times are spiralling, with nearly a quarter of patients waiting over a year; and a shortfall of £290 million prevents practices from hiring additional staff. Patients' physical and mental wellbeing is being harmed. Is it not time that the Government made significant commonsense bureaucratic cuts, reducing the redundant middle management of the NHS and diverting those resources to the front line?

Neil Gray: Sandesh Gulhane will know that Public Health Scotland is clear that, in order to arrive at a one in six figure, list numbers would have to be combined—which it recommends should not be done. He will therefore want to check that figure.

On GP numbers, welcome figures have just shown, for the first time since 2019, a 4 per cent rise in the number of whole-time equivalent GPs. I am now engaged with the Royal College of General Practitioners and the British Medical Association on the long-term funding position, including how there can be greater recruitment of general practitioners, to match the incredible investment that is going into training them. A record number of 1,200 GPs are currently in training.

Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP): I remind members that I hold a bank nurse contract with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde.

I welcome the progress that the Scottish Government has made in reducing waiting lists, and it is disappointing that Labour consistently talks down our national health service and our hard-working staff. In that vein, what can the cabinet secretary say about the recent figures in relation to the number of GPs, paramedics and the wider NHS workforce?

Neil Gray: I am absolutely committed to our workforce. It is the greatest asset of our health and care services. I remain extremely grateful for the daily contribution that it makes to providing high-quality services to patients across Scotland.

It is welcome that data published this morning shows an increase in the NHS whole-time equivalent workforce since last year, and a 16.6 per cent increase in headcount over the past decade. Last week, we saw an increase in the number of new paramedics, and our GP whole-

time equivalent workforce has grown by 4 per cent over the past year, which is the first such increase since 2019.

We will continue to invest in our NHS and our incredible staff so that they can continue to deliver an NHS for the people of Scotland.

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): In my summer surgeries this year, one of the biggest issues was lengthy waiting times at NHS Grampian. I had an elderly constituent in Portgordon, who has been told that he will have to wait 18 months for a cataract operation, and another in Hopeman, who has been waiting since February 2023 for a referral to ear, nose and throat services, and who has been told that the waiting time is 137 weeks. Can the cabinet secretary defend those lengthy waiting times? If—as I hope—he cannot, what is he doing with NHS Grampian, a board that is in dire financial straits, to get those waiting times reduced, because patients urgently need that care?

Neil Gray: I know that the waiting times that Douglas Ross has outlined are not acceptable. They are not in the position where we expect them to be. That is why we are making the investments that we are making. I was able to recount the position in relation to improvement in both in-patient and day-case activity and out-patient activity, as well as record numbers of hip and knee operations.

We are providing specific support for NHS Grampian through its escalation process, which Douglas Ross will be aware of. We are also looking at how regional support can be provided to bring down its waiting list so that there is wider health service activity to support the position for the constituents that Douglas Ross referred to, allowing them to be seen faster.

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): In NHS Ayrshire and Arran, more than 11,000 patients were stuck waiting more than a year for an out-patient appointment. Those waits have consequences for patients and for our highly professional and hard-working staff. The reworked plans that you constantly set out are not working. We need some honesty from this Government.

What can you say to those thousands of patients, and to the staff in NHS Ayrshire and Arran, about what action you will take to stop them waiting in limbo?

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

Neil Gray: I recognise the question from Carol Mochan, and I hope that she recognises that the interventions that we are taking are making a difference. We are seeing increases in activity. I was able to quote statistics from this morning

showing that July had the highest number of operations delivered for any month since February 2020. That is welcome progress, which has been delivered by the targeted investments of this Government, through the budget of £21.7 billion, and thanks to the hard-working staff in our NHS.

We are rolling out greater regional working to support the delivery of faster progress on waiting times. The Golden Jubilee hospital is a critical example of that, as well as our national treatment centre programme and other regional hubs. I hope that that will help to deliver the improvements in NHS Ayrshire and Arran that Carol Mochan is waiting for.

Ardrossan Harbour

3. Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government, in light of the Cabinet Secretary for Transport's announcement on 19 February 2025, whether it will provide an update on its discussions with Peel Ports regarding bringing Ardrossan harbour into public ownership. (S6T-02625)

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport (Fiona Hyslop): I assure Kenny Gibson and his constituents that concluding the matter and bringing Ardrossan harbour into public ownership is a top priority for Scottish ministers. Yesterday, I shared an update with the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee and the Ardrossan task force that our asset owner, Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd, is continuing positive negotiations with Peel Ports Group.

Those complex and commercially sensitive discussions are now focusing on heads of terms, and both parties are committed to confirming details of the potential sale as quickly as possible. Achieving a clean title on the assets—a large part of which have not been transacted since the late 19th century—and adhering to legal and commercial due process is essential to securing a sustainable future for our ferry operations.

This Government will continue to support the role of Ardrossan harbour for the long-term benefit of local communities in Arran and Ardrossan. I look forward to updating Parliament on further progress at the earliest opportunity.

Kenneth Gibson: I am heartened that progress is being made, and I commend the cabinet secretary's tenacity in pursuing the harbour's purchase. However, progress still appears to be glacial. The communities of Ardrossan and Arran just want to know when the purchase will successfully conclude, given the time that has already elapsed. Few people thought, regardless of how complex the negotiations to buy the harbour would be, that it would take even the six months that we have waited so far. Can the

cabinet secretary say what further work is being done to ensure that the purchase is concluded in days and weeks rather than months and years?

Fiona Hyslop: I understand people's frustrations. I have been quite clear about my determination that the purchase will be concluded, but success will be when those negotiations succeed and are agreed to by both parties.

On my part, the move to heads of terms ensures that we are getting into the practical detail of ensuring the clean title that I referred to, which will be the long-term result of those negotiations.

In terms of the impetus to ensure that progress is made more rapidly now that we have got to this critical stage, the member can be assured that the matter has my utmost attention, as it has done in recent months.

Kenneth Gibson: I sympathise with the cabinet secretary's predicament. Peel Ports chronically underinvested in the harbour for years. When the save Ardrossan harbour and Arran for Ardrossan harbour groups came to Holyrood, the cabinet secretary met them, whereas Peel would not when they protested outside its Glasgow headquarters.

Although the Scottish Government has declined to comment on active commercial negotiations, Peel has accused it of not matching its "pace, energy and commitment". Does the cabinet secretary agree that, to right the wrong of the Tory privatisation of Ardrossan harbour, Peel Ports should cease trying to hold Scottish taxpayers to ransom and sell the port now—lock, stock and barrel—for a fair price?

Fiona Hyslop: I agree that a fair price is absolutely essential. The member is also correct to remind members in the chamber that the situation is a result of the long history of Conservative privatisation of ports. He also recognises the key reason why we are doing this, which is to ensure that there is investment, both in the short and in the long term, to make sure that there is a secure and sustainable future for Ardrossan harbour.

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (LD): Let us not forget that it was Humza Yousaf who promised the upgrade of Ardrossan harbour when he was transport minister. This Government has had years to get on with the job.

Peel Ports has accused the Government of not matching its "pace, energy and commitment" when it comes to the negotiations, and it says that the negotiations must be a higher priority. I hope that that will be the case moving forward.

On compensation specifically, will the cabinet secretary consider extending the window of opportunity for compensation beyond today, which is currently the last day for applications? There are

businesses out there that still need cash and are not aware of the scheme. Secondly, will the scheme be extended to businesses in Ardrossan? I do not want to see a single small business in Ardrossan lose business or go bust as a result of this sorry saga.

Fiona Hyslop: I note that the Liberal Democrat member has taken the side of Peel Ports and accepted its interpretation. As the cabinet secretary, I am trying to ensure that there are constructive discussions between the parties and that both parties are giving the issue the attention that is required.

The member refers to a separate scheme that has been announced by the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands to help support islanders. I understand that there has been an extension to the application period.

My main concern for Ardrossan harbour is to keep it open and operating as long as possible. That is why we are providing additional funding to ensure that, where possible, there is two-port provision. However, I am also very conscious that there will be a period of investment that will mean that Ardrossan harbour will be closed, so I think that we should be turning our attention to how we can provide practical support to businesses during that stage.

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): In February, after years of the Scottish Government ridiculing those arguing for the public ownership of Ardrossan harbour, the Cabinet Secretary for Transport announced, during rural affairs portfolio questions, that the Scottish Government now supported it. The Scottish Government knew more than 10 years ago, when it decided to commission the two Arran ferries, that the ferries did not fit into Ardrossan harbour, that the Scottish Government did not own Ardrossan harbour, and that it was going to be very difficult to get a deal with the owners, but it spent years failing to take the necessary compulsory action. Does the cabinet secretary accept that the Scottish Government has failed the people of Arran and Ardrossan?

Fiona Hyslop: No, I do not, and I would be interested to know whether compulsory purchase of ports and harbours in Scotland is a new Labour Party policy; that might be news to a lot of investors who want to create jobs and provide services.

The member was not a member of this Parliament at the time, and she is rehearsing an argument that is more about propaganda—*[Interruption.]*

Presiding Officer, this matter is very important to the people of Ardrossan.

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear one another.

Fiona Hyslop: The member, in her anger, perhaps betrays her regret that progress is in fact being made. If she thinks that compulsory purchase is, or was ever, a legal solution for Ardrossan or for other ports, the Labour Party needs to look seriously at its economic case.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes topical questions.

Housing Emergency

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is a statement by the Cabinet Secretary for Housing, Màiri McAllan, on tackling the housing emergency. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of her statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:35

The Cabinet Secretary for Housing (Màiri McAllan): On 11 June, I was appointed as Scotland's first Cabinet Secretary for Housing, with the First Minister placing homes at the heart of his Government. A safe, warm, secure and affordable place to call home is fundamental to a life of dignity and opportunity. We have long believed that and, since coming into government, we have invested considerably in it. Since 2007, we have helped to deliver more than 139,000 affordable homes, with 99,000 of those available for social rent. That has resulted in Scotland having a delivery rate for affordable homes per head of population of 47 per cent more than in England and 73 per cent more than in Wales.

We have also legislated for some of the most protective anti-homelessness laws of any country and have fully mitigated the effect of the United Kingdom Government's bedroom tax, so that no one in Scotland pays it. Despite that, there is unprecedented strain in demand for, and supply of, housing, after years of financial strain from UK austerity and Brexit, the pandemic and other inflationary pressures.

Since we declared a housing emergency, significant progress has been made. In May, the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice updated Parliament on our targeted work to date. That has included helping some 2,700 households with children into affordable homes in the year to December 2024, and bringing almost 1,000 homes back into use in 2024-25 through our targeted £40 million of investment. We also increased our affordable homes supply programme budget to £768 million this year, so that we are able to deliver a further 8,000 affordable homes.

In addition, the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership reported earlier today that 2,066 privately owned long-term empty homes were returned to use in 2024-25. That is the highest annual amount in 15 years, and it brings the total number of homes returned to nearly 13,000.

However, there is still much to do and we must go further, and the action plan that I am setting out today does that. Over the summer, I have worked extensively with partners across the housing

sector. It was very important to me to understand their challenges and hear their proposed solutions.

My resultant plan is centred on three core missions: first, ending the situation of children living in unsuitable accommodation, as part of the Government's work to eradicate child poverty; secondly, supporting the housing needs of vulnerable communities; and lastly, building our future by maximising growth and investment in Scotland's housing sector.

Children should not live in accommodation that is unsuited to their needs. While temporary accommodation is a vital safety net for families, it must be just that—temporary. John Swinney's Government is working to eradicate child poverty and we will, through this plan, double our acquisition fund from £40 million to £80 million this year, which will bring our total additional targeted investment to £120 million since the emergency was declared. That will support the acquisition of at least 1,200 homes over the 18 months of the fund, helping between 600 and 800 children to quickly move out of temporary accommodation and into permanent tenancies.

I will work with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and with local authorities to make clear our expectation that that funding should be concentrated on family-sized homes where they are required. Following the guidance that the Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers has produced on flipping temporary accommodation to a settled residence, we will ask councils to now contact every household with children in good-quality temporary accommodation to examine flipping opportunities, with the funding helping to replenish temporary stock.

We will invest £2 million in discretionary housing payments to support households currently in temporary housing to find settled homes in the private rented sector; we will fund pilots, such as private sector leasing schemes, to tackle the use of unsuitable bed and breakfasts and hotels; and, subject to parliamentary approval of the Housing (Scotland) Bill, we will introduce a long-term system of rent controls to ensure affordability.

As well as the availability of homes, I am focusing on the quality. No one in Scotland—and especially no child—should live with damp or mould. I confirm that, should Parliament agree, we will raise the standard and quality of all rented accommodation in Scotland by bringing Awaab's law into force in the social and private rented sectors from March 2026.

I turn to the second pillar of my plan—supporting the housing needs of vulnerable communities. Following the Cabinet meeting this morning, I visited the exceptional Scottish Women's Aid team in Edinburgh. I heard from staff

who have worked with survivors—and their children—when they are trying to leave an abusive partner.

Domestic abuse is the leading cause of homelessness among women, and I know how financial support can help women with children to be free of abusive men. No woman should flee violence only to face homelessness. That is why my plan will establish a national fund to leave, which will be backed this year by £1 million, to help up to 1,200 women and their children leave an abusive relationship.

Another vulnerable group is people with multiple and complex needs, who are at risk of cyclical homelessness and rough sleeping. Over the summer, I met those who benefit from and help to facilitate the housing first programme. The stories of resilience, hope and recovery will stay with me always. To support those people, we will invest an additional £4 million this year to expand the delivery of housing first tenancies.

In response to strong calls from the sector, we will extend rapid rehousing transition plan funding to 2026-27 and invest £500,000 in winter preparedness measures to ensure that, in the cold winter months, people get a suitable bed for the night.

Looking forward, I am focusing on building our future by maximising growth and investment in Scotland's housing sector. That means continuing to invest extensively in affordable homes and, at the same time, working to create the optimum conditions to foster confidence and investment.

I referred earlier to the valuable engagement with partners this summer. There was a consistent call for the certainty that multiyear funding trajectories can provide. Today, the Scottish Government is positively answering that call, and I confirm that we will provide that multiyear funding forward look.

We will complement that with a new delivery ambition to increase delivery across all tenures by at least 10 per cent each year over the first three years of the next parliamentary session. In support of that ambition, and knowing how vital continued development is to the availability and affordability of homes, I take this opportunity to confirm my intention, in principle, to exempt mid-market rent and build-to-rent properties, where appropriate, from the rent controls that are being introduced under the Housing (Scotland) Bill. Such exemptions would be designed to protect and promote investment in those sectors and were clearly called for by our housing investment task force.

We will work with East Lothian Council and private sector partners to unlock investment in the new town Blindwells, which has the potential to

deliver 10,000 homes. I will support first-time buyers who are on low or medium incomes by reopening the open market shared equity scheme to them.

As a rural MSP, I know well how housing challenges differ between Scotland's diverse places. As well as continuing to support the rural and islands housing fund, we will expand our work by engaging public bodies, landowners and the Scottish National Investment Bank to unlock land for housing in rural Scotland.

Key to all of that is our planning system. The "Planning and the Housing Emergency—Delivery Plan", which was published in November last year, set out 23 actions, and we have made good progress against them.

My action plan takes our planning commitments further. I confirm today that we will issue a new notification direction to planning authorities, through which ministers will closely monitor the application of planning policy and intervene when needed.

The Minister for Public Finance, the chief planner and I will also write to planning authorities to set out our expectations of customer service and proportionality when dealing with small and medium-sized enterprise house builders and, separately, to all planning stakeholders on our expectation of an emergency-led approach across development plan preparation and the determination of planning applications.

I referred earlier to our commitment to offer multiyear funding certainty. Having confirmed that, I am pleased to go further today by accompanying this forward look with a significant step up in funding. I confirm that we will invest up to £4.9 billion over the coming four years to support the delivery of about 36,000 affordable homes, which will provide up to 24,000 children with a warm, safe home. Although further details will be outlined in the forthcoming spending review, the delivery will be through a mixture of public and privately leveraged investment.

I present today a rounded and ambitious package, and I trust that members will find much in it to welcome. What they will not find is a single word dedicated to spreading fear and division in our communities. They will not find a single word scapegoating those who are seeking refuge in Scotland. I call on the UK Home Office to properly fund and organise its asylum processes, and I recommit Scotland to being a welcoming and inclusive nation.

I call on all partners to join us in delivering the bold actions that have been set out in my plan—not least members of the housing to 2040 strategic board, whose support and enthusiasm I so value. Let us now work together to turn commitment into

action and to turn action into early, positive and lasting change.

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

Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for providing advance sight of her statement. I welcome the fact that the Scottish Government is discussing an issue that is devolved to this Parliament, in a week in which we will spend three hours of valuable parliamentary time discussing foreign affairs.

It has been more than a year since the Parliament declared a housing emergency. At the time, many of us hoped that that would create an imperative on the Scottish Government to build more homes more quickly. Instead, just 7,444 affordable homes were completed in 2024-25, which was a decrease of 22 per cent on the previous year. That is around half the 15,000 affordable homes that housing charities say that we need to meet current demand.

Rather than increasing the affordable housing supply, the Scottish National Party has pressed ahead with a housing bill that will not build a single home. It has imposed disastrous rent controls on the sector, and nearly 5,000 landlords have exited the market in the past year. That figure is likely to rise unless the SNP makes housing a more attractive area for investment.

If the cabinet secretary is serious about tackling the housing emergency, will she commit to going further than she has today in attracting and utilising private finance to achieve the target of providing 15,000 affordable homes per year?

Màiri McAllan: Meghan Gallacher does herself absolutely no credit with her comments about international affairs. The issues for discussion are very important to the people of Scotland and they should be heard in this Parliament.

With regard to housing, I urge a bit of humility and perhaps self-reflection on the part of Meghan Gallacher and her colleagues. If it were not for the Conservatives, with their relentless austerity agenda, their complete mismanagement of the United Kingdom's economy and their pursuit of the hardest of hard Brexits, the prevailing economic conditions in this country would not have been so unfavourable in recent years and households would not have been pushed to the brink in the way that they have been, which has increased homelessness across this country. I encourage Meghan Gallacher to have another look at my statement and see how it speaks to creating favourable conditions for investment, and to come

back to me if she wants to have a sensible conversation.

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): Two years ago, housing emergencies were declared across Scotland. A year and a half ago, the Government acknowledged the crisis. Today, ALACHO reports that councils remain just as overwhelmed as they were three years ago, and the Government's response does not match the scale of that challenge.

The promise to move 600 to 800 children out of temporary accommodation is good news for those children, but, with more than 10,000 kids living in unacceptable conditions, when will the Government end the use of unsuitable temporary accommodation for children?

The statement makes passing mention of planning, but, without meaningful planning reform, we will not build the homes that we need. Will the cabinet secretary say whether the Government will restore its policy in favour of sustainable development in order to kick-start the house building that we need?

We welcome the increase in funding and stability after years of SNP cuts, but a 10 per cent rise in stats over three years falls far short of the 15,000 affordable homes that Shelter Scotland and the Chartered Institute of Housing say are essential. When does the cabinet secretary believe that the housing and homelessness emergency will end?

Màiri McAllan: The housing emergency, and the homelessness part of that, is a very complex picture. It is multifaceted, and I do not believe that we should be trying to tie it down to key performance indicators and figures to be measured.

In general, the housing emergency will be over when people can fully utilise the protective anti-homelessness legislation that we are very proud to have in this country, and when supply and demand and availability of social housing are met.

I hope that, if the member looks at the broad commitment that the Government has made in the plan, he will see a series of actions that will bring that together. Immediate action includes investing in the acquisition of homes to take children out of temporary and unsuitable accommodation right now. It also includes directions and advice to local authorities to contact every home with children who are in a temporary but suitable home to consider flipping that to a permanent residency—that can make a difference now. Overwhelmingly, what will make a difference is our commitment to multi-annual funding certainty and a significant increase in the funding of affordable homes in Scotland.

Everybody who is working on the issue understands that the provision of affordable homes is the way to tackle it, and the member will see our commitment to that in the statement.

Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): I welcome the cabinet secretary's return to Parliament and wish her well in her new role.

It is clear from the recent evidence on domestic abuse that the Social Justice and Social Security Committee took that women's experience of homelessness is very different from that of men. Therefore, the response to their housing needs should be very different. Will the cabinet secretary say more about how the Scottish Government is working to support women who are fleeing domestic abuse as a key part of addressing homelessness pressures?

Màiri McAllan: As I said in my statement, domestic abuse is the leading cause of homelessness for women in Scotland. That is unacceptable to this Government.

There are many barriers that can prevent someone who is experiencing domestic abuse from deciding and being able to leave that relationship. It can be a very dangerous and difficult time for them. Therefore, I am pleased that we have been able to commit to rolling out the fund to leave on a national basis. We know from our piloting of the fund that it has a positive impact. Women who are experiencing domestic abuse will be able to apply for a grant to pay for the essentials that they need when leaving a relationship with an abusive partner. We believe that the £1 million investment in our new national fund could help 1,200 women and their children to do just that.

Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Scotland has a record high number of children who are growing up in temporary accommodation—there are more than 10,000 of them—which has a huge knock-on effect on their mental health, their education and their life prospects. The statement refers to the provision of an additional £40 million for the acquisitions fund, which brings the total to £120 million so far, but that has not done nearly enough or brought the number below the 10,000 record figure. Therefore, how can the cabinet secretary possibly assure the Parliament that those targeted investments are anywhere close to the radical action that is needed? How will any more investment actively change the lives of Scotland's children?

Màiri McAllan: I will respond to that by highlighting the fact that the 2,700 households with children who have been assisted into affordable housing in the year to December 2024 through this Government's work will not recognise the characterisation that has been put to me, nor will

the people who are now living in the 2,066 formerly long-term empty properties that this Government's investment in the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership has helped to turn into settled homes. I ask the member to reflect on those figures.

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): How will the Scottish Government prioritise the delivery of multiyear funding for the affordable housing supply programme? What positive impact is that programme expected to have in East Ayrshire and across Scotland?

Màiri McAllan: The Government's core priorities will sit at the heart of the spending review process, and they will guide where and to what extent funding is allocated. We have recognised today that affordable housing is central to delivering against our priorities as a Government, in particular the leading priority of eradicating child poverty, as well as growing our economy and tackling net zero.

We have responded to the asks of the housing sector for multiyear funding, which I hope will give the certainty and confidence that are required for investment. That will, of course, apply across East Ayrshire, which is currently benefiting from almost £13 million of investment that is being made available this year, with further details to follow.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): I welcome the cabinet secretary to her new role. As she observed, Glasgow has a long and proud history of welcoming those in need, including thousands of people who have sought asylum through the Home Office's dispersal programme since it started in 1999. However, in 2022, the Government removed the local connection rule for homelessness applications, including those that are made by refugees. That measure was taken in good faith to allow homeless people greater autonomy to control their lives, but, however well intentioned, it has inadvertently increased pressure on Glasgow's homelessness services.

Last year, more than one in 10 homelessness applications came from asylum seekers who had been granted refugee status outside Scotland and who then moved to Glasgow, as a local connection is not required. Glasgow City Council estimates that, this year, almost half of all homelessness cases in the city will involve people who have been granted asylum in other dispersal cities, such as London, Belfast, Birmingham, Manchester and Liverpool, which will create an overspend of £66 million by next year.

Will the cabinet secretary review the suspension of local connection rules, while retaining exemptions for particularly vulnerable groups such as domestic abuse survivors, given the immediate and urgent housing pressure in Glasgow?

Màiri McAllan: I thank Paul Sweeney for that question. We keep all the means by which we respond to homelessness under review, but I confirm today that we have no intention of rolling back the changes that this Government put in place in respect of local connection.

The significant levels of asylum decision making by the UK Home Office are putting significant pressure on Scottish local authorities, not least Glasgow City Council. The challenges that arise are not the fault of refugees, who continue to be valuable members of our communities and who will be treated respectfully. The issue lies at the door of the UK Home Office, and I ask Paul Sweeney to support me and Susan Aitken, the leader of Glasgow City Council, as we call on his colleagues in the UK Home Office to manage their asylum processes more reasonably and to back them with more money. That is required to make sure that the system works well for those who are seeking asylum and for others on housing waiting lists.

The Presiding Officer: There is much interest in this statement. I would be grateful for concise questions and responses.

Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): I welcome the cabinet secretary's focus today on significant investment and her focus on the whole of the housing system. We need a focused, holistic emergency response to deliver for our communities.

Shelter Scotland's commissioned report "Affordable Housing Need in Scotland Post-2026", which was published today, highlights the sharp rise in temporary accommodation usage since 2020 and the urgent need for increased investment.

Bringing empty homes back into use is key to addressing the situation. Can the cabinet secretary outline how the Scottish Government is working with local authorities to ensure that that is done urgently and that blockages in the system are removed? What impact will that investment have on ensuring that more children have access to safe and secure homes, with temporary stays being as brief as possible and being avoided altogether in cases of domestic abuse?

I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests as a member of Shelter Scotland's committee.

Màiri McAllan: I agree with the principle of Elena Whitham's question, which is that we must pull every lever to respond to homelessness and the housing emergency. That means delivering more homes, but it also means using existing homes to better effect and bringing private, long-term empty homes back into use. I mentioned in my statement how our investment in the Scottish

Empty Homes Partnership is doing just that and how figures released this morning set out that, last year, a record number of empty homes—2,066—were brought back into use by that means. I stress that we are continuing our investment in that fund.

In addition, I direct Elena Whitham to speak to my colleague Ivan McKee, who I have been working with on planning, about how that can facilitate all that we wish to achieve in housing.

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): Renters across Scotland have been hit by outrageous rent demands. Earlier this year, the Scottish Government ended temporary rent controls that were meant to protect tenants from large hikes until permanent rent controls came into force. Living Rent reports that, since the end of those controls in April, there have been 175 cases in which landlords have requested a 20 per cent increase on average. Forty-one landlords proposed rent increases above 30 per cent, and some went as high as 88 per cent.

The cabinet secretary has clearly been listening to the landlord lobby, given some of the rent controls exemptions that she has announced today. Given the massive hikes that renters are facing, will she acknowledge the plight of tenants and support the Green amendment to reinstate temporary controls until the Housing (Scotland) Bill comes into effect?

Màiri McAllan: Affordability of rents is one of the key points that require attention as we respond to the housing emergency. I made clear my commitment to that when I met Living Rent over the summer. The Housing (Scotland) Bill, which is currently going through Parliament and which is approaching stage 3, contains a system of long-term, national and evidence-based rent control provisions, which I will be glad to see on the statute book, subject to Parliament's approval, so that we can support tenants with affordability across Scotland.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I think that the cabinet secretary knows that the most significant changes in the Scottish Government's housing policy have been to dispense with some of the more damaging proposals in the Housing (Scotland) Bill and the reversal of the cuts to the affordable housing budget. However, we are still in a housing emergency and the scale of the plan that is set out today does not meet the scale of the problem that we face.

My question is about investment, particularly in relation to the exemptions from rent controls. The cabinet secretary talked about mid-market rent and build to rent. Will the provisions cover the private sector as well as housing associations?

Màiri McAllan: The regulations through which the exemptions will be set out—or, at least,

through which it is my intention that they should be set out, because they are subject to the process in Parliament—will consider all the detail that Willie Rennie is asking me about today. For absolute clarity and for accuracy, I will await that process being undertaken before we confirm that. I will be glad to discuss all of that with Willie Rennie and with partners from across the chamber.

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): The housing emergency has been decades in the making, since Thatcherism, and it is the biggest issue for millennials and those younger than that. Therefore, I warmly welcome the significant investment that the Scottish Government has announced today. Does the cabinet secretary agree that both private and public spending on house building is an investment in our national infrastructure, and that we need to approach it with that mindset and focus on quality of build so that we create new buildings that last for many decades? Will the investment that has been announced be targeted in areas with the most pressure on the housing system, such as here in the capital city?

Màiri McAllan: A number of the pots of additional funding that the Government has released in response to the emergency have been directed to the local authorities that have the most sustained temporary accommodation and homelessness pressures. It is my intention that a number of the pots that have been announced today will continue to do that, and I will work with COSLA and local authorities on that.

On the general point, the Scottish Government agreed with the recommendation of the housing investment task force, which published its report in June, that housing should be recognised as critical infrastructure. I hope that Ben Macpherson, in reviewing what is contained in the statement today, will see that I have brought that to bear in the commitments made.

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The affordable housing supply programme budget has increased by only £12 million since 2018-19, which is against the financial backdrop. How does the Scottish Government expect that affordable housing demand will be met when a report from Shelter Scotland, the Chartered Institute of Housing Scotland and the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations found that £900 million a year is needed to meet the affordable housing demand?

Màiri McAllan: That is a reasonable question. There are two points to flag.

First, let us not forget the economic circumstances that we have come through in recent years and the impact that those will have had on value for money and on the affordable

home supply programme's ability to go further in delivering housing. Let us remember that construction inflation reached 24 per cent in summer 2022. All the while, we are dealing with the expectation that Scotland's capital block grant will be reduced by 1.1 per cent in the period up to 2029-30.

Mr Stewart was absolutely right to recognise the difficulties that the Government is wrestling with, many of which are outwith its control, but he will have seen in my statement and from the Scottish Government a determination to overcome them and to ensure that there is sufficient affordable housing for the population of Scotland.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): Can the cabinet secretary advise how tackling the housing emergency by ensuring that families have access to a home will work towards the Scottish Government's core mission of eradicating child poverty?

Màiri McAllan: I can point to a number of statistics and research methodologies, which will be available in time. In general, we all know that having a safe, warm and secure place to call home is absolutely fundamental to a life of dignity and opportunity and to the eradication of child poverty in Scotland. I hope that Rona Mackay will find that that commitment is clear throughout my statement.

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Ind): I welcome the cabinet secretary to her position. A recent report from Shelter Scotland stated that, shockingly, there are more children in temporary accommodation in Edinburgh than there are in temporary accommodation in the whole of Wales. How can our capital city still be in such a crisis a year after we declared a housing emergency, and what will the cabinet secretary do practically to help the City of Edinburgh Council to move on from that situation?

Màiri McAllan: On the question of practical matters, I refer the member to the statement. It takes members through some immediate actions that we are taking, such as investing £40 million of additional funding for acquisitions, investing £2 million in discretionary housing payments in order to support households to move to the private rented sector and, fundamentally, providing a significant uplift in funding for affordable homes, which is coupled with multi-annual certainty on the funding trajectory.

Together, coupled with the other provisions in the plan, those steps are exactly how we will combat the unacceptable situation in Edinburgh, which the member was right to highlight, and in other local authority areas throughout Scotland.

Sharon Dowe (South Scotland) (Con): We all recognise the scale of the housing emergency

and the need to get homes built quickly, but what action is the cabinet secretary taking to unblock housing developments that already have funding and approvals in place but are being held up by Government processes?

Màiri McAllan: I refer Sharon Dowey to our “Planning and the Housing Emergency—Delivery Plan”, which was published last November and against which action continues to be taken, not least our action to remove barriers on stalled housing sites, the placing of our national planning hub, the recruitment of 17 future planners to work with the Scottish Government while they study their master’s degrees in planning and the trebling of the number of bursaries for student planners for this year. Those were our commitments from November, and Sharon Dowey will find a boosting of them in my statement today—not least my intention to create a new notification direction for ministers to observe and oversee how national housing policy is applied.

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Reform): I welcome the cabinet secretary to her position. We have had a couple of very useful discussions over the summer, and I am pleased that she agrees with me on rent controls exemptions.

The cabinet secretary also agrees with me on the need to bring into force Awaab’s law to deal with damp and mould in all rented homes. Will she work with me on a possible amendment to the Housing (Scotland) Bill on that issue at stage 3, and will she tell us what enforcement mechanisms she foresees being introduced to ensure that landlords comply?

Màiri McAllan: Over the summer, I have engaged with Graham Simpson on the Housing (Scotland) Bill’s detail. In advance of stage 3, I intend to continue that engagement with him and with other interested parties across the Parliament.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes the ministerial statement. I will allow a moment or two for front-bench members to organise for the next item of business.

Scottish Government Priorities

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-18671, in the name of John Swinney, on priorities for Scotland.

15:10

The First Minister (John Swinney): We gather today at the start of the fifth and final year of the sixth session of Scotland’s national Parliament—a Parliament that is more than a quarter of a century old, its place anchored at the heart of decision making in Scotland today, a Parliament elected to chart a way forward for Scotland and to wrestle with the challenges that face our people.

In this session of Parliament, our country has faced a number of those challenges, including the lasting effects of the Covid pandemic and the illegal invasion of Ukraine, with its consequences for energy costs and security. In the middle east, we have witnessed, and I have repeatedly condemned, Hamas’s barbaric attacks on 7 October 2023. I also share the concerns of other Governments and other international leaders that the brutal actions of the Israeli Government in Gaza constitute a genocide. That has unleashed widespread suffering and has caused such anguish.

In the United Kingdom, we are seeing the prolonged application of austerity at a time of desperate need to rebuild in our society.

These are difficult days. For many in our society, the implications of those events are that money is tight, prices are rising and hope is in short supply. The danger in such circumstances is that all those difficulties are marshalled together to be made the fault of others in our society, and that some get blamed for supposedly causing those problems. That has been ever present during the summer recess, when migrants have been put in the spotlight and the politics of intolerance has been stoked by some.

Let me be clear, at the outset of this final year of the parliamentary session, that I reject that demonising behaviour. Let me be clear that I intend to defeat the politics of fear and division by offering a clear, principled alternative based on the decent, welcoming values that have served Scotland so well throughout my lifetime. That is why I want to use every opportunity that is available to my Government to give that leadership to Scotland and to deliver improvements in the lives of people in Scotland.

Since becoming First Minister, I have heard loud and clear the desire of the people for effective delivery in Government alongside a meaningful

message of hope. Today I will speak mostly about how we have delivered, how we are delivering and how we will continue to deliver for the people of Scotland in ways that will improve their lives. It is a story of much achieved but more still to do, of a corner that is being turned and of progress that is once again being made.

I will start with the national health service. I often hear my political rivals say that the national health service is broken. I reject that. I say that, thanks to our dedicated staff, Scotland's national health service remains fundamentally strong and an asset for this country. Yes, it has problems, and why would it not, after a decade and more of Westminster austerity, after Brexit and after the foundation-shaking experience of Covid? That is not just my view; it is what the Labour Party says about the NHS in Labour-run Wales.

In Scotland, 97 per cent of people leave hospital with no delay, 95 per cent are registered with an NHS dentist, and 7 million treatments have been delivered since November 2023. Scotland's core accident and emergency system has consistently outperformed that in England and Wales for the past decade, as has been repeated again in the most recent figures. Those are not just numbers: last year, more than 1 million patients were seen within four hours in our accident and emergency system, which is around one patient every 30 seconds in Scotland.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I am sure that everyone across the chamber supports our hard-working NHS staff. However, does the First Minister recognise that his words will come as cold comfort to everyone who has been waiting in line on the phone for a general practitioner appointment this afternoon and to every one of the 2,000 Scots who are stuck in hospital well enough to go home but too frail to do so without a care package? Will he recognise that his words will come as cold comfort to everyone, in general, who is looking for social care in our communities?

The First Minister: Let me address those particular issues. In our programme for government, we promised 150,000 extra appointments and procedures, but we now expect to exceed that and to deliver 213,000, meaning that, in total, we will deliver an extra 300,000 appointments and procedures. That extra capacity means that, right now, in-patient waiting lists are falling, a record number of hip and knee replacements are being carried out, more people are surviving cancer than ever before and the numbers of paramedics and GPs are increasing. There is work to be done, but substantial progress has been made in strengthening the NHS under this Government's leadership of the NHS.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): I totally believe that John Swinney is just making up what he has been saying. There are 900,000 people on waiting lists, which is one in six people in Scotland. What has he got to say to my constituents and everybody else waiting on lists who are in pain?

The First Minister: I am very happy to reinforce the point that I made a moment ago about the extra capacity that means that, right now, in-patient waiting lists are falling in Scotland. I am happy to put that on the record once again for Rachael Hamilton's benefit.

The latest statistics confirm our progress, with planned care activity up, the number of operations performed in July 2025 at the highest level in more than five years, the child and adolescent mental health services waiting time standard met for the third time in a row and the lowest number of eight-hour and 12-hour waits for A and E since September 2023, despite the highest July attendance level for six years.

It is not a broken national health service; it is an NHS that we can be proud of. It is an NHS that, after Covid and after the Government's decision to put record investment into the NHS—record investment, of course, that neither the Labour Party nor the Conservatives in the Parliament supported—is getting better once again. Much has been achieved, but there is much more to do to strengthen the NHS in Scotland.

Thanks to choices made in Scotland, the child poverty rate is now lower than it has been for a decade, despite UK Government actions that have pushed more children below the poverty line. Indeed, if Scotland had the same rate of child poverty as the rest of the UK, an additional 90,000 Scottish children would be in poverty.

Progress has been delivered because of innovative policies—made-in-Scotland policies such as the Scottish child payment—and because of our prioritisation and hard work in bringing people together to ensure that we delivered lower levels of child poverty in Scotland. That has had an effect on our schools, where free school meal provision has been expanded and where the pupil equity fund has enabled 3,000 additional staff to be employed—staff who can work with children to ensure that they have more of the support that they need to thrive.

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): Will the First Minister set out to members how many newly qualified teachers are unemployed this year as a result of the Government's failure to match supply and demand in the teaching workforce?

The First Minister: What has helped in relation to the recruitment of teachers has been the pupil equity funding that we put into the budget and the

increased levels of local government funding that the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government put into the budget, which Pam Duncan-Glaney was unable to vote for when the budget came to Parliament. That did not help one tiny little bit.

The first fruits of our interventions can now be seen, with more Scots from the most deprived areas entering university full time and the poverty-related attainment gap continuing to narrow at all three key qualification levels. Across the board, more and more Scottish children are getting the chance to learn and to grow in skills and confidence, with attainment levels in literacy and numeracy at key stages of primary and secondary school reaching record highs.

There is also progress on the economy. Scotland is by far the fastest-growing start-up economy in the United Kingdom and one of the fastest-growing in Europe. New business incorporations here increased by almost a fifth in the first half of 2025, compared to the final six months of 2024. This remains the best place outside London at attracting overseas investment, with investment in the tech sector alone increasing by a massive 120 per cent between 2020 and 2024.

Wages are up in real terms, unemployment is down and our economy is growing. Much has been achieved, there is more to do and more will, no doubt, be done, because life is tough right now for the people we serve and we are acting to address those concerns.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (Ind): While Norway forges ahead, our oil and gas industry is dying before our very eyes. Will the First Minister at last support it, or will he, like a modern-day Brutus, go down in history as its co-assassin?

The First Minister: The voices that speak to me from the oil and gas sector tell me that the cost regime that is applied by the taxation levels of the United Kingdom Government—which this Government does not support—is undermining investment to sustain activity in the North Sea. This Government is investing heavily in supporting the energy transition that we must make to ensure that we achieve our climate change objectives.

That brings me to my comments about energy. I know that people in Scotland share my frustration that households are not feeling the benefit of the rapid expansion of low-cost renewable energy generation here in Scotland. A clear Scottish policy success is not delivering the savings to consumers that it should, because of policy choices made by successive United Kingdom Governments, and some of what Mr Ewing has just raised with me is relevant in that respect.

Westminster will happily take our energy but will do nothing to lower our energy bills and nothing to give Scottish business the competitive advantage of lower energy costs. That is why Scotland's energy resources should be in Scotland's hands, but that can come only with the control that independence would give to the people of Scotland.

It is my firm belief that our vast, low-cost, renewable energy generation has the capacity to be as transformational for Scotland's economy, and for the wealth of our people, as corporation tax was for Ireland's. It has the capacity to send Scotland on a new, more prosperous course.

The fundamental truth that anchors all my politics is that the people who care most about Scotland, the people who choose to live here, should be the ones setting our nation's course—not politicians in Westminster for whom Scotland is too often just an afterthought.

That principle has been delivered in part by the creation of this Parliament. We have some ability—but limited ability—to shape our nation, but for so long, as big decisions about our budget, our economy, immigration, membership of the European Union, energy, jobs and wages have been taken elsewhere, there has been a brake on what our country can achieve. Westminster choices hold us back when we should be moving forward.

Let us consider immigration. Not having control of immigration means that our national health service and our care homes are facing critical staff shortages. The UK Government has made it more difficult for them to recruit abroad, which impacts on the levels of care that they can offer. It is a completely unnecessary problem that has been manufactured by Westminster's toxic immigration debate, and Westminster policy is doing, and will do, real damage to Scotland's national health service and to our care sector. The solution is a simple one: a Parliament with the power—

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): Will the First Minister accept an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The First Minister is concluding.

The First Minister: I need to bring my remarks to a close.

We need a Parliament with the power to create an immigration policy that works for the people of Scotland.

We move ahead on eradicating child poverty, but then a new Westminster decision pushes us back. We seek to create jobs and boost prosperity, but a clumsy, ill-judged Westminster national insurance tax grab pushes businesses to the brink.

The Scottish Government will do everything that we can within our powers to secure the future of the people of Scotland and improve their lives, but make no mistake—this country needs to have the full powers of independence to transform the lives of our people, and this Government is going to work to deliver exactly that.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the Scottish Government's continued focus on its four key priorities of eradicating child poverty, tackling the climate emergency, growing the economy, and ensuring high-quality and sustainable public services; recognises that the delivery of these priorities is within the significant constraints of a constitutional settlement that hampers achieving those priorities due to the policy decisions of UK Conservative and Labour administrations, and recognises that it is only by choosing independence that Scotland can get the fresh start that its people need and deserve.

15:25

Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con): In just over eight months' time, this parliamentary session will come to an end. Over the past four years, Parliament's achievements have been too few and its mistakes too many. Barely anything has been done to encourage the economic growth that powers our country and pays the bills. Little effort has been made to create jobs. There has been next to no consideration about how to make life easier for workers and businesses, or to give families a helping hand with ever-rising bills.

This Government has nurtured a culture of anti-aspiration, holding back those who want to get on. In this time, when people have looked at Holyrood, they have been dismayed at what they have seen. They watched as the Scottish National Party passed extreme gender legislation. They watched the disastrous attempt at a deposit return scheme, which harmed business and hammered taxpayers. They watched the SNP target free speech, criminalising what can be said in one's own home. They watched it fail to build two ferries and to stem the desperate death toll from drugs, as today's figures show.

Why does almost everything that Holyrood touches go so badly wrong? Why does it waste so much time debating things that are either outwith its remit or really not that important? All the while, it neglects the issues—the real issues—that it has the power to change. Whatever John Swinney claimed today, the blunt reality is that this Parliament has not focused on what people truly care about. It has not made it any easier to get a GP appointment. It has not fixed dangerous roads. It has not raised school standards. In short, Holyrood has not focused on Scotland's priorities.

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government (Shona Robison): Does Russell

Findlay think that this line of argument keeps both his MSPs and the population voting for him, given that he is at record low levels at the moment? Do you think that this is working for you and for your party?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Always speak through the chair.

Russell Findlay: Let us talk about this Parliament and what it can do—or, rather, what it is not doing because of this Government. It does not look at the interests of those who are aspirational or ambitious, nor at the priorities of workers and businesses, nor at the priorities of—frankly—anyone in mainstream Scotland who just wants politicians to show some basic common sense.

Since becoming an MSP in 2021, I have been struck by how disconnected this place is from the real world. I became a politician to get things done and to try to make a difference to people's lives, but if we asked the average person what Holyrood has done to help them in the past four years, I do not think that we would get a positive answer. We should pose that question to small business owners in Perth or Peebles who are struggling to stay afloat; to high-street workers in Dumfriesshire or Ayrshire who are trying to get a mortgage; to families in Glasgow and Edinburgh who work around the clock to make ends meet while others stay idle only to get things handed to them on a plate; to oil and gas workers in the north-east, where I was this morning, and those at Grangemouth who think that this Government would rather that they lost their jobs; and to young people leaving school across Scotland who despair at the lack of opportunity.

The First Minister: Let me give Mr Findlay a flavour of some of the practical things that the Government is doing to help people with the cost of living challenges that they face. Council tax bills are generally 30 per cent lower and water bills 20 per cent lower than those south of the border. Yesterday, we abolished peak rail fares, which will halve the cost of rail journeys for the average commuter between Edinburgh and Glasgow every single day. Mr Findlay mentioned small businesses in Perth. Many small businesses in Perth will benefit from the small business bonus scheme that this Government voted for in the budget, but which Mr Findlay never voted for in the budget. That is just a flavour of what the Government is doing to protect people's incomes.

Russell Findlay: That was a bit of a long intervention. I am very glad that the First Minister listened to the Scottish Conservatives last December when they called for the end of peak rail fares. That was very good of him. However, he should also stop hammering households and

businesses with additional tax and additional red tape.

The Parliament must face up to the fact that the public agree on one thing: this place is not working for them. We are all elected to serve the interests of the public. In the short time before the next election, it is time that we started to do so.

My party is the only one that is willing to stand up and admit to our mistakes, say plainly what we need to do better—*[Interruption.]*

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Neil Gray): Mistakes such as backing Liz Truss.

Russell Findlay: We are really not the only ones, Neil Gray, who should be doing that.

Neil Gray: I did not back Liz Truss.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary, please desist.

Russell Findlay: He is very noisy when he is sat down—he has a big mouth when he is sat down.

The only way that any of us will win back public trust and earn the right to represent people is if we do things differently. In the eight months ahead, the Parliament has the opportunity to do that, rather than fritter away endless time on debates that achieve nothing except for letting MSPs feel good about themselves. We need to use that time to kick-start Scotland's economy and get it growing again. We must make that a top priority. The focus of the Parliament should be on the creation of jobs and the expansion of business. We have to create the conditions for Scotland's economic renewal, repair the relationship between Parliament and business, and nurture an environment in which more people have the confidence to start a business. More of the same from John Swinney is just not an option.

Members must look at where we are now. Four out of every five small and medium-sized enterprises in Scotland believe that their very survival is at risk over the next 12 months. Just one in 10 Scottish firms thinks that the Scottish Government understands the business environment. A report from the Confederation of British Industry and the Fraser of Allander Institute found that the Scottish economy is struggling to keep pace with the UK-wide economy on almost every metric.

John Swinney knows only how to squeeze more out of workers and businesses while imposing more rules that stifle innovation and expansion. For more than 18 years of SNP rule, our economy has been in decline. The business community feels overlooked or ignored. Workers do not get new opportunities from the SNP—just higher bills.

The entire SNP economic model is at breaking point. Our country cannot afford to keep spending so much on a huge and unreformed public sector and an ever-growing benefits bill.

It is unsustainable to always take more and spend more. It is unfair to expect people to continually forfeit more of their own hard-earned money just to watch Holyrood politicians throw it down the drain. More of the same reckless agenda from John Swinney risks the solvency of Scotland. The SNP needs to abandon the folly of its economics, which prioritise abstract and woke thinking—does anyone really know what the wellbeing economy actually is?

The only way to change is to put our focus instead on Scotland's economic renewal. Opportunity and aspiration, productivity and profit—that is where my party stands. We are going to reconnect with the astute values of mainstream Scotland.

Fergus Ewing: *[Made a request to intervene.]*

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

Russell Findlay: We will focus on efficient spending, champion self-reliance, demand freedom for people to aspire and to succeed, and bring forward common-sense solutions to cut red tape.

A thriving economy gives us a chance to fix public services. A failing economy will mean only more of the same, from what is a failing Government. That is the choice that the Parliament faces over the next eight months: take the path towards prosperity or stay on the SNP's road to nowhere. That is the choice that the country will face next year: a continued slide into stagnation under the SNP or a new way forward for the common good.

I move amendment S6M-18671.4, to leave out from "welcomes" to end and insert:

"recognises that the Scottish Government has failed to take action on the priorities of taxpayers, like cutting NHS waiting lists, fixing crumbling roads and stimulating economic growth; acknowledges that, despite repeatedly raising taxes, public services have not improved in Scotland; laments that, increasingly, the Scottish Government has focused on its obsession with independence, as well as fringe issues like gender reform and subjects wholly outside its remit like foreign affairs; notes with concern that Scotland continues to have a bloated public sector, with a huge number of quangos that often have overlapping functions and remits; argues that public money would be better spent being diverted to frontline services rather than on the bureaucratic state, and calls for the Scottish Ministers to prioritise economic growth and improving public services rather than yet another push for an independence referendum."

15:34

Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): I welcome all members back to the chamber for the new session. It may be a new session, but, for this knackered SNP Government, it is the same old script and the same old tired voices. No matter how much John Swinney shouts about hope and delivery, the truth is that he is hopeless at delivery—and Scotland can see it.

As much as he tries to reheat and rehash the same old playbook, the difference now is that Scots can see right through him. John Swinney talks of his priorities for Scotland, but, in his own motion, he claims that the only way that he can deliver on those priorities is—surprise, surprise—through independence.

I want to give John Swinney credit, however. He is a politician of rare consistency. The guy has been in the Government for almost 20 years and, over all that time, throughout his entire career, he has pleaded powerlessness over his inability to improve Scotland. His answer to every hard question remains the same: he blames somebody else or talks about independence. But while he continues to beat that drum, the people of Scotland are paying the price of his and his Government's inaction.

This Government's inaction is clear for all to see, across all of John Swinney's stated, claimed priorities.

The First Minister: In my speech, I quoted the statistic that if Scotland had the same level of child poverty as the rest of the United Kingdom, 90,000 more children would be living in poverty in Scotland today. Our figures are the result of the actions that this Parliament and this Government have taken to keep children out of poverty. Why cannot Mr Sarwar see the value of that impact on the lives of children in Scotland? Why is he prepared to support a Labour Government that is pushing child poverty in the opposite direction to the one that it should be going in?

Anas Sarwar: I welcome the Scottish child payment, which we have continually supported. However, this Government is failing to challenge structural poverty, which I will come on to in a moment.

Let us take our public services. On John Swinney's watch, our public services are in utter disarray. Almost 900,000 Scots are on NHS waiting lists and more than 100,000 Scots are waiting more than a year for treatment. The number of cancer deaths is rising. A and E waits remain dangerously long, and former routine services such as dentistry and hip and knee replacements are slowly being privatised due to the failure of the SNP to provide the level of services that people need. The health secretary is

saying, from a sedentary position, "No, they're not." However, every single week, Scottish families are forced to empty their savings or remortgage their homes to pay for medical treatment, and the responsibility for that lies with John Swinney and the SNP Government.

Neil Gray: Will Anas Sarwar give way?

Anas Sarwar: If the health secretary wants to stand up and apologise, he is free to do so.

Neil Gray: As I pointed out to Jackie Baillie earlier, the rate of private operations in the health service is 54 per cent lower in Scotland than in the NHS in England.

Does Anas Sarwar support his UK Government colleagues' reducing the number of health and care visas being approved by 77 per cent over the past year? How does he think that that and threatening the deportation of social care workers in Scotland will help health and social care services in Scotland?

Anas Sarwar: There we go again—the same old playbook: blame somebody else. The harsh fact is that 40 per cent of the hip and knee replacements that happen in our country happen in the private sector because of this SNP Government's incompetence.

Our schools are also feeling the strain after two decades of the SNP. The poverty-related attainment gap stubbornly persists, teacher numbers have been decimated across Scotland, and teachers, pupils and parents are fearing for their safety as discipline breaks down in schools across Scotland—and again this Government turns a blind eye.

John Swinney mentioned tackling child poverty, but we all know that we cannot properly tackle poverty unless we address the structural issues, one of which is the need to ensure that people have safe and secure homes to live in. Under the SNP, for too many Scots, that is not the case. We are in the midst of a housing emergency. Record numbers of homeless children are being left to spend their nights in hotels and bed and breakfasts, and house building completions are at a record low. A generation of young Scots feel totally frozen out of the housing market, with home ownership an unattainable dream. Again, the responsibility for that lies with John Swinney and this SNP Government.

Just this morning, the human cost of SNP failure was demonstrated again. There have been 1,017 deaths from drug abuse in the past year and 6,000 such deaths since the drugs crisis was declared. The rate of drug deaths is still three times higher in Scotland than in the rest of the UK and is the highest rate in Europe. Every single one of those deaths is avoidable—precious lives lost needlessly

because of the scourge of drugs. Again, some of that relates to this Government cutting the number of rehab beds, cutting our hard-pressed police and so much more. Again, the responsibility lies with John Swinney and this SNP Government.

We all know that John Swinney has only one priority in the next eight months—to somehow try to cling on to power—and he is going to use the independence card to keep his knackered, failing Government in power. He is not interested in improving people's lives today, fixing services tomorrow or making Scotland a better place any time soon; he is just desperately talking about independence—but why is he doing it? John Swinney is many things, but he is not daft. He has been in this game a very long time and he knows that he cannot stand in the election on his record, because Scots have had enough. That is why he wants to make the election about independence—not because he believes that he can achieve it, nor because he thinks that the SNP can win a majority, but because he thinks that it is the only way that he can keep enough people together to sneak over the line and cling on to power. It is cynical, it is desperate and it is John Swinney all over, but I do not believe that it will work, because Scots are canny and can see right through it. *[Interruption.]*

John Swinney shouts about focus groups, but the focus groups say, “You guys are out and getting beat,” because whether Scots voted yes or no, people have had enough. They want a Government that gets back to basics—that fixes the NHS, schools and transport—and they know that the SNP is failing on every measure. John Swinney wants to talk about focus groups. Ask the people of Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse who helped to beat the SNP. Ask the people in Barrhead who helped to beat the SNP. I promise that, in Scotland next year, they will help us to beat the SNP all over again, because, after nearly two decades, Scotland is crying out for a new direction.

People want a Government that will fix public services and get the basics right. They want a Government that shares their ambitions for Scotland's future. We will tackle the housing crisis by actually building the homes; we will get our businesses growing by backing entrepreneurship; we will stop the antisocial behaviour in our schools by banning mobile phones, supporting teachers and supporting our communities; and we will fix our NHS by taking on the bureaucrats, empowering doctors and pulling out all the stops to clear the backlogs. That is the new direction that Scotland needs—new thinking, new ideas and new leadership, not the same old arguments from the same old knackered SNP.

I move amendment S6M-18671.2, to leave out from “welcomes” to end and insert:

“notes that the Scottish National Party (SNP) administration has overseen the development of a housing emergency, allowed NHS waiting lists to soar, leading to a two-tier system with those who can afford to pay going private, been forced to scrap its legal climate change targets due to its own inaction, wasted billions of pounds of public money through incompetence and bureaucracy, and stood by while school standards declined; recognises that SNP incompetence means that people in Scotland are not feeling the benefits of the £5.2 billion in additional funding delivered by the UK Labour administration, which is working to restore public services and kickstart economic growth, and believes that Scotland is a country that is full of potential but that it is being failed by the SNP administration, and that, at the election in 2026, people in Scotland can choose a new administration that shares their ambitions and works to deliver the services that they deserve.”

15:42

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): We have a lot to be proud of. The Scottish Greens certainly have a lot to be proud of in this session of Parliament so far: the removal of peak rail fares, which will save commuters hundreds—and, in some cases, thousands—of pounds; the fact that this is the only part of the UK where child poverty is going down; and the fact that, just two weeks ago, when the schools started again, there were 6,000 more children eligible for free school meals as a result of agreements made in this Parliament.

However, we cannot deny the fact that people are angry. Communities are being pulled apart and families feel unhappy, and it is because their lives are not getting better. This country is not working for them. Whether it is the cost of living or the climate crisis, it is not because the systems are broken—it is because they are rigged. That is what we need to change. To change it, we need to take on those who have rigged the system. We need to take on the super-rich, the big polluters and the greedy landlords.

My message to the people of Scotland is that the Scottish Green Party is on your side. We are fighting your corner. There are too many politicians—including in the chamber now—who are whipping up hatred in our communities and who are lying to the public about who the enemy is. Trans people and asylum seekers are not the problem. They did not sell off the community centres, privatise the buses or increase rents. We will take on the bigots and the conmen who are directing that anger at the most vulnerable in our society and we will direct it at those who are often bankrolled by the people who are really at fault—the people who have rigged the system. This country is not working for ordinary people because it was not designed to, and I want to change that.

I am proud of the Greens' track record on changing the system. We have taken every opportunity to rebalance the scales in favour of our planet and ordinary people. We are delivering rent controls, taking power from the haves and giving it to the have-nots. We stand up for Scotland's natural heritage against corporate greed, as in our campaign to protect Loch Lomond from Flamingo Land. We have fundamentally transferred wealth in this society, taxing those who can afford it in order to extend the Scottish child payment and free school meals, to deliver free bus travel for young people and to buck the UK-wide trend of rising child poverty. I am proud that we have done that through co-operation with colleagues in the SNP, but there is so much more to do.

That is why the Green amendment focuses on our public finances and tax. It is outrageous that—as the Scottish Government confirmed last week—the richest 2 per cent of households in this country have more wealth than the bottom 50 per cent. This morning, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government agreed with me that that is not good enough, but the Scottish Government does not appear to have a plan to go any further on wealth redistribution.

I am proud of what we have already done together, but it is clear that more is needed. We cannot lift more children out of poverty, cut emissions or hire more hospital staff without the money to pay for it. People are sick of politicians with big promises but little follow-through and absolutely no plan to pay for what they have committed to.

The Greens have a plan, because we are brave enough to be honest with the electorate that a better society needs to be paid for and that the wealthiest people can afford to pay, and should be paying, far more.

Despite the doomsday predictions over most of the past decade, changes in our tax policy that the Greens have delivered have worked, and they are popular. Our income tax changes mean that, this year alone, there is £1.7 billion more to deliver for public services such as our schools, hospitals and public transport.

We have doubled the additional dwelling supplement, taking on the buy-to-let landlords—in particular, short-term let landlords—and freeing up thousands of homes for young families to live in, while raising £0.25 billion to invest in public services. We have delivered more powers for local government, including the visitor levy, which will raise millions of pounds to deliver on the issues that people really care about, such as the quality of their roads and pavements and their libraries and schools.

We need to recognise that it is no wonder that people are angry when they see a hugely wealthy country—Scotland is one of the wealthiest countries in the history of the world—yet they still cannot afford to take their children on a holiday or even buy new school uniforms and they cannot afford their rent. That is why the Green amendment

“calls ... on the Scottish Government to make bold use of its existing tax-raising powers, including the creation of new revenue-raising mechanisms for local government.”

That means fixing our broken council tax system. It cannot be right that the poorest households are paying the highest share of their income in council tax or that we have a tax system in which more than half of all households in this country are paying the wrong rate—a system that is based on property values from before I was even born.

I say to the Scottish Government, in response to its line that we can achieve council tax reform only through consensus, that that is not going to work. There is no prospect of consensus, particularly as we look ahead to the next session of Parliament. However, there is a majority to deliver council tax reform if the Government is brave enough to lead that majority.

It is absolutely true that Scotland has done more than any other UK nation to tackle child poverty and the climate emergency, but it is also true that we are still not doing enough on either of those issues. Indeed, on climate action, the Government's ambitions are being scaled back. Scotland needs MSPs and Government ministers who are bold and brave enough to take on those who have rigged the system: the super rich and the big polluters. Only by doing that can we defeat the forces of hate who are exploiting our communities and build the fairer, greener society that the vast majority of people in Scotland want to see.

I move amendment S6M-18671.3, to insert at end:

“; is concerned that Scottish Government action to tackle the climate emergency has been scaled back, that targets for reducing child poverty have been missed and that the wealthiest 2% of households in Scotland hold more wealth than the bottom 50%; recognises that tackling the climate emergency, eradicating child poverty and ensuring high-quality and sustainable public services will require further redistribution of wealth, and calls, therefore, on the Scottish Government to make bold use of its existing tax-raising powers, including the creation of new revenue-raising mechanisms for local government.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members who wish to speak in the debate to check that they have, in fact, pressed their request-to-speak button.

15:49

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): Before I start, I associate myself with the First Minister's remarks about the situation in Gaza; the scenes that we have seen unfolding there, in particular this summer, should strike a humanitarian chord with every member in the chamber.

From Stranraer to Shetland and from Skye to St Andrews, Scotland has so much going for it, but everywhere you go, people say that right now, things feel broken. If you talk to people the length and breadth of the country about how they are feeling, they say that they are tired and frustrated, and they are right to be.

They will not stand for the protestations by this First Minister, who, in addressing my intervention, effectively took to the words of Jim Callaghan—"Crisis? What crisis?" It is all around him. It can take weeks to see a GP. You are lucky if you can find an NHS dentist locally. The waits for many operations and treatments are measured out in years. People are stuck in hospital because they cannot get a care home place or the support that they need to live back at home. Islanders are fed up of ferry cancellations. Communities are fed up of dangerous roads, such as the A9—the backbone of the Perthshire and Highland communities—which finishes each year with a body count. Families worry about violence at school and the lack of support for pupils who need it, and about whether they can find childcare that fits around their work.

Fergus Ewing: I am pleased that Alex Cole-Hamilton mentioned the A9. At the forthcoming election, will the Liberals include a manifesto commitment to dual the A9 from Inverness to Perth and to bring forward, if possible, the completion of that dualling before the planned date of 2035?

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I am grateful to Fergus Ewing, and I also make the same commitment for the A96.

To put it simply, if the M8 were killing upwards of 10 people every year, it would be dualled by Christmas, yet Highlanders have had to wait for nearly 20 years of commitment after commitment but have not seen that vital road dualled. People deserve better, and Scotland deserves better.

Nearly two decades into SNP rule, for many people, it feels like our country simply is not working as it should be and as it used to. The SNP has had long enough. We know that the only thing that will truly bring about the change that Scotland needs is a change of Government. Scotland needs change, and it needs to be change with fairness at its heart—fairness for everyone, no matter who you are or where you come from.

Liberal Democrats will always hold this Government to account, but we will also roll up our sleeves and get things done. That is what our councillors and MSPs and our record-breaking 72 Liberal Democrat MPs are doing.

For us, the number 1 issue—for both the remainder of this parliamentary session and the coming election—is the NHS and care in our communities. The equivalent of one in six Scots is now stuck on a waiting list. That means months of pain, anxiety and lost time. Liberal Democrats would invest in a first-rate health service so that people can see a GP or dentist when they need them. It is not hard to imagine a time when we used to have that, and that should be the aspiration now. We would deliver faster access to mental health treatment because nobody should be left waiting years for help.

All those waits are holding people back. They are holding growth back and they are holding our country back. On doorsteps across Scotland, families tell me the same story—their bills are soaring, their money does not go as far as it used to, and they are struggling to get by. We would tackle that head on with a national programme of insulation to bring warmth to the homes of Scotland and to bring down stubbornly high fuel costs.

We also want local communities to truly benefit from renewables projects in their areas, so that people actually see the gains from Scotland's energy wealth. To be shivering in the shadow of a wind turbine and unable to heat your home is not a fair deal when you live in a part of the country that is a powerhouse of the renewables revolution that will move us to net zero and guarantee energy security for all those islands. Jobs in the trades, warmer homes, lower bills—those are the practical differences that a competent Government can make.

It is 10 years since Nicola Sturgeon promised to close the poverty-related attainment gap. It was the number 1 priority—the yardstick—of SNP Government. However, Scottish education has fallen further down the international rankings. Parents and teachers are increasingly worried about what is happening in classrooms, especially about the violence. Workforce planning is a mess, which is leaving good teachers out of work.

The progress on closing that yawning attainment gap has been minuscule. We urgently need a plan to drive up education performance and improve outcomes for our young people. It means recruiting and retaining great teachers properly, supporting pupils with additional support needs and ensuring that every child gets the best possible start in life.

I am not given to quoting Kemi Badenoch, but I will do so now. She said that the Lib Dems are in local communities and that

“A typical Liberal Democrat will be somebody who is good at fixing their church roof.”

She is sneering at the Lib Dems for being a party that will come and fix your church roof and be in your local community, but that is something that we hold as a badge of honour. Her words show exactly why the Conservatives have lost the public's trust. Many people who once backed Ruth Davidson are completely scunnered at what that party has turned into.

We will be the champions for every town and village in Scotland. We will be champions who will fight for carers, for those who are waiting for operations or care packages, for families who want to see a GP without weeks of delay, for parents who want the best for their children and for businesses that want to see a customs union and youth mobility scheme to fix our broken relationship with Europe.

People are tired of political spin and constant division. They want competence, compassion and care. This is what the Liberal Democrats stand for: thousands of seemingly tiny acts of public service up and down this country, working to make our communities better, to fix what is broken, to build anew and to protect liberal values at home and abroad. This is how we restore hope in our communities and trust in our politics: by fighting for change with fairness at its heart. Scotland deserves better, and the Liberal Democrats are ready to deliver that.

I move amendment S6M-18671.1, to leave out from “welcomes” to end and insert:

“recognises that people feel let down and frustrated, and considers that Scotland deserves better than the current Scottish National Party administration; calls for first-rate healthcare, help with the cost of living, more support for pupils to help get Scottish education back to its best, and an end to the ferries fiasco, and believes that Scotland needs change with fairness at its heart.”

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

15:55

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): I am glad to be back in the Parliament. I am positive about the future of Scotland and about how we can make things better. It was good to hear the First Minister tell us about his positive ideas to make Scotland better, even with the challenges that we have to deal with.

On the other side of that, for politics to be better, we need to get something better from the Opposition, because the Opposition—both Tory and Labour—is extremely negative about

everything. There is no idea of what they will do. Anas Sarwar has gone from talking about “change”—within a year of the UK Labour Government there has been no change; things just got worse—to talking about “a new direction”; that seems to be his new one. It seems that they have got nae direction whatsoever, because we never hear one thing about what they will do and what they will try to achieve. That is what the people want to hear—the public want to know what you are doing as the Government and how you are achieving things. They do not want to hear or listen to the spin from Labour and the Tories; they want to hear real issues and ideas come to fruition.

The First Minister was right to remind us that, as we came into this parliamentary session, we were going through the end game with Covid, and how difficult that was. Even when we were back in the chamber, we were still a metre apart from one another. For the first year of the session, the Parliament did not operate in the way that it should have. For anyone to brush off the challenge of coming out of Covid is complete and utter nonsense, because that would be a challenge for any Government and it is one that everyone else in the world is dealing with.

The First Minister mentioned Ukraine and the genocide that is happening in Gaza. To those who say that the Scottish Parliament should not talk about what is going on in Gaza, I say: take a long, hard look at yourself and think about what kind of person you are when you can see what is happening in that country and you do not want to talk about it when, as a politician, you have an opportunity to do so. You need to take a look at yourself and move on. Scotland has a voice and a role in the world, and using that is what we in the SNP are all about.

The First Minister is right that what has happened over the summer period regarding the demonisation of some in the community is absolutely disgraceful and needs to be called out. We have seen this before in history, when those on the right attack minority groups—they have done it before and it is a game plan that they use all the time. That should be called out on every single occasion.

This year, we move forward towards the election. It will be no surprise when I say that I come from Paisley. My fellow buddies and I speak in a pretty plain and straight manner—there are no airs and graces. I will tell a story that is connected to the way in which we think and do things. A while ago, I was doing the Paisley 10k and, at this stage, I was walking through Ferguslie Park. A woman in her garden articulated her point of view to me about the fact that I was not running and said that I should go a bit faster. I cannot use the

language that she used, because parliamentary protocol would not allow me to, but she motivated me to move forward.

We do not dress things up in Paisley; we tell it how it is. We always look for solutions to the challenges and problems. If a wean is hungry, we feed them; if the hoose is cold, we heat it; if something is broken, we fix it. That is the way that our town and the people in my area have been thinking for all their days. I cannot be someone who does not think or work that way. There are difficulties and challenges, but we must find a solution. What makes us relevant when we speak to the public is looking at the job in hand and getting on with it.

Compare all that with the approach that is taken by those in Westminster. When people say that they need help, they do not find a solution or try to solve the issue. They do not find ways to help to feed them, to heat their homes or to fix things. Instead, they point, shout and hope that nobody notices the mess that they have left. They blame one other and others. Like a typical bully, they blame the easy target—those who cannot defend themselves.

In Scotland, we see action; in Westminster, we see distraction. That is the fundamental difference. I am not interested in playing Westminster's type of game, but I am interested in what delivers for the people of Paisley and of Scotland. That is what is important to me, and it should be important to every member in the chamber.

For me, the major difference between the two Governments is that our SNP Government is focused on the four big issues: ending child poverty; growing the economy; investing in public services and tackling the climate emergency. Those are not slogans or soundbites. Tackling those issues requires hard work, and our hard-working Scottish Government is actually doing that for people.

Let us take the issue of child poverty. More than 326,000 children are supported through the Scottish child payment. That is more money into families' pockets. Meanwhile, Westminster is still clinging to its cruel two-child benefit cap. That policy is so daft that even the Government's back benchers cannot support it. So far, Scotland's Government has given £1 billion to families who need it, whereas Westminster offers nothing but austerity.

Scotland is bucking the trend, while the UK is stuck in reverse gear. It makes us wonder what the point of the UK is. Our economy in Scotland has outperformed the UK again, we are top for inward investment outside London and we have tripled green jobs since 2021. While we are

building an economy for the future, Westminster is running an economic circus.

When it comes to the problems with the climate, Westminster still cannot decide whether climate change is a real thing or just another culture war to fight on "GB News". I cannot be bothered with that nonsense.

The choice is simple: people can stick with Westminster or they can build a future with an independent Scotland in which the Scottish people make the decisions for Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): I advise members that we are well over time. I will keep members to their time limits.

16:01

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): The topic that is before us today is Scotland's priorities. I am sure that we will all contest exactly what those are. Each party will put forward its own interpretation of the issues that deserve the most attention, but, in truth, the priorities of most Scots have not changed in the 18 years since the SNP came to power. The things that mattered most to people then still matter most to them now. The overwhelming majority of the public do not care about fringe obsessions such as gender, and they do not see independence as a big issue that needs action.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I am sure that the member would agree that one of the great achievements not just of the SNP but of the Parliament was the reopening of the Borders railway, which will celebrate its 10th anniversary on Saturday. Things have been delivered for the people of Scotland.

Rachael Hamilton: I very much look forward to joining Christine Grahame to celebrate the 10th anniversary. I have always been a supporter of the Borders railway.

People do not sit at home discussing small-time topics such as pardons for witches—unless, of course, they are saying, "Can you believe that Holyrood actually spoke about such things?" As Russell Findlay said, what people want is for politicians to show basic common sense. They wanted that in 2007, and that is what they need now. In 18 years of SNP rule, they have not had that. They did not get it under Alex Salmond, Nicola Sturgeon or Humza Yousaf. They are not getting it under John Swinney, either—the man who has been sitting around the Cabinet table for all but one of those 18 years. He was the right-hand man for almost all of his predecessors' time in office, and he very much represents more of the same SNP way that has let Scotland down for

decades. He will not do anything about Scotland's top priorities, because he never has.

If John Swinney finally wants to change course and do things differently, as he has been promising today, Scotland's current top priority, just as it was in 2008, is to have a thriving and growing economy. We know that a prosperous economy is the key to increasing tax revenues and providing more investment for much-needed improvement in our public services. Without higher economic growth, we will never have the funds to reduce NHS waiting lists, on which I intervened on the First Minister earlier, or to invest in more teachers and sort out the attainment gap that other members raised in their earlier interventions.

The economy is the crucial bedrock on which everything else is built, but, under the SNP, it is way down the list of its priorities. On the nationalists' watch, businesses do not feel that they have a say in what happens. Barely any companies think that the Government understands their business. Companies are regularly disadvantaged compared with their competitors south of the border, as happened when the SNP refused to pass on the hundreds of millions of pounds-worth of business rates relief that the UK Government provided.

For a few years, the SNP even brought into government a party that does not believe in economic growth and sees it as a bad thing. It was the First Minister who infamously helped to negotiate the deal to bring the extreme Greens into government. The Greens might be gone, but their influence remains, and the SNP has been pursuing the same disastrous approach for years now: setting higher taxes, introducing more regulation, taking more of people's hard-earned money but providing less in return, limiting innovation and curtailing opportunities.

Fergus Ewing: Does Rachael Hamilton agree that the windfall tax must be either abolished or substantially reduced? Otherwise, we will see that industry die before our very eyes.

Rachael Hamilton: I am grateful to Fergus Ewing for the intervention, because I know that he is a huge advocate for the north-east's oil and gas sector, as are the Scottish Conservatives. We know that if we do not issue extraction licences and get oil and gas out of the ground, those energy forms will become more unaffordable. People will have less in their pockets to spend and will see their household energy bills go up. It is therefore very important that we support that sector.

Things need to change, and they need to change fast. The SNP must do things differently and put our economy at the top of the agenda. That is why, in the months ahead, my party will

call for—and will stand for—there to be a renewed focus on effective spending, for innovators to be encouraged to start and to grow businesses, and for more high-quality jobs to be brought to Scotland.

On Fergus Ewing's point, we want those thousands of jobs in the north-east to be protected so that workers can transition as we move towards our net zero target, because it is they who have the required skills, experience and knowledge.

We want less red tape for businesses. It is not only Scottish Conservatives who are saying that—it is the businesses themselves. We do not want people wasting their time by filling out paperwork. We want the expansion of opportunities to ambitious and aspirational Scots, whose expectations the SNP is not meeting now. As I have just mentioned, we want lower bills so that families can decide how to spend more of their own money.

By putting our economy first, there will be more revenue to give to the education system and to increase our rankings in the international league.

I do not have more time, so I will come to a close. To summarise, our economy, our education system and our NHS cannot tolerate any more of this failing SNP Government.

16:08

Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP): Today, too many households are still struggling with the cost of food, energy bills and everyday essentials. Decisions that are taken at Westminster continue to make life more difficult for families, communities and businesses across the country. They have faced years of austerity, a hard Brexit that has been imposed on Scotland, and completely and utterly catastrophic economic mismanagement by successive UK Governments.

No doubt my Scottish Labour colleagues who sit to my right will again try to distance themselves from the billions of pounds-worth of cuts made by their UK Labour colleagues, but I will set the scene with a quick rundown of just some of their greatest hits. They have refused to end the two-child benefit cap, and so have pushed more children into poverty. They have blocked compensation for the women against state pension inequality—the WASPI women. They have slashed international aid. They have tried to introduce billions of pounds-worth of cuts to disabled people and imposed a tax on jobs and public services by hiking employer national insurance contributions. The pockets of the young, the poor, the disabled and the elderly have been raided under Labour, and speculation is mounting that the Chancellor of the Exchequer is set to announce another wave of tax rises and spending cuts.

We are only just into September, and I am already hearing from constituents who are worried about yet another rise in energy bills. Those are the same constituents who had Labour leaflets pushed through their doors, promising that their bills would go down by £300.

Today, I will expand on one of those points: child poverty. The persistence of child poverty is testament to how families across the UK and the whole of Scotland have been absolutely failed by Westminster. It should be a mark of shame for the Labour Government that child poverty is rising in the rest of the UK and is expected to hit record highs by the end of this Westminster session.

Meanwhile, in Scotland, the First Minister has said that the eradication of child poverty is his single most important objective, and the Scottish Government is taking action and turning the tide. Organisations such as the Joseph Rowntree Foundation have highlighted SNP policies such as the Scottish child payment and the mitigation of the two-child limit as ones that see Scotland bucking the trend.

Research led by Professor Ruth Patrick shows that the Labour Westminster Government could cut child poverty in the UK by a sixth if it were to match Scotland's investment in social security. That represents 700,000 children who would be lifted out of poverty overnight. We have to ask the question: what is stopping the Labour Government? The progress that Scotland has made on driving down poverty rates shows that another way is possible if the political will is there.

Last week, I visited Rutherglen and Cambuslang Foodbank in my constituency to meet the new manager and to learn more about its upcoming move. With that visit and today's debate in mind, I was very interested to read a report on the Scottish child payment that the Trussell Trust commissioned from the Fraser of Allander Institute. The Trussell Trust praised the payment as an example of

"an important lever for reducing the need for food banks"

by lifting families out of the deep poverty that leads to their use.

The report found evidence that the Scottish child payment

"successfully reduced food bank usage"

for single-adult households with children, households with three or more children and those with children aged five to 16. Although that research was exploratory in nature, the results are very promising and give us reason for optimism for when larger data sets are available. We are talking about breaking cycles of deep poverty and allowing families not just to pay for essential items

and live with more dignity and freedom but to participate in more opportunities and to thrive.

In South Lanarkshire, where my Rutherglen constituency is based, more than 20,000 children and young people are benefiting from the Scottish child payment. More than 21,500 children and young people received best start grant and best start food payments. Those are families in our communities who are getting money directly in their pockets, which eases their household pressures. That is what tackling child poverty head on looks like. Although Labour continues to sit on its hands at Westminster, refusing to reverse the cruel two-child cap, which is widely recognised as one of the biggest drivers of child poverty, the SNP has taken action to effectively scrap that cruel policy in Scotland from next March.

With the powers available to us via this Parliament, the SNP Government is taking action to keep more money in people's pockets through these tough times. Whether we are talking about social security support that is available only in Scotland, the expansion of free school meals, funded childcare worth £6,000 per year, free prescriptions and eye appointments, free university tuition, free bus travel for 2.3 million people or scrapping peak rail fares, that action is making a difference to families across the country. The SNP Government is saving people money, but the UK Government is doing nothing to help people in our communities with soaring bills. This is a story of action versus distraction, and the SNP has chosen action, which demonstrates what happens when decisions for Scotland can be—and are—made in Scotland.

As an independent nation, we could do so much more, and that is what the SNP is fighting for. Through our actions and our vision over the next year, we will show that independence is the fresh start that Scotland needs.

16:13

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to debate Scotland's priorities. Eradicating child poverty, confronting the climate emergency, growing a stronger economy and sustaining high-quality public services are ambitions shared across the chamber, but the real test is not whether those aims are worthy but whether they are being delivered. The sad reality is that they are not, and the people of Scotland know it.

The SNP has had nearly two decades to lift children out of poverty, yet persistent child poverty is up. It has had two decades to confront the climate emergency, but it has missed its climate targets. It has had two decades to grow the economy, but it has overseen huge skills gaps in

areas where skills are needed to do that. It has had two decades to sustain high-quality public services, yet NHS waiting lists are leaving people in agony for years, teachers are leaving the profession, pupils are being failed and colleges are on their knees.

This Government had £5.2 billion in additional funding this year, yet people's lives are not getting better. We are in the midst of a housing emergency, which is felt keenly in Glasgow. NHS waiting lists have created a two-tier system, in which those who can afford to pay are going private. The SNP has wasted billions of pounds of public money through incompetence and bureaucracy, and it has stood by while school standards have declined.

It is in education that we can see Scotland's potential. It is in schools and our education system that we change life chances, celebrate achievement and deliver opportunity for all. However, sadly, in Scotland it is also where we see the impact of our Government's catastrophic failures, because our Government is distracted and failing to open up opportunities for all Scotland's young people. The work that our teachers, lecturers and support staff do, from early years through to lifelong learning and additional support, in apprenticeships, universities and colleges, can transform lives, reduce poverty and deliver the Scotland that we all want. The message from them, from families, from young people and from staff is simple: "Get the basics right and give us a fighting chance, and we can and will flourish." However, the Government has failed to do that. If the Government is to deliver on what it says in its motion are priorities, those must be matched by real outcomes in classrooms, campuses and workplaces across Scotland.

Ministers came to office saying that education was their number 1 priority, yet thousands of young people are being held back as the poverty-related attainment gap persists. Data shows that the gap between our most and least deprived pupils remains stark—at primary school level, it is around 20 percentage points. Someone from a poorer background is still less likely to get a national 5 or an advanced higher than other pupils. This Government is failing pupils in our poorest communities. Some primary 1 pupils, who have started school in recent weeks, were already behind before they even found their peg.

Although the Government has tinkered around the edges to address attendance, which is too low, the reality is that it has failed to tackle the fundamentals that lock young people out of school—the fact is that classroom violence is rising because pupils and staff do not feel supported. The support and the scaffolding around them have been broken. Long waits for CAMHS,

the lack of pathways to provide support for neurodiversity, and excessive workloads are causing teachers to leave the profession. Despite what the Government tells us, teacher numbers are nowhere near what they should be in key subjects and localities, which is leaving children short of opportunities. All the while, many teachers are out of work. Support staff are stretched to breaking point and, although inclusion is promised, support is rationed.

Colleges, which should be our regional engines of opportunity, are being asked to do more with less, while employers warn of a skills gap that holds back growth and the mission to transition to net zero. With enrolments falling, funding squeezed and capital budgets cut in real terms, I say to the First Minister and his team that Scotland cannot close its skills gaps by shrinking the institutions that train our workforce and our young people. That is not focus; it is drift and managed—or, as some have said, unmanaged—decline. Devolution gives real powers over schools, skills, colleges, universities, childcare and much more, but the Government has failed to grasp the opportunity that it brings. Scots see through it, and they need leadership. They need a Government that shares their ambitions and works relentlessly to deliver the services that they deserve. Put simply, we need a Government that is back in the service of the people of Scotland.

At the election in May, people in Scotland can have that, with Scottish Labour and a new direction. They can have a Government that is focused on investing in our future by ensuring that every child in every community can believe that success belongs to them. They can have a Government that does more than move a motion and has ambition for all our young people, with a plan from cradle to career to match and deliver it. Scottish Labour has a plan that builds strong skills in literacy, oracy and numeracy. It is a plan that delivers a knowledge-rich curriculum with world-leading digital and science, technology, engineering and mathematics capability; supports creativity; and develops a skills system that delivers for young people, career changers and employers, with colleges, universities and educators at its heart. It is a plan with ambition for school staff, which includes action to reduce teacher workloads and properly match jobs with newly qualified teachers. It will be a Government with an ambition for safe and thriving schools that takes solid action on behaviour, attendance and proper support for pupils with ASN.

Scotland's young people need a Government with ambition that takes action to remove barriers and deliver affordable childcare that works for working families. Having ambition and taking action in all those areas is how we deliver opportunity for young people. Those are the

priorities of Scotland's people, and they will be the priorities of a Scottish Labour Government.

16:19

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): After a long recess away from Parliament, it is good to be back talking about our priorities and about what matters to my constituents and to folk across Scotland.

The Scottish Government has four key priorities: eradicating child poverty; tackling the climate emergency; growing the economy; and sustaining public services. In Aberdeen we can see how those four priorities are interlinked and are combining to provide one single clear direction for the future of our city and our country. Let me talk through them in turn.

We might think that the value of giving every child the best start in life and eradicating child poverty would be clear for everyone to see. However, if we truly want to protect children, we must start by protecting them from poverty. Instead of that, we have a Labour Government that is still persevering with the two-child cap, which is forcing thousands of our bairns to go to bed at night hungry. Thank goodness that we will take a different path in Scotland, and that the Scottish Government will abolish the two-child cap. With that, alongside the baby box, the Scottish child payment, best start grants, 1,140 hours of free childcare a year and a continued investment in our nurseries and schools, we are ensuring that every child gets the best start in life.

The second priority involves the climate emergency. Some may say that that is an issue for the world that our young folk will inherit. However, in Aberdeen—Europe's energy capital and the future net zero capital of the world—the journey to net zero has already started and is already impacting on folks' lives. Many young folk have a parent who works in the energy industry. If those jobs are not there when they grow up, there is a big question mark over what jobs there will be.

The third priority is growing the economy. In Aberdeen, as I have already alluded to, the energy sector is the biggest part of our economy. Thousands of folk in our city work for energy companies and thousands more work in the supply chain, and the money that they spend supports a high proportion of other local jobs. For decades, the fortunes of Aberdeen have risen and fallen with oil prices and, throughout that time, we have considered what a future without oil and gas might look like. Whether it is phased out, is forced out or runs out, there will come a time when Aberdeen no longer has an oil and gas industry, but being home to a workforce that is so highly

skilled offers us a golden opportunity to establish ourselves as a net zero capital.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): Will the member take an intervention on that?

Jackie Dunbar: I will take a quick intervention, although time is quite tight.

Liam Kerr: I am grateful.

The SNP's draft energy strategy maintains its presumption against new oil and gas. Does the member support that presumption?

Jackie Dunbar: I am talking about the energy industry in Aberdeen; the member has gone off topic just slightly.

The climate crisis and the efforts to tackle it will affect everyone but, with the right investment and support, Aberdeen will lead Scotland and the world in the move to net zero. As I am standing here now, more than 30,000 industry professionals and our Deputy First Minister are attending the Offshore Europe conference in my Aberdeen Donside constituency. The focus of that event is the future of the energy industry, which is a priority for all of us, especially those of us in the north-east.

The motion talks about being hampered by the policy decisions of the UK Government, and the north-east and the energy industry represent probably the clearest example of where it is getting it wrong. It has been far too quick to announce a windfall tax only for energy companies, it has been far too quick to increase it and it has been far too quick to remove investment incentives, while it has taken far too long to back and invest in the Acorn project. I suspect that we will be waiting a very long time to see any meaningful amount of jobs created within Great British Energy. The UK Government has utterly failed to take any meaningful action to save energy jobs in Scotland, be that in the north-east or at Grangemouth.

The Scottish Government has stepped up, not just with the £500 million just transition fund but with a range of local investments, such as the millions of pounds that it has committed to Aberdeen's first green academy building in Hazlehead, which conveniently ties in with all of the Scottish Government's priorities.

I turn to the fourth and final priority: delivering and sustaining good-quality public services. I grew up with the idea that a welfare state would support me from the cradle to the grave. Although the welfare state has been eroded by 15 years of austerity, it is still worth fighting for, and I am pleased that the Scottish Government is delivering in the same spirit. From baby boxes and best start grants to funeral support payments and everything in between—free university, free doctor

appointments and a helping hand when folk have children—those are the Scottish Government's priorities. I can see the difference that they make to people's lives as the Government works towards and delivers on those priorities every day.

In contrast, I am not so sure that I see what the UK Government's priorities are, and I am unsure whether Keir Starmer does, either. However, I can see what the UK has delivered for people: a proliferation of food banks, record levels of inequality, reduced opportunities, Brexit, attempts to sow division and two decades of wage stagnation. I look forward to folk getting to choose between a Scottish Government that is focused on delivering for them and a broken Britain that looks to be in its dying days.

16:25

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): This debate serves to show one thing and one thing only: namely, despite the opportunity for self-reflection and a reset over the summer, the First Minister and his Government have learned no lessons at all. We return to the Parliament today, and the SNP's first act, sadly and predictably, is to press for independence. Over the summer, I have spoken to residents on doorsteps and in surgeries from Aberlady to Sanquhar. Let me tell the First Minister, who has just left the chamber, that independence was not a priority for a single person to whom I spoke out there in the real world.

Between now and the election, we will be locked in this downward and depressing spiral of constitutional debate, because it is a distraction by a discredited First Minister who has not offered a single effective solution to the problems that his Government has created, which are getting worse by the day. Mr Swinney's priority, I am afraid to say—he is not here, but I will repeat this if he comes back in—is the dwindling band of nationalist diehards who grow shriller and shriller as each month passes.

Let us offer a reality check to Mr Swinney and his colleagues. We do so because the real priorities of people out in the country are very different from those of his Government. Rather than obsessing over gender issues, people would like his Government to fix the NHS. One in six Scots is still languishing on an NHS waiting list, stretching primary care to breaking point.

People want more of their own money in their pocket. Instead, taxes are sky high; hard-pressed Scots are being bled dry, with £1.7 billion in additional income taxes that are resulting in behavioural change and damaging the Scottish economy.

Driving on Scotland's roads, particularly roads in rural areas, which are forgotten about by the SNP,

is now increasingly like driving on the surface of the moon. Worse still, the failure to upgrade key roads such as the A75 is putting lives and livelihoods at risk.

What of Ivan McKee's commitment to public sector reform, which is, apparently, a priority? Right on cue, Mr McKee has arrived in the chamber. When he announced his public sector reform plan earlier this year, he said that it was "rooted in realism". He said that it was not done

"in a headline-grabbing way that simply throws out random targets based on no evidence".—[*Official Report*, 19 June 2025; c 57.]

However, we now know from an freedom of information request response that Mr McKee's policy is a sham. Civil servants warned him that there are "significant caveats" and "limitations" around the figures underpinning the "very challenging" target that he set. That included "inconsistencies" in how public bodies had "self-reported" their previous spending activity, compounded by a "light-touch verification" system. His own directorate for public service reform warned him of that in May, when it said:

"There is not a specific breakdown of the £1 billion target and there is an element of risk in this approach."

We found out that, in May, cabinet secretaries raised with the minister what they said were "considerable concerns", but, today, Shona Robison could shed no light on what those specific concerns were. In short—

The Minister for Public Finance (Ivan McKee) rose—

Craig Hoy: I am short on time, but I will take a brief intervention.

Ivan McKee: I just want to let Craig Hoy know that, of course, there is risk, but we are going to deliver on the policy. There are challenges, but we are going to deliver. The target is, indeed, rooted in reality; it is based on the data that we collected—it is 20 per cent of that. That is what we are going to deliver on. He might want to stand there and say that we have problems and challenges and that it is not going to happen, but I am letting him know that we are committed to the policy, we are going to deliver on it and everybody is committed to making that happen.

Craig Hoy: The minister knows only too well that his plan is not rooted in reality but was written on the back of a fag packet to get him through the next Scottish Parliament election. If his own officials and colleagues do not believe that there is a plan, why should the country have any faith in his proposals? Is it not true that it is facing a £5 billion budget black hole by 2030—one created by SNP ministers—which means that the Government is now clutching at straws to get itself

through next year's election? Is the reality not that, in order to pay their bloated public sector and welfare bills, ministers will have to make very tough decisions and that, although they will not tell us this now, that will mean huge tax increases or massive public spending cuts if the SNP is re-elected next May?

Over the course of the summer, I knocked on thousands of doors across Dumfriesshire. I can tell the First Minister and the Scottish Government—people who care little for South Scotland or for regions that do not vote for the SNP—what the Scottish people's real priorities are. They are tackling long waits in our NHS, fixing our roads and providing certainty to farmers who are scared witless by Labour's family farm tax.

I say to the First Minister, the Government and SNP back benchers that they could not be further away from real people's views on immigration. Many of the ordinary Scots who I spoke to over the summer live with the reality of an asylum hotel, the Mercure in Dumfries, on their doorstep. It is not—as it is for the First Minister—an abstract matter: it is what they live with day by day. It has changed the character of their community, and not for the better. We need a Government that focuses on the needs of communities such as those in Dumfriesshire, not one that focuses on allowing more and more people into our country in breach of the law. Britain is our home; it is not a hotel for those trying to enter the country illegally. Sadly, this SNP Government, this First Minister and this self-indulgent Parliament simply will not understand that.

16:31

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of members' interests regarding my former employment.

I will focus today on missed opportunities and on how the SNP is letting down people in my area. As ever, we heard blame today, even though our new Labour Government allocated this Government an extra £5.2 billion in Barnett consequential. That is real money that should be making a real difference to people's lives, but it is not being delivered where it is needed because of SNP waste.

We have pushed SNP ministers so hard to focus on the day job. We saw that with the Edinburgh eye pavilion when, after huge public pressure, they were forced into a U-turn, and we saw it again with peak fares when, once more, the Government had to U-turn after pressure by Labour members. *[Interruption.]* Colleagues should remember those debates—they are in the *Official Report*.

Our constituents deserve better than government by U-turn. They deserve government by delivery, whether that is in the NHS, where 900,000 people face massive waiting times, or in my constituency, where young people are massively impacted by the lack of access to CAMHS services and by the failure to deliver on educational attainment that was cited by Pam Duncan-Glancy.

Mark Griffin's response to today's statement on housing was spot on. Although we welcome more investment, it is too little, too late. We are still in a housing emergency and there is a lack of affordable, accessible housing. It is unacceptable that more than 9,000 children will still be in unsuitable accommodation. I thought that it was really significant that the cabinet secretary did not directly answer Ben Macpherson's question about Edinburgh's housing emergency. Our constituents desperately need to see more support for our councils, housing associations and housing co-operatives so that they can build the affordable, accessible housing that we desperately need.

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): Màiri McAllan, the cabinet secretary, is not in the chamber, but it is important to put on the record that she did actually respond by saying that there would be targeted spending in areas of high pressure, such as Edinburgh.

Sarah Boyack: Yes, but we did not get the targets or the accountability.

For years, there has been a lack of building, which means that people are leaving the city and going to East Lothian, Midlothian or West Lothian because they simply cannot afford housing in the city. That lack of affordable housing means that rents have been rocketing and are simply unaffordable. We need urgent action, but we did not get the detailed financial commitments that we needed to hear today, and that is deeply disappointing.

I want to focus on the climate emergency. The climate targets were dumped because the SNP had not done the heavy lifting to meet them. The climate emergency is not abstract. It is impacting on people's lives now. Flooding is disrupting rail services and damaging people's homes and communities. Last week, a damning report from Audit Scotland warned that the Scottish Government is failing to allocate the investment that is needed to make our communities safe from flooding. Over the past decade, costs have trebled. Local authorities now need clarity and certainty on funding, because the risk of flooding is increasing due to extreme weather. Coastal communities are vulnerable, as are homes on flood plains and beside rivers. There are 280,000 homes in Scotland that are currently at risk.

There is also the growing risk of wildfires. It is horrific to see what is happening across Europe—in Greece, Spain and Portugal—but we are also seeing wildfires here in Scotland. This summer, a fire burned for several days in Uphall in West Lothian. Last month, we had a serious fire in Holyrood park that lasted for days. It is thought that the fire was the result of human activity, and we need to raise awareness of risk, but awareness alone is not enough. People also need to know that their emergency services will be there for them when disaster strikes.

That is why we need the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service to be properly resourced to deal with the new risks of fires and flooding. Rural and urban communities need more community capacity, not cuts, because the time that it takes for firefighters to arrive can make the difference between life and death. It makes no sense to close Marionville fire station, which is just over a mile from this Parliament and is in an area where there are 3,500 new homes. There are also major developments at Leith port, and Marionville is the station that is responsible for tackling fires in Holyrood park. Closing Marionville would leave families and businesses more exposed to risk. It makes no sense to close that station. It is another example of SNP Government cuts not delivering the services that our constituents urgently need.

We need a Government that is focused on delivery, not one that wastes its money through bad decision making. The failed national care service wasted millions but did not create a single job, and there has been a lack of jobs being created on ferries and buses and in renewables. If we are to see a fair transition, we need good-quality jobs in Scotland now. There was such an irony in John Swinney saying that his Government does not have the powers that it needs, given the massive missed opportunities for our renewables with ScotWind—the opportunities to create more jobs in our communities and the opportunities for community, co-operative or municipally owned heat and power companies.

We need to see the recommendations of the Just Transition Commission being acted on. We need action in the north-east and action on our ports and harbours. The SNP promised to create 130,000 green jobs, but that has not happened. It has not created a publicly owned energy system, but we can see GB Energy getting on with the job. We need investment in community energy projects. We cannot afford another SNP Government of excuses and U-turns. We need a Government of delivery, which will come only with a Scottish Labour Government.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The final speaker in the open debate will be Ben Macpherson.

16:38

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): Coming into Parliament today after a long recess, it was even more striking to me—as I am sure it was to colleagues—just what a privilege it is to come and be able to speak and express ourselves in this place on behalf of those we serve. They expect us to bring solutions and positive vision, especially at a time when, as the First Minister said, we are 25 years into this Parliament's history, a quarter of the way into the 21st century and in a period of multiple challenges at home and across the world.

I am therefore—honestly—dismayed and shocked at the absolute lack of depth of solutions from Opposition members. When I listened to both Opposition leaders speaking, I did not hear one idea, one worked-out policy or one thing that was constructive. We all know that the people we represent are experiencing tough times, and they expect us to do what we were sent here to do, which is to come up with ways that will make a difference for them. That is exactly what the First Minister set out to Parliament and what the Scottish Government is focused on. There are challenges, but there are multiple successes to be welcomed, too.

I did not hear any Opposition MSP mention the really good results that our school pupils achieved across the country, or the fact that more people from less privileged backgrounds are going to university. I did not hear them say that we had a remarkable summer of culture and festivities—in particular, here in the capital, where people poured in from around the world and spoke positively about our country thereafter. I did not hear any praise for our remarkable police force and the fact that it managed all those events—and a presidential visit and a vice-presidential visit—extremely well.

I did not hear any comment about the fact that the standard for waiting times has been met for the third time in a row, as was announced today. I did not hear about NHS Scotland's five-year high for operations, with a record number of hip and knee replacements being performed by our NHS.

As the First Minister said, there is more to do, but much has been achieved. Given all the challenge in our country, we need to get to a position in which people can look to this place and see people speaking with passion about ideas to make things better and being constructive about what has been done well.

Those who are just trying to talk our country down and to chip away at our society will be absolutely delighted by what the Opposition parties have put to the Parliament today, because it is empty—there are no ideas.

Anas Sarwar, you may shake your head—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must speak through the chair.

Ben Macpherson: Pardon me, Presiding Officer. If Anas Sarwar gets to his feet later this week, he should come out with some constructive solutions.

When members of the Opposition parties speak, they talk as if Scotland already had all the powers of an independent nation. They talk as if a Conservative Government had not made disastrous decisions for many years. They talk as if a coalition between the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives had not put this country into the worst austerity in Europe in the 21st century. They talk as if the Labour Government had done everything perfectly over the years, when we all know that that is not the case. There is so much more that we can do, but we need to do it together and to be honest.

For example, on the NHS, the Opposition makes criticism, but we should think about what we could do if we had a migration policy in Scotland, or about how things would be better if we had not been taken out of the EU against our will. When it comes to the economy, imagine if we could reverse or had not had the national insurance increase, or could do more with VAT to support the hospitality sector, or more with other aspects of the taxation system. That would help us to make a difference. That is why the constitution matters.

Another example is energy. Members talked about redirecting wealth from renewables into communities, but energy policy is reserved. That is why the constitution and more powers matter.

Members talked about poverty alleviation. Imagine if we did not have to spend money on mitigating the two-child cap and the bedroom tax. Imagine if we could make all the welfare policy in Scotland in a more sensible and thoughtful way, to reduce poverty even further. Of course, we are making good progress compared with elsewhere in the UK, as has already been said.

So much more could be said about why the constitution matters. As much as the Opposition and others want to chip away and tear things down, I can feel that a resistant optimism is developing in Scotland. I am proud that the SNP Government is part of the pushback against negativity. Yes, we will talk about hope; yes, we will talk about how we can make things better; and yes, we will talk about the constitution being relevant in that space. More and more people are seeing independence as the space in which Scotland would be able to achieve its full potential. More and more, it is becoming the settled will. Those who dismiss it as an aspiration—those who

dismiss statehood—need to remember that they are talking about 50 per cent of the people we represent. Their opinions matter and, very soon, the question will be what the Opposition and Westminster are going to do to facilitate their will.

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

16:44

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (LD): I welcome Ruth Maguire's presence back in the chamber after her absence. It is good to see her. [Applause.]

I also take the opportunity to thank the constituent who wrote to me congratulating me on taking over the Scottish Green Party. I am very grateful for their email, but I think that I have done enough bench moving this year.

Listening to the First Minister today, I was really struck by a sense of déjà vu, because I have listened to this debate some nine years in a row. However, the big difference in the First Minister's speech this year was that it took him 14 minutes to utter the word "independence"—and, even then, it was just once. That, in itself, is quite telling as to the direction of travel of the SNP.

Here is what we did not hear, but should have heard, from the speakers from the governing party. Although we heard it from Opposition members, we did not hear it from them that, for the seventh year in a row, Scotland has the highest number of drug deaths in Europe. We did not hear that 25 of them were in Inverclyde alone. Those people are my neighbours; those people are my friends of friends.

We also did not hear from members on the Government benches about the 8,000 cancellations on the Gourock to Dunoon ferry in the past two years, or about the fact that Ferguson Marine was overlooked for ferry contracts, which went to yards in Poland and Turkey, and which we are now seeing delays to. We did not hear about the 2,000 people—that is more than the entire population of Howwood in my region—who are stuck in a hospital bed due to delayed discharge. They are in hospital, but they should be at home, and we all know it. Of course, none of that comes as any surprise, because we all know that care homes are closing across Scotland, left, right and centre. In Scotland right now, 10,000 people are waiting for a social care assessment.

We did not hear from members on the Government benches about the nearly 1 million people who are stuck on an out-patient, in-patient or diagnostic appointment waiting list, some of whom have been on one for years—years of

worry, pain and distress. Some people will die waiting.

We did not hear about the psychiatric patients who were discharged from hospital, often at the most vulnerable point in their lives, who waited a year for critical follow-up care. One person in the NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde area waited 330 days to be seen after leaving hospital.

Yes, all that might sound a bit parochial and overly negative, but all politics is local, and that is the reality of too many people and too many of our constituents. Believe it or not, very few people in my region lie awake at night wondering about the many constitutional arguments that occupy so much airtime in this chamber. They lie awake at night because they are in pain. They lie awake at night because they are waiting on a new knee or hip. They lie awake at night because they are stuck in temporary accommodation, wondering why on earth they cannot find a permanent home for them and their children. They lie awake at night in the back streets of our Glasgow city, addicted to drugs and desperate for help, and many of them will not wake the next day. That is our national shame, which is a shame not just on the Government but on the entire Parliament.

People in my region lie awake at night staring at their spreadsheets, wondering why footfall to their island is down this year, whether their business will survive another winter and which member of staff they might have to lay off to balance the books.

Ben Macpherson said that he wants solutions, and I agree. I, too, want to hear constructive solutions from all parties, which all have good ideas. However, people are fed up, and I do not blame them. Here is my biggest fear, and why I find genuine consensus in some of the comments that have been made this afternoon. My biggest fear is that voters will respond to their overall loss of faith in politics and politicians by finding solace in the fringes of populist politics: in politicians who will promise them the earth, but who will deliver nothing but grievance, division and community discontent. Divide and conquer, as their strategy seems to be, will deliver temporary electoral results, but it also risks fracturing the good nature of Scots—and we, as a Parliament, cannot let that happen.

Fergus Ewing: Will Jamie Greene give way?

Jamie Greene: I do not have much time; my apologies.

Let me say that refugees are not the reason that people cannot get a GP appointment by waiting in that 8 am queue. Let me say that the LGBT community is not the reason that domestic violence is on the up in Scotland. There are other reasons, and it is about time that we stop

scapegoating people who have already faced so much adversity in life to get to where they are. I make no apologies for saying that.

I understand that governing is difficult, and that it is about priorities. I understand that there has never been an endless pot of cash, and I understand the economic difficulties of being in government and having to make those decisions.

However, taxpayers want and deserve value for money. They expect good public services. They expect their Parliament to debate these issues with gravity and sensitivity. They expect their politicians to work constructively when required and to disagree respectfully when necessary. Of course they want alternatives. Of course they are sick of people bemoaning failures, but something that is sorely lacking in this place is the Government taking and accepting responsibility when it has to.

This debate is about Scotland's future. We all want a better future for Scotland—I do not doubt that. However, speeches will not deliver a better Scotland; a Government that does what it promises will, and whatever the next Government of Scotland looks like, it should never forget that.

16:50

Ross Greer: I will pick up from where Ben Macpherson finished because I was disappointed by this debate. It was an opportunity for all parties to set out our priorities and our visions for Scotland. In too many cases, the Scottish Government lacks ambition and bravery, but there is clearly a vision there and it is one that I can broadly agree with. However, what we heard from Labour and the Conservatives this afternoon was a relentlessly negative vision for this country—if “vision” is even a word that can be used to describe it. If I was not convinced beforehand, I am absolutely convinced now that it is the strategy of both of those parties to simply make people miserable because they think that that is the best way to achieve the results that they want next May. There is no sense that they would improve the lives of the people of this country. More importantly, there was no record for them to speak of. This is a minority Scottish Government. A minority Government gives every member of this Parliament the opportunity to exercise influence and to deliver on what they believe in, but there was no mention of a record of delivery and achievement from the members on the Labour or Conservative benches, because they have a strategy of preventing progress—even more so in this session of Parliament than in the previous one.

I can think of no better example of that than in relation to the Housing (Scotland) Bill, to which I

lodged an amendment to end one particular scandal—the scandal of domestic abuse survivors being forced to pay off their abusers' council tax debts. I thank Shirley-Anne Somerville and Paul McLennan for supporting me with that amendment and the SNP members who voted for it. However, Labour and Conservative MSPs voted against that amendment to end the scandal of abuse survivors paying their abusers' debts. Why?

In June, Labour and the Conservatives came up with contrived reasons to oppose the Education (Scotland) Bill and to keep the Scottish Qualifications Authority in place—an organisation that they, like me, have quite rightly railed against for years.

I tried to find something that I could agree with. At one point, Russell Findlay complained about an unreformed public sector. Although we probably have very different visions of reform, I agree that there is need for reform. I am sure that, on that basis, if the report into the pilots of the four-day working week shows a boost in worker productivity at no additional cost, we will see that in the Conservative manifesto for next year—I do not really believe that, of course, because that would be a policy that would make some people happier, which is something that the Conservatives absolutely cannot see in Scotland. I ask my Conservative colleagues whether they are not exhausted by that negativity. Are they not exhausted by coming here every day to talk down the country that they live in and represent?

I spoke in my opening speech about the need for us to redistribute wealth to deliver the fairer, greener society that I believe that the vast majority of people want. That involves having some difficult conversations, such as the one that I had with the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government this morning about the small business bonus scheme. I accept the need for us to support small businesses—the lifeblood of Scotland's economy—but the Government's own independent review found that there was no evidence that the £0.25 billion scheme had positive economic outcomes. If we are to spend £0.25 billion supporting small businesses every year, we need to have a difficult conversation about whether the SBBS, in its current form, is the way to do that.

That is not the only area of tax where we need to see reform. We also need to see reform in property taxes. There are too many young people who want to start a family and need a home to do that but are locked out of the broken housing market, while the king—one of the richest people in this country—is personally exempt from paying land and buildings transaction tax.

I know that there are many on the Government benches who agree with the policies that the

Greens have put forward and, under the leadership of me and Gillian Mackay, the Greens want to work constructively with the Government where there is common ground and the opportunity to take this country forward together.

People want and need politicians on their side, fighting for them. Free bus travel for young people and removing peak rail fares were policies that put money in people's pockets, took action to tackle the climate crisis and made life easier for normal people. That kind of progress is key to securing independence.

We need to strain the existing powers of this place and show people the good of self-government. It undermines the argument for independence when our existing—limited, but existing—powers sit unused or underused. Yes, we are doing things with one hand tied behind our back, but we need to play the hand that we have been dealt. We need to act to fix the everyday problems that people face, because happy people make for an optimistic society, and that is the only way that we will achieve our goal of independence.

I want us to strain the limits of devolution. One area in which I hope that the Scottish Government will stretch the limits of devolution tomorrow is in opposing apartheid Israel's genocidal assault on Palestine. I wrote to the First Minister with a package of measures that the Government could bring forward with its existing powers to deliver the boycott, divestment and sanctions campaign—a campaign that worked against apartheid South Africa and can work against apartheid Israel—because the Scottish Government's actions with regard to the genocide in Gaza simply do not match its welcome words. In fact, it has taken no action against the state of Israel. One can compare that with its approach to Russia: as soon as Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the Scottish Government quite rightly urged every business in the country to axe all ties and business links with Russia.

Palestinian Scots want to see action from the Government, because words will not save their family members' lives. If the Scottish Government is willing to be bold, Green MSPs will work with it, because a bold, brave Government is exactly what this era of crisis requires.

16:56

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):

The Government's motion invites us to consider Scotland's priorities. If the SNP ever cared about the priorities of ordinary people, it is clear that it has long since lost touch with them.

Instead of running a functioning NHS, it has brought the health service to its knees. We have

more patients waiting longer than two years for treatment in NHS Tayside than we do in the whole of England.

Instead of delivering a school system in which young people can reach their potential, the SNP has presided over a decline in school standards. In Dundee, it cannot even build the primary school that it promised 10 years ago.

Instead of a thriving economy, it has left us lagging behind other parts of the UK and wasted billions of pounds of taxpayers' money. If the SNP and John Swinney had real ideas about how to fix the mess that they have made we would have seen them by now.

Of course, John Swinney and the SNP want to talk about none of that. They know that their legislative achievements are meagre and that their record in government is one of demonstrable failure. Instead, John Swinney is reaching for the independence panic button—that is not about building out, but about narrowing in. Those are not the priorities of the ordinary people across Scotland, who are working ever harder and getting ever less from their Government in return. John Swinney knows that, and in the next eight months, unfortunately, he will put the SNP's election strategy before the good of the country.

The First Minister began this debate by talking about, and throwing around, blame. A preferable term might be responsibility, and the opportunity to finally take some.

The First Minister says that

"a corner ... is being turned".

I ask him who the corner is being turned on, because the person who set us on this path, and set this direction for 20 years—two decades—was him. Our NHS will not survive another decade of this knackered SNP Government.

The First Minister: Mr Marra misconstrues my comments, and he does so in a very dangerous way, for which I want to hold him to account. I willingly accept my responsibility—I am in the chamber every Thursday when Parliament sits, answering questions as First Minister, in order to accept my responsibility. I was making the point that blame has been foisted on migrants in this country, and half of it has been landed on them by the Labour Government in London.

Michael Marra: That is a risible statement, and it is below the First Minister—

The First Minister: No, it is not.

Michael Marra: The First Minister is absolutely right—[*Interruption.*]

He is absolutely right that there is a climate of fear being nurtured in this country by people on

the extreme right. However, when he talks about his legislative agenda, he has to take responsibility for his record, which has produced the result that people are being disenfranchised and scared in their own communities when they do not see a Government that is delivering for them. That is part of the responsibility of Government: to build the compact between the politicians and the people.

Neil Gray: Will the member give way?

Michael Marra: No, thank you, sir.

It is absolutely right that the First Minister takes responsibility for that record, because he is completely out of touch on the NHS. There are 900,000 people on waiting lists in Scotland, cancer deaths are on the rise and private healthcare is opening up in streets across Scotland. People are having to empty their bank accounts and go into debt to obtain the care that they badly need. That is the record that he is desperate to walk away from, because that record has very real consequences, as various members have pointed out today.

Today saw the publication of annual drug deaths figures for Scotland. In 2024, 1,017 people in Scotland lost their lives to addiction and drugs—the worst record in the whole of Europe. One thousand and seventeen lives were destroyed, 1,017 families were ripped apart and 1,017 people left behind their grieving loved ones. For years, this scandal has torn through my home city of Dundee and, yet again, Dundee is in the top three areas in Scotland for drug deaths. In 2010, 22 Dundonians were lost to suspected drug deaths, but, by 2021, that figure was 52, at which point Nicola Sturgeon admitted that she had taken her eye off the ball. That showed at least some semblance of responsibility, but, unfortunately, it deserves just three paragraphs in her latest tax-avoiding novel. Tragically, lives are being lost that could well have been saved if Scotland had had a Government with its eyes on the ball and its people's interests at its heart.

The SNP is content to take Scotland further down the path of managed decline and failure. Scottish Labour knows that that is not good enough. Scots deserve a health service that is there when they need it, a place to call home, good jobs and a world-class education system. We used to have those things, but nearly two decades of the SNP have hollowed out those services and hobbled our economy. Scotland cannot afford a third decade of the SNP.

Scottish Labour is ambitious for this country's future. We will build a country where Government delivers the basics but everyone has the chance to reach their full potential. We will fix the NHS, clear the backlogs and end the 8 am rush for a GP

appointment. We will improve our schools, support our high streets and grow our economy. We will end the addiction to waste and respect taxpayers' money. A Scottish Labour Government will focus on ordinary people's priorities and deliver the real new direction that Scotland desperately needs.

17:02

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):

Normally, at this stage in the parliamentary timetable, we debate the programme for government. Of course, we did that back in May, but this afternoon there is a good opportunity to look at the proposals from the Scottish Government and consider what we hear from the First Minister and what that tells us about this Government's priorities for the period ahead.

An illustration of what is wrong with the priorities of this Government is the fact that, when we look at the parliamentary timetable for this week, we see the entirety of tomorrow's business being spent on international affairs—business that has nothing to do with this Parliament. I am sure that it is a great opportunity for people on the SNP benches and elsewhere to grandstand, but it is a literal waste of parliamentary time. George Adam said that Scotland should have a voice on those issues. He is right. Scotland does have a voice on them—we send 56 MPs to Westminster to speak for Scotland on them. I am sure that Mr Adam knows that some of them are SNP MPs and are utterly useless and incapable of doing their job properly. We should be spending our time here productively on the things that we can change, not wasting our time on the things that we cannot.

As we would expect, we heard from Mr Swinney about independence. I was a little surprised that, in his comments on independence, he did not address the latest revelations from the Scottish Government's "Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland" figures, which came out just a few weeks ago in recess. The net fiscal deficit for Scotland is now up to £26.5 billion, which is 11.7 per cent of gross domestic product and is double the UK level. That means that an independent Scotland would have to find £13 billion-worth of either cuts or tax rises. The Government never tells us how it would fill that gap. That figure means that the union dividend is now worth £2,600 extra for every man, woman and child in Scotland in fiscal transfers from other parts of the United Kingdom.

People might think that, with all that extra money to spend on the health service, education, infrastructure and justice, our public services would be much better than they are in every other part of the United Kingdom. Patently, that is not the case, as we have heard in this afternoon's debate.

The other thing that we now know from the GERS figures is that public sector spend in Scotland is equivalent to 52 per cent of gross domestic product, which is among the highest levels of any country in the developed world. When SNP members talk about austerity, are they trying to tell us that more than half of our GDP being spent in the public sector is austerity? If that is austerity, what figure would they have us spend? Would it be 62 per cent or 72 per cent? They never tell us. They have huge sums of money at their disposal and they need to stop wasting it.

I welcome the First Minister saying that there needs to be a focus on economic growth, and we agree. We have just had the growth figures for the second quarter of this year. GDP growth in Scotland was 0.2 per cent, while in the UK, under a dismal Labour chancellor who is holding back economic growth, the equivalent figure was 0.3 per cent. Scotland is growing at just two thirds the rate of even the dismal performance of the United Kingdom.

Looking at the long-term trend since 2011, we see that, if the Scottish economy had grown at the same rate as the UK economy, it would be £10 billion bigger than it is today. That is the SNP's record in government. When SNP members look at the figures, they say, "Go back to 2007." Yes, it is right that, when we look at the figures from 2007 to 2011, we see that there was rapid growth in the Scottish economy. Why? It is because of growth in the oil and gas sector—the very oil and gas sector that the SNP wants to close down. Kemi Badenoch is absolutely right in what she said today in Aberdeen, where she talked about the need to take the brakes off extraction from the North Sea.

That economic underperformance comes at a cost. The Scottish Fiscal Commission talked about the economic performance gap, which is estimated to cost £1.058 billion to the public sector in 2025-26—that is £1 billion less in revenue than we should have thanks to SNP mismanagement.

However, as Craig Hoy reminded us, Ivan McKee is riding to the rescue. We all hope that Mr McKee is successful in his battle with his Cabinet colleagues, who are apparently very resistant to his plans. According to information released under a freedom of information request, they have "raised considerable concerns" about Mr McKee's plans. Keep fighting, Mr McKee—we are all behind you as you find these savings in the public sector.

Ben Macpherson challenged us to come up with some positive ideas, so I will do just that for Mr Macpherson's benefit. We make no apology for demanding a focus on growth, because growth provides wealth, growth provides more secure, better-paid jobs, growth provides less poverty,

growth provides more disposable income, and growth provides higher tax revenues. What we should be doing is tackling the barriers to growth: the higher taxes imposed by the SNP in income tax and LBTT, the business rates that are hammering hospitality, and the visitor levy—throughout the summer, I heard so many businesses expressing their concern about a visitor levy coming in on top of all the other bills that they have to pay. We should tackle the excessive regulation, such as the overbureaucratic short-term let rules, or the creaking planning system that needs to be fixed.

There are other priorities that we have to tackle. The NHS has too many people waiting too long. Anas Sarwar was right to talk about the number of people in Scotland who are having to pay for private operations because they are simply waiting too long. I met a constituent at the weekend who is in exactly that position, waiting more than a year for a vital hip replacement and eventually having to dip into savings to go private. That is happening too often.

Standards in schools are dropping below those of our competitor nations. There are growing issues of violence in classrooms and a failure to deliver vital infrastructure. Remember that this is all with £2,600 more per head of population to spend than in the rest of the UK. With all that money, we should have public services that are so much better than everywhere else, and that we do not is an SNP failure.

Our approach is simply this: let us put growth first, let us take the brakes off oil and gas extraction in the North Sea, let us get reformed, effective public services, let us invest in infrastructure and let us speak up for the victims of crime. Those are the people's priorities and they are our priorities, too.

17:09

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government (Shona Robison): Murdo Fraser is out of touch with the Scottish people. They care deeply about the plight of people in Gaza and they expect their nation's Parliament to care, too. Their compassion is in stark contrast to the lack of compassion of those Tory members from whom we have heard today.

I welcome everyone back to Parliament—it is a more plural Parliament than the one that we had in June. I, too, welcome Ruth Maguire back to the chamber; it is good to see her here. *[Applause.]*

I will start with Russell Findlay's miserable contribution, which I suspect reflects the rather miserable summer that he and his colleagues have had. Russell Findlay's narrative is really not working for him or for his party. It is entirely

negative, as others have pointed out, and is based on the simple objective of talking down Scotland. That is all that the Tories have, and their approach will continue to be roundly rejected by the population of our nation.

Anas Sarwar, despite the hubris, cannot escape the simple truth that he failed to support more funding for the NHS, more funding to tackle child poverty and more funding to tackle the housing emergency. It is all talk and no action from him, as usual. If he wants to talk about what is "knackered", he has only to look at his knackered Prime Minister and his knackered UK Labour Government, which, after one year in power, is plummeting in the polls and running scared of Reform UK. If he wants to use the word "knackered" from his focus groups, we are very happy to talk about what is knackered: his Government and his Prime Minister.

In contrast, Ross Greer made a constructive contribution, and I agree with many of the things that he had to say. We disagree on some things, but it is about working collaboratively on the things that we agree on. I would also say that about Alex Cole-Hamilton. There are many areas on which he and his colleagues have taken a pragmatic approach to working with us in order to make progress—the budget is an example of that—and I welcome that. However, on his comment about the attainment gap, I point out that we have record levels of literacy and numeracy attainment for both primary and secondary pupils, and we have a record-low attainment gap in literacy for primary schools. Yes, there is more to do, but we have to recognise where progress has been made.

Clare Haughey set out well the UK Labour Government's woeful record. It made a promise to cut energy bills only for us to see them rise, and that increase impacts on people's household budgets.

Pam Duncan-Glancy spoke about reducing child poverty, but let me remind her of the facts. Scotland is the only part of the UK where the level of child poverty is falling. It is going up in the areas that the Labour Party controls, whether in Wales or in England. The reality is very different from her rhetoric.

Liam Kerr: This debate has been on the Scottish Government's priorities, but not one SNP speaker has mentioned the serious challenges in the justice portfolio. Can the people of Scotland conclude that justice is still not a priority for this failing SNP Government?

Shona Robison: We have prioritised justice and the front-line spend for Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, both of which have received a real-terms increase in their funding. Crime is at a record low in most areas,

and we should be proud of that. People should feel safe in Scotland. That is not to say that there are not challenges with sexual offences and domestic violence, which are issues that I take very seriously indeed. However, let us not create the impression that Scotland is not a safe place. It is a safe place to live in, and we should all be telling the truth about that.

I cannot let this debate pass without challenging something that Craig Hoy said. I was going to say something a bit light-hearted about public sector reform and the explanation and detail that I gave him on that at the Finance and Public Administration Committee this morning, but I will turn instead to the fact that he said that “the character” of Dumfries “has changed” and is changing. I want to know what he meant by “character”. What characteristics was Craig Hoy referring to?

Craig Hoy: I will happily respond to the minister, because I spent the summer talking to real voters out in the real world, and they are very concerned about the community effects of long-term asylum hotels at the heart of their community. People should not be staying at those places for two to three years; that is not a long-term solution. It is for the Scottish Government and the UK Government to answer now how they intend to solve that problem.

Shona Robison: If Craig Hoy is going to talk about changed characteristics, he needs to explain what characteristics he is talking about. That is dangerous rhetoric that we do not want brought to this place and it has to stop now. Craig Hoy should reflect on his statement today.

Sarah Boyack talked about action on climate change. I agree that we need action on climate change and the transition to net zero, but here again there is a lack of reality, because the UK Labour Government has the chance to act. Grangemouth is still without the cash that the UK Labour Government promised, yet that Government has managed to save a second steelworks in England. Unite the Union has called the Labour Government out for the lack of action and the lack of the cash that was promised. Let us get away from the rhetoric and let her Government stump up the cash that it promised the workers of Grangemouth.

Ben Macpherson spoke for us all today in exposing the lack of ideas from any of the Opposition benches. He made up for that by recognising the positive achievements of our public services across the summer months—hard work by our hard-working public servants. We should not talk down their efforts; it really demeans those who do.

Jamie Greene talked about some of the issues that we need to address—including, of course, drug deaths. I represent an area that has been very much impacted by drug deaths. I absolutely have the desire to work with others across the chamber on that issue and with the organisations that are working day in, day out in our communities. We have provided record levels of funding for drug and alcohol programmes, but without doubt there is more that we need to do—I absolutely accept that.

I want to make sure that Michael Marra is aware that the Western Gateway primary school is in the capital plan for Dundee City Council. I thought that he would have known that, but there we are. Every day is a learning day, even for Michael Marra.

In his opening speech, the First Minister laid out in detail the impact of the resources that we are putting in and the improvements that are being made in our public services. At no point did he say that there was not more to do—of course, there is. The actions that we have mentioned cover only a few of the important areas. We will continue to invest in budgets that were not supported by the Opposition parties and to deliver positive impacts.

We recognise that there is more to do. We will continue to listen in order to understand the issues that people are facing, and we will continue to deliver on the people’s priorities for the future of Scotland. That is what we will focus on.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): That concludes the debate on the Scottish Government’s priorities for Scotland.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:19

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of four Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motions S6M-18690 and S6M-18691, on committee membership, and motions S6M-18692 and S6M-18693, on committee substitutes.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that—

Rhoda Grant be appointed to replace Paul O’Kane as a member of the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee;

Davy Russell be appointed to replace Foysol Choudhury as a member of the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee;

Michael Marra be appointed to replace Paul O’Kane as a member of the Social Justice and Social Security Committee; and

Carol Mochan be appointed to replace Mark Griffin as a member of the Social Justice and Social Security Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that Ariane Burgess be appointed to replace Mark Ruskell as a member of the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that—

Michael Marra be appointed as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Public Audit Committee;

Foysol Choudhury be appointed to replace Daniel Johnson as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee;

Mark Griffin be appointed to replace Carol Mochan as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Social Justice and Social Security Committee; and

Rhoda Grant be appointed as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that Mark Ruskell be appointed to replace Ariane Burgess as the Scottish Green Party substitute on the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

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

Decision Time

17:19

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

There are six questions to be put as a result of today’s business. I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Russell Findlay is agreed to, the amendments in the name of Anas Sarwar and Alex Cole-Hamilton will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S6M-18671.4, in the name of Russell Findlay, which seeks to amend motion S6M-18671, in the name of John Swinney, on priorities 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.

17:20

Meeting suspended.

17:25

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We move to the vote on amendment S6M-18671.4, in the name of Russell Findlay, which seeks to amend S6M-18671, in the name of John Swinney, on priorities for Scotland. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is closed.

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

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

The Minister for Business and Employment (Richard Lochhead): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app would not work. I would have voted no.

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

For

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Ind)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)

Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 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)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (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)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by Ross Greer]
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)

Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 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)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Michael Marra]
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Abstentions

Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-18671.4, in the name of Russell Findlay, is: For 27, Against 90, Abstentions 1.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: I remind members that if the amendment in the name of Anas Sarwar is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Alex Cole-Hamilton will fall.

The next question is, that amendment S6M-18671.2, in the name of Anas Sarwar, which seeks to amend motion S6M-18671, in the name of John Swinney, on priorities for Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice (Shirley-Anne Somerville): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app would not connect. I would have voted no.

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

Neil Gray: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app did not connect. I would have voted no.

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

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I would have voted yes.

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

For

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 O’Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Michael Marra]
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Ind)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)

FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, 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)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 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)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)

Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Abstentions

Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-18671.2, in the name of Anas Sarwar, is: For 19, Against 98, Abstentions 1.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-18671.3, in the name of Ross Greer, which seeks to amend motion S6M-18671, in the name of John Swinney, on priorities for Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app seemed to do something funny—I do apologise. I would have voted no.

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

For

Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by Ross Greer]
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Ind)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)

Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (Ind)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Michael Marra]
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD) [Proxy vote cast by Willie Rennie]
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-18671.3, in the name of Ross Greer, is: For 8, Against 111, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-18671.1, in the name of Alex Cole-Hamilton, which seeks to amend motion S6M-18671, in the name of John Swinney, on priorities for Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Ind)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Michael Marra]
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD) [Proxy vote cast by Willie Rennie]

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by Ross Greer]
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 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)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Abstentions

Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-18671.1, in the name of Alex Cole-Hamilton, is: For 50, Against 68, Abstentions 1.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-18671, in the name of John Swinney, on priorities for Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app would not connect. I would have voted yes.

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

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)

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

Against

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

Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Michael Marra]
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD) [Proxy vote cast by Willie Rennie]

Abstentions

Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-18671, in the name of John Swinney, on priorities for Scotland, is: For 66, Against 52, Abstentions 1.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament welcomes the Scottish Government's continued focus on its four key priorities of eradicating child poverty, tackling the climate emergency, growing the economy, and ensuring high-quality and sustainable public services; recognises that the delivery of these priorities is within the significant constraints of a constitutional settlement that hampers achieving those priorities due to the policy decisions of UK Conservative and Labour administrations, and recognises that it is only by choosing independence that Scotland can get the fresh start that its people need and deserve.

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

As no member has objected, the final question is, that motions S6M-18690 and S6M-18691 on committee membership and motions S6M-18692 and S6M-18693 on committee substitutes, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that—

Rhoda Grant be appointed to replace Paul O'Kane as a member of the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee;

Davy Russell be appointed to replace Foysol Choudhury as a member of the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee;

Michael Marra be appointed to replace Paul O'Kane as a member of the Social Justice and Social Security Committee; and

Carol Mochan be appointed to replace Mark Griffin as a member of the Social Justice and Social Security Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that Ariane Burgess be appointed to replace Mark Ruskell as a member of the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that—

Michael Marra be appointed as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Public Audit Committee;

Foysol Choudhury be appointed to replace Daniel Johnson as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee;

Mark Griffin be appointed to replace Carol Mochan as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Social Justice and Social Security Committee; and

Rhoda Grant be appointed as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that Mark Ruskell be appointed to replace Ariane Burgess as the Scottish Green Party substitute on the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee.

National Health Service Dentistry

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-17893, in the name of Alex Rowley, on provision of national health service dentistry. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament is concerned by the availability of NHS dentistry provision, with specific concerns relating to some dental practices reportedly making the decision to no longer provide dentistry on the NHS for adult patients; understands that the operators of Breeze Dental Care in Fife have indicated their intention to restrict the NHS dental care that they provide to only those under the age of 26, affecting patients of both their Cowdenbeath and Cardenden practices; further understands that this decision has caused considerable stress for existing patients, who have reportedly been told that the only option to remain with the practice is to sign up to a private payment plan, which many cannot afford; regrets the reported anxiety that this has caused for some patients who have used the same dental practice for many decades of their life and are now unable to find any other dentists in their local area accepting new NHS dental patients; is troubled by situations such as this when a dentist decides to no longer offer NHS dental treatment, but existing patients have no recourse to move to another dentist due to a lack of availability in the provision; believes that this situation is unfair and risks disrupting continuity of care, which can be vital for people who have attended a local dentist for much of their life; understands that, in responding to this latest practice removing NHS provision, NHS Fife has said that "There is a national shortage of qualified dentists currently and this remains a significant issue impacting NHS dentistry across Scotland, including here in Fife", and that "Health Boards like NHS Fife have no means of compelling practices to provide NHS dental services, and with the shift over recent years from smaller NHS-run practices to larger corporate entities, we have very limited influence over practice decisions", and notes the belief that, as a result of many people across the Mid Scotland and Fife region, as well as across Scotland, finding it difficult to access NHS dentistry, the Scottish Government should review the availability of provision as well as what action can be taken to ensure that people remain able to access NHS dentistry.

17:37

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I thank the MSPs who signed my motion to enable us to have the debate, and I thank my business manager for allocating time for what I believe is an important issue that the Parliament and the Government must do more to address.

I brought the debate to the chamber as a result of being contacted, time and again, by constituents who have been struggling to access a national health service dentist and, more recently, by constituents who are being told that their dentist has decided to withdraw from NHS provision and who are being given a choice to either sign up to a monthly payment plan or leave the practice.

An example comes from an email that I received from a lady in Cowdenbeath some months ago. She stated:

"Dear Mr Rowley,

I am emailing you to see if there's any advice or help you can give me as I am stressing out. I received an email from a local dentist saying they are no longer doing NHS only private and must decide by beginning of June or I will be put off list altogether—won't have a dentist.

Mr Rowley I was with Breeze for 45 yrs. I am a pensioner in June. Tried six dentists in"

Dunfermline,

"even went in to them in person not taking any new NHS!!! This is absolutely shocking! Finally went down to Cowdenbeath dentist Stenhouse Street—not taking anyone on NHS just now.

Why can't I get a dentist it's a disgrace!!! Breeze offering private payment plan monthly, that's not counting the treatment you might need and can't afford.

Really upset me very much. Why can't I get into a dentist what's the problem!? This is a shocking disgrace. Hope to hear from you."

Another lady, from south-west Fife, said:

"My current dentist has informed me that they are no longer offering NHS treatment. I have tried and exhausted all possible means of finding a new dentist. I am not in pain and am willing to go on a waiting list. Even the waiting lists are closed!!! So I find myself at a complete loss. I am usually reluctant to use the word 'entitled'—but in this country, currently, NHS dental care is my entitlement. Yet there is absolutely no provision. What do you suggest I do?"

When I raised the matter directly with NHS Fife, its chief executive officer responded:

"There is a national shortage of qualified dentists currently and this remains a significant issue impacting NHS dentistry across Scotland, including here in Fife.

Health Boards like NHS Fife have no means of compelling practices to provide NHS dental services, and with the shift over recent years from smaller NHS-run practices to larger corporate entities, we have very limited influence over practice decisions.

We are, however, committed to supporting practices to improve access to NHS dentistry within our control and remit."

I acknowledge that the Government is trying to address the issues with a 15 per cent increase in this year's dental services budget, and I welcome the additional investment, including the establishment of the Scottish dental access initiative grant. That new grant has, in part, led to a new six-surgery facility opening in Dunfermline, which has registered its first 3,000 NHS patients since July.

That is very welcome, but much more will need to be done. A total of 3,000 people signing up so far shows the sheer volume of those who are not able to access NHS dentistry; the numbers across Scotland are in the tens of thousands.

When I found out about the welcome new developments, I wrote to people who had contacted me, including the two ladies I quoted earlier. One thanked me and said that she had been able to sign up with the new dentist in Dunfermline. The other lady responded that she had tried to register, but the lists were closed. When I looked on the website of the new practice, it said:

"We have been overwhelmed by the response from those who have signed up already. We have decided to pause sign ups for now to cater to those who have signed up already."

As I said, it is very welcome that the Government now recognises that action is desperately required, but much more will be required to address the underinvestment, for a decade and more, that has led to the unacceptable situation in which tens of thousands of people find themselves unable to access NHS dentistry.

I will outline why that is important. NHS Fife has always emphasised that emergency care remains available. However, preventive dental care is significantly less expensive than the cost of treating advanced dental disease. In addition, maintaining good oral hygiene helps to prevent common problems such as tooth decay and gum disease, which can lead to tooth loss, bad breath and more serious health conditions such as heart disease, diabetes and respiratory infections, and which are linked to some forms of cancer.

It is therefore crucial that, in a developed country such as Scotland, the population is able to access dental care. As one constituent put it to me, being able to access a dentist must be a requirement that every citizen can expect.

I welcome the steps that the Government has taken this year, but much more must be done. If larger corporate entities are taking over smaller practices and removing NHS provision, we must be clear that alternative provision will be put in place. Dentistry is far too important to allow communities to be left beholden to such large corporate entities, which put profit before people.

We have to recognise that, while the Government has started to take action, much more has to be done. Every individual in the country should be able to access an NHS dentist, and if they cannot, the costs of that will be massive for people and their health and for the Government.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. I remind all members who are seeking to contribute to check that they have pressed their request-to-speak button, and I remind members that speeches should be of up to four minutes.

17:45

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I thank Mr Rowley for lodging the motion to allow us to debate the matter. As I represent a rural region that is affected possibly more than most areas in respect of access to NHS dentistry, I sympathise with his constituents.

I agree with Mr Rowley that the decisions by privately owned dental practices to withdraw care and increase charges are hugely concerning and need exposed. In the south of Scotland, we have seen many of the same challenges affecting patients' access to dentists, which in some cases has been hugely restricted or withdrawn completely.

Over the past two years, nearly 25,000 people in Dumfries and Galloway have been deregistered from NHS dental practices. That includes 2,500 in Lochthorn, 4,000 in the DADDs practice and 1,000 people in Stranraer. Over the past couple of years, I have engaged in a lot of casework on the issue.

I am grateful for the Scottish Government's roll-out of the Scottish dental access initiative, which is delivering opportunities for investment in rural dentistry and rural practices.

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): Will the member give way?

Emma Harper: Give me one wee second.

In Moffat in my region, for example, Moffat Dental Practice took on 2,000 new patients after securing grant funding from the dental access initiative. That funding helped to provide an additional NHS dentist in the practice and supported local training efforts.

Finlay Carson: Does the member agree that it is too little, too late and that the Government is not doing enough? We are still seeing dentists in Dumfries and Galloway deregistering and providing only private services.

Emma Harper: As I said, there are still issues that need to be addressed, and I will come on to discuss potential solutions.

I urge any practice in rural Dumfries and Galloway, in the Borders and in parts of South Ayrshire to get in touch with the Scottish dental access initiative to see what they can do to boost and expand their services and the number of patients they serve.

In the time that I have, I highlight that I believe that we can go further where needed—for example, by introducing mobile dental services to go directly to communities where dental coverage is reduced and bring care to the doorstep until a longer-term solution can be found. Deploying mobile units would allow the NHS and dental

professionals to react quickly to closures or the withdrawal of services and to ensure that locals who are affected continue to receive NHS dental care. I am keen to hear from the Minister for Public Health and Women's Health whether mobile dental services could be pursued in Galloway as an action to assist.

Across Scotland, we have seen a revolution in preventative care that is aimed at ensuring that patients do not need treatment in the first place. For the past decade and a half, the Scottish National Party Scottish Government has delivered the Childsmile programme to every child under 12, with a focus on those who are under five.

Over that period, the proportion of those in primary 1 with no tooth decay has improved. Children from the most economically deprived households saw the biggest benefit, and the health inequality gap between those children and those in the wealthiest households is closing. The commitment to engaging in the early years to prevent issues from arising later in life, when they increase the pressures on care services, also drives the Scottish Government's policy on funding dental treatment for all those aged under 26 in our country, which was introduced four years ago and is putting money back in the pockets of hard-pressed households during Westminster's cost of living crisis.

There is a lot more that can be done in dentistry, just as there is always much that can be done for our health and care sector. However, I know that our Scottish Government is committing to do all that it can to provide the best possible treatment for our citizens, regardless of where they live. The areas of Scotland that face the fewest problems are those that have less trouble maintaining their populations and have a younger demographic.

Attracting dentists to our communities is as hard as attracting people in any other profession, as there are clearly challenges in pulling newly qualified professionals away from the urban cities. Fixing the challenges of rural dentistry also means tackling the much bigger—and, to be frank, more complex—issues around the demography of regions such as Dumfries and Galloway, and our NHS can play a part in that. I will stop there.

17:49

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife)
(Con): I am very pleased to be able to speak in this evening's debate, and I thank Alex Rowley for bringing it to the chamber.

Four and a half years ago, the SNP made some very bold promises about the future of NHS dentistry across Scotland. However, with the end of the parliamentary session now in sight, the fact is that many communities do not have a dentist

whom they can go to; indeed, such a prospect is a distant dream for them. We know that thousands of Scots have not seen a dentist for a number of years, and the number of young people who require dental treatment in hospital has increased in each of the past four years.

From every corner of Scotland, we are repeatedly hearing that practices are no longer accepting NHS patients, and whole areas of Scotland are now being classified as dental deserts. There are also countless stories of constituents being forced to take private treatment, and even stories of patients doing dentistry on themselves because they do not have the opportunity to get treatment.

Alex Rowley's motion rightly highlights the problems with Breeze Dental Care in our region. Patients were very used to going to the practice; however, it said that it was no longer able to provide NHS services and that patients would have to sign up to a payment plan. That has been happening with lots of other dentists and in lots of other areas, and it is a real issue for individuals.

As for those areas of Scotland that are affected, I know that, in my area and region, countless stories and amounts of information have been going back and forth, and MSPs will have found their inboxes full of such things. Dental services across Stirling are on a knife edge, and many locations are suffering. Infinityblu Dental Care and Implant Clinic, for example, announced that it would no longer be taking any NHS patients in the Callander area, except for those under the age of 18. Many people had been going to that practice for decades; at the time, constituents were told that they needed to go to other locations, and they were hugely concerned about that. Those in Callander had to go to Crieff or Auchterarder, which is a considerable distance to travel. The practice made it clear that it did not want to make such decisions, but it found that it was losing revenue on every NHS patient whom it treated. Since then, there has been an improvement in the situation.

I recognise that the Government is trying to do something, but its approach is not having an effect everywhere, and some locations are still finding it really difficult. Residents in the example that I highlighted are still hoping for a full return of adult NHS dental services, and I am disappointed that that has not happened, although I know that the Government, along with the health board—NHS Forth Valley—is still working to find solutions. Solutions have been found in some areas, but not in all, and more work needs to be done to ensure that people get the protection that they need for their oral health.

Regardless of what the Government is doing, the fact is that there is a genuine need to tackle

this agenda. As I have said, we are coming towards the end of this parliamentary session, and I hope that the Government will finally take note of the flood of casework that MSPs are having to cope with. I have seen the situation in my region, and other MSPs are saying the same thing. The solution to it will, no doubt, be no easy fix—we acknowledge that—but we also feel that, instead of tinkering around the edges, the Scottish Government must commit to building the sort of modern dental service that communities, and those in rural environments in particular, need, and to ensuring that that approach to dentistry is in place for them. I and many others will keep calling for that repeatedly, because what is required is a safe support mechanism for individuals across communities.

17:54

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank Alex Rowley for bringing forward this important debate. His contribution showed us how the situation feels for our constituents out there today.

Dentistry needs to be viewed as part of the prevention agenda in health in Scotland, and access to timely and routine dental care is crucial to achieving that goal.

An issue that I want to raise at this point, and which should be important to us in the chamber, is the persistent and widening oral health inequalities that we have in Scotland, with the most deprived communities experiencing significantly worse outcomes than our more affluent ones. Equal access must be part of our plan, because good oral health helps to prevent systemic health conditions, including cardiovascular disease, respiratory infections and problems, diabetes and pregnancy complications. It is integral to our overall health and wellbeing. Sometimes we forget that, but if we want to close that gap, dentistry must be seen as playing a part in health outcomes and health inequalities.

It is critical that people have access to an NHS dentist—that is the key. Today's debate has highlighted that access is a problem for our constituents. They are not receiving regular check-ups and, as we have heard, there is consensus across Scotland that it is becoming harder and harder to register with and access an NHS dentist. In the current system, patients are unable to access NHS care. Dentists are in short supply, which means that practices have vacancies that go on and on, and they cannot fill them. There are fewer dentists who are willing to treat our NHS patients. Alex Rowley gave an example of how we are pushing people to the private sector.

Those challenges are well known and of long standing. Alex Rowley spoke about some of the

initiatives that the Government has put in place, but, as others have said, we need to do more. Even those within the profession have argued that the model of dentistry is not fit for purpose and that it fails patients.

I will consider some data from my region of South Scotland on registrations and contact with dentists. In Dumfries and Galloway, only 65 per cent of the population is registered with an NHS dentist. Dumfries and Galloway is an example of a dental desert, and the issue of the recruitment of dentists plays a huge part in that. In Ayrshire, a dental practice in Mauchline—my home village—reported having an NHS patient waiting list of 1,000 people.

To return to the point about inequalities, some people are lucky enough to be registered with an NHS dentist, but there are significant numbers of people who cannot register, which leads to more and more inequality.

In Ayrshire and Arran, less than 60 per cent of registered patients living in the most-deprived areas had contact with an NHS dentist in the past two years. That compares with 73 per cent or more of patients living in some of the least-deprived areas.

I hope that today's debate highlights that we need to fix the crisis. The Government's approach has been piecemeal. We appreciate the actions that it has taken, but there needs to be leadership to ensure that a two-tier system does not exist in dentistry and that we can move forward.

I support the motion and I thank everyone who has contributed to the debate.

17:58

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I thank Alex Rowley for bringing the debate to the chamber. He presented it in a grounded and honest way, because he reflected on the strengths as well as on the weaknesses, which he quite rightly highlighted.

It is good to have the debate, because we are getting on to being two years on from the review of the funding system. An indication was given at that point that that would start to improve the situation, but in many circumstances—certainly in my constituency—the situation has not improved. In fact, it has deteriorated since.

Before the 2023 review of the funding, we had the closure of the Newburgh, Glenrothes and Leven practices, which have not reopened. We have also continued to see practices not opening up for the registration of NHS patients. The Cupar dentist, which is run by the Real Good Dental Company, is now emergency only, and it has been like that for months.

People are desperate to get treatment. They cannot even get the check-ups, and they are desperate to get routine treatment. Unless they are in an emergency situation, they are just not seen, because we are short of dentists.

I have some examples that I sought from constituents. One constituent says that there has been no registration for two years. A couple from St Andrews have had to go to Glasgow to get check-ups, and another constituent said that their surgery had closed a year ago, since when they have been unable to register with another dentist. That constituent cannot afford to go private and their teeth have never been in such a state. There are many examples of patients who are struggling because of the lack of treatment. They cannot afford to go private and they certainly cannot afford to go to Turkey to get their teeth sorted, as some people can afford to do. Therefore, we still have a problem. There seems to be a particular issue in rural and more deprived areas, which requires particular attention from the Government.

It is not just a case of going private or abroad. Even if someone is registered, that does not guarantee that they will get the treatment that they need, as we have seen with the case of the Cupar dentist. Some people can wait for a very long time. Their practices are so overwhelmed with the shortage of dentists that they find it difficult to treat all their patients, even if they are registered. We should not really be looking at registration rates, because once someone is registered with a dentist, they are often registered with that dentist for life. It used to be that they would have to renew their registration regularly. The registration process does not really indicate the quality of the service that patients are receiving.

What are the solutions? We need to look at the particular problem in rural areas, and at the General Dental Council process for foreign dentists who are in this country—apparently, 6,000 of them in the United Kingdom are not going through the system. That issue is primarily the responsibility of Westminster and the GDC, but we need to get it resolved. Through the budget process, which the Liberal Democrats voted for, we negotiated the inclusion of an additional £3 million for an increase in the number of training places, and that is starting to come through.

As Fergus Ewing MSP has said previously, we also need to consider how we can keep dentists who are trained by the state in the UK not only in the country but in the NHS. Dentists used to serve a certain period in the NHS before they could take on private work. That has changed, and we need to consider whether we can reverse that trend and keep dentists in the NHS for much longer.

18:02

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): I thank Alex Rowley for securing the debate. I am sure that we all have constituents who have been in touch about access to dental care, but the problem is more acute in rural areas. In January, I was shocked to read that 2 million Scots, including 177,000 children, have not seen a dentist in two years, and that a number—significantly lower, admittedly—have not seen a dentist since the Covid pandemic. There is also worrying data about access to dentistry among children in deprived areas, where it appears that the figures are going in the wrong direction.

Emma Harper has referred to the fact that, as many members know, Dumfries and Galloway has one of the worst rates of NHS registration by some margin—40 per cent of those living in the south-west no longer have access to NHS dentists. That is a shocking statistic and one that shows that the current model of NHS dentistry simply is not working in Scotland, and particularly in rural areas. The model for funding NHS dentistry is clearly not fit for purpose.

Last year, I was struck by something that Emma Harper referred to, which is the number of people who were being deregistered in Scotland, particularly in Dumfries and Galloway. Overall, 25,000 were deregistered, but the figure in one fell swoop was 2,000. At the same point, last October, no NHS dentists in Dumfries and Galloway were registering new NHS patients. Those moving into the area were not getting access to NHS dentistry and those living there were being deregistered. That means significant problems, particularly for those from a lower-income background. The subscription model, which now appears to be the norm in Scotland, is clearly not affordable for many of the constituents who have been in touch with me.

This is part of a broader problem about access to rural healthcare and the problems that rural residents face more generally. Many members will be aware of the recent withdrawal of bus services in Dumfries and Galloway, which means that people are having to take very long bus journeys, and they sometimes have long waits in between buses, even when moving between towns and villages that are relatively close. That puts in place another barrier to accessing healthcare and dentistry, particularly for those who do not have access to a car or for those who are elderly. The minister should consider that in relation to rural housing, because the recruitment of dentists into rural areas is undoubtedly being undermined not just by the disconnections in rural transport but by the lack of affordable rural housing.

The other issue that I have been struck by is that of accessing emergency dentistry, which was

seen as a panacea for some people. Someone who was not registered with a dentist and who needed an extraction could access emergency dentistry relatively easily. Last year, however, it emerged that adults seeking extractions in the Dumfries and Galloway health board area had to wait 43 weeks if they could not access that through a primary care setting, compared with just 10 weeks in 2019-20. For children, the waiting time was a staggering 42 weeks, compared with nine weeks just four years before.

There are clearly problems in relation to the dental position throughout Scotland, but the situation in rural areas is particularly dire. The Scottish Government must redouble its efforts to work with the profession and with our rural communities to ensure that they do not become dental black spots or dental deserts. That does untold damage to people's health and can in some cases lead to life-threatening conditions, as was the case for a constituent who came to a surgery in Canonbie recently. That is, frankly, unacceptable in modern Scotland.

18:06

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I, too, thank Alex Rowley for securing the debate. We are both familiar with the challenges around access to NHS dentistry in our region of Mid Scotland and Fife and across the country, with numerous concerns having been raised with us by constituents—both patients and dental practitioners—over a period of years.

Not only have dental practices been closing; many are either reducing or entirely ending NHS provision for adult patients, leaving patients in the position of having to pay for private care or having no access to a dentist. That is entirely at odds with the belief that everyone should have access to NHS care when they need it. Instead of high-quality free NHS dentistry being ensured for all, many people are now being pushed into private practice, sometimes effectively to subsidise the delivery of NHS services at the same practice. They often have no choice, because the alternative that they are faced with is to leave the practice and not receive dental care, as they cannot get registered with an alternative NHS dentist. We know the potential consequences of that from the terrible examples of DIY treatment and from cases of people enduring discomfort and declining oral health. As other members have said, regular dental checks are important, as they identify other oral health conditions and allow for early prevention and treatment.

The move to lifetime registration in 2010 should have resulted in a change to how we measure access to a dentist. Lifetime registration does not always reflect access, and we need to focus on

the number of people who are actually accessing NHS care. The headline figures that the Scottish Government promotes say that 95 per cent of Scots are registered with an NHS dentist, but what really matters is the proportion of those who have actually had contact with a dentist in the past two years, which is much lower. At the start of this year, out of those who were registered, 1.8 million adults and more than 177,000 children in Scotland had not seen a dentist in that period, and 28 per cent of registered adults had not had an appointment in five years. Those are the figures that we need to focus on.

The number of NHS practices is still in decline, with NHS provision reducing or ending completely at many practices. The British Dental Association is clear that the fall in attendance at dental surgeries will mean a bigger burden from a higher rate of dental disease and the likely widening of health inequalities. Unless we improve access to dentists now, it will cost the NHS far more to deal with the consequences. We need to consider preventative measures that can be applied to the approach to dental care more broadly. For years, those in the profession have been calling for a move to a more preventative system, instead of the drill-and-fill model. Instead of that comprehensive change, however, there has been only tinkering, which has simply not been good enough.

I recognise that there has been some positive news in Fife more recently, with the opening of a new practice in Dunfermline, although Alex Rowley has highlighted the stress that is being experienced and the demand for that service. I also recognise that that has been supported in part by funding from the Scottish dental access initiative and that there are plans in place for Leven and Glenrothes. However, we have to remember that not only do those new practices come in the context of a greater number of closures and restrictions on access to NHS dentistry, but that NHS services are under significant pressures nationally and that the supply of dentists is finite. Therefore, for every community that benefits from a new practice, there will be more communities that miss out. That is the crux of the problem.

To address the problem, we need to not only increase the number of qualified dentists, but ensure that there are adequate numbers of technicians, nurses and hygienists, who are all vital parts of a practice. I have spoken to dentists in my region and they want to see every avenue explored to expand routes into dentistry and related roles. That includes ensuring that more students are being trained, by lifting the cap on numbers and encouraging them to stay not only in Scotland but in the NHS, as well as facilitating routes for qualified practitioners from other

countries to be able to practice here—that is an area that I have previously spoken to the minister about.

I recognise that there is a role for the UK Government, but there is more that the Scottish Government could explore to see what we can do here and whether we can make progress.

18:11

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries)

(Con): I thank Alex Rowley for bringing this important debate to the chamber. NHS dentistry is a critical issue that affects thousands across Scotland—nowhere more than in my constituency of Galloway and West Dumfries. I am not surprised that Emma Harper is the only SNP back benchers who is prepared or brave enough to try to defend the Government's position—it is done through gritted teeth, no doubt.

The situation in Dumfries and Galloway is dire, and I will not apologise for repeating some of the stark figures. We are the worst affected area in Scotland, with only 63 per cent of the population registered with an NHS dentist. According to a formal response from NHS Dumfries and Galloway, 45,432 patients lost access to an NHS dentist between September 2021 and September 2024.

In 2019, Scotland had approximately 3,400 dentists providing NHS services; by 2023, that number had fallen to 3,240—a drop of 167 dentists, which is a 4.9 per cent fall over that period. Although some might argue that that fall is significant, the number of dentists, even though it is falling, is not the main issue.

This has not happened overnight. I have raised concerns with successive First Ministers—Nicola Sturgeon, Humza Yousaf and their health secretaries. Despite repeated promises, the situation has only worsened under John Swinney.

I respect minister Jenni Minto and I have no doubt that she wants to sort the issue. In 2023, she said that she was

“working closely with NHS Boards on local solutions, particularly in remote and rural communities.”

In 2024, Neil Gray promised that they were

“developing a Rural Delivery Plan to address the challenges faced by rural Scotland.”

Those are fine words, but where is the delivery? Where is the plan? It will no doubt be too little, too late. Where are the bespoke solutions for Dumfries and Galloway?

On the ground, patients are being deregistered in the tens of thousands and forced to travel miles for treatment or pushed into private care that they simply cannot afford. I lodged a parliamentary

question asking where the funding has gone when patients are shifted to private care. Has any of that money been reinvested in our region? I also asked how much NHS Dumfries and Galloway has saved due to reduced provision, and how those savings are being used. The answer was that payments come from a national budget, with no separate allocation for boards. Although the minister boasted of a 15 per cent increase in the budget, that means nothing to my constituents who cannot get an appointment.

Dentists are walking away from NHS work because the current contract is financially unsustainable. Fees do not cover the cost of care, especially for complex treatments, and rising overheads make it impossible for practices to survive on NHS rates alone. Yes, fees were increased during the pandemic to keep practices afloat but now, the system is broken. The result is that there is virtually no NHS dental provision in the south of Scotland.

I admit that there have been some positive steps, such as the outreach facility in Dumfries, where 12 final-year dental students provide emergency care for unregistered patients. That is welcome, but it is a sticking plaster over a gaping wound. Even then, retaining those students locally is nearly impossible due to the chronic shortage of affordable housing, which is, yet again, another SNP failure.

This is a crisis of the SNP's making. Years of underfunding, poor workforce planning and ill-conceived policies have created a perfect storm. Unless the Government changes course, the situation will only deteriorate.

However, behind every statistic there is a real person. Last week, I received an email from a constituent in Stranraer. His family has been forced into private dental care, which is an impossible burden as the cost of living continues to rise. He is deeply worried about the long-term impact on his children, who need regular preventative care but are being priced out of basic health services.

His story is echoed in hundreds of messages that I have received from across my constituency. Those are not isolated cases. They are the lived reality of families who feel abandoned, unheard and increasingly desperate. Scotland's rural communities are proud and resilient, but they should not have to fight this hard just to access the care that they deserve.

My colleagues in the Scottish Conservatives will not stand by while children go without treatment, while parents choose between groceries and dentist bills and while elderly residents lose the dignity of basic health provision. This is not about dentistry on its own; it is about fairness and

dignity. Until every family in Dumfries and Galloway can access NHS dental care without fear, without cost and without delay, we will keep fighting, because they deserve better.

Under this failing SNP Government, we are a long, long way from having the confidence to smile again.

18:15

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): I thank my friend Mr Rowley, a member for the Mid Scotland and Fife region, for presenting this important motion on the terrible state of NHS dentistry in Fife, which I was pleased to sign.

We have heard a series of passionate speeches from across the chamber about patients—our constituents—who have been forced to go private for their care or who cannot access dentistry at all and are left to languish. We know that, increasingly, many of Scotland's citizens are having to rely on our underresourced public dental service for routine care that, just a few years ago, they would have been able to get routinely from an NHS-registered practice. We see that situation playing out across Scotland, especially in places such as Fife.

NHS dentistry is quickly becoming a thing of the past. The well-off go private while the less well-off fall through the gaps and are left behind. That is against everything that the NHS was set up to achieve.

In Scotland, oral health has too often been treated as a nice thing to have rather than an essential part of preventative healthcare. We choose to celebrate genuine successes in public health such as Childsmile—a programme that was set up under the previous Labour Government in Scotland and has continued under the current Government—while ignoring the fact that more and more of those who call Scotland their home are missing out on essential dental care.

Oral health care is not just about addressing pain when it is experienced or keeping plaque at bay; it is about early detection of many conditions that are critical to whole-body health, such as diabetes. It is also about protecting a person's ability to consume and enjoy food and retaining jaw structure so that, throughout a person's life, they can recognise themselves in a mirror—that is actually a public health matter, as it helps to maintain good mental health. Good healthcare is a vital part of a holistic approach to medicine, and it must be available for everyone in regard to dental treatment.

We have heard about a number of rather shocking cases. Mr Rowley described a shocking case concerning his constituent, and it is

disgraceful that, when trying to register, she was left in such a situation.

Although the Government has taken measures such as reforming the pay system, which may have had a marginal effect, we are still seeing a clear trajectory towards an exit from NHS dentistry. When dentists leave, there is very little incentive for them to return to NHS dental practice—the business model simply does not make sense, and they are certainly getting plenty of customers, because those who can afford to pay will push their way to the front. It is the people who are left behind who we really need to concern ourselves with.

Members have referred to a number of potential solutions. I do not think that anyone here has a desire to simply comment on failure; we are all eager to find solutions, because we all have a stake in this. Solutions that have been suggested by the profession and members include the mobile dental facilities that Ms Harper proposed for South Scotland—I know that NHS Tayside operates one such facility, and perhaps there is more to be done in that regard.

It might also be worth considering the gap in relation to emergency treatment. We know that NHS remuneration for an emergency item is just £20.80, but the private fee for the same treatment is approximately £130. Bridging the gap in the remuneration for emergency treatment could assist in bringing about a change in behaviour.

Additional preventative measures, such as building on water fluoridation and considering issuing enhanced fluoridated toothpaste to over-50s, could represent an opportunity to improve general public dental health.

We should look at the training pipeline. There are about 150 training posts for dentists every year, but the number that is available for dental therapists is restricted—there are only 40 a year. In concert with our activity in relation to dentists, could we expand the role of dental therapists to increase overall capacity when it comes to routine check-up activity and, potentially, baseline dental treatment, such as fillings? Those are all practical measures that could be delivered.

We must concern ourselves with the glut in the number of available training posts. About 6,000 overseas dentists are waiting for General Dental Council registration; they cannot sit the exam, and some have been waiting for up to four years. The chief dental officer in Scotland was exploring with the royal colleges the idea of setting up a separate route for dental training registration in Scotland, but I do not know whether that has been progressed.

We must act urgently on all those measures because, ultimately, our constituents are suffering

as a consequence of the present situation. Let us get on with finding practical solutions to stem the flow.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I invite Jenni Minto to respond to the debate.

18:21

The Minister for Public Health and Women's Health (Jenni Minto): I, too, thank Alex Rowley for bringing the debate to the chamber. It is important that we can use this space to talk about the concerns that members hear about from their constituents, and which I hear about from mine. I very much appreciate the tone in which the debate has been conducted, and I welcome members' valuable contributions.

I reaffirm the Scottish Government's commitment to securing equitable and sustainable access to NHS dental services. As many members have pointed out, in November 2023, we brought in a new payment reform as part of a comprehensive modernisation of the service. That prevention-based model is delivering high levels of service and has been welcomed by the profession, but I recognise that that is not the case across the board, which is why we are focusing on other opportunities.

I welcome the official statistics that were published last week, which show that more than 7 million courses of treatment have been delivered since the introduction of the payment reform in November 2023. That demonstrates that the significant continuing investment in NHS dentistry is supporting high volumes of patient access to NHS care and is delivering on our aims to sustain NHS dental services. In the quarter that ended in June 2025, 1.14 million courses of treatment were delivered. In the same quarter, 998,000 patients were seen by NHS dentists. As others have pointed out, 95.7 per cent of Scotland's population are registered with dentists.

I remain absolutely clear that payment reform is only the first step in ensuring the sustainability of the service, which is why our recently published operational improvement plan sets out key actions to improve the NHS dental workforce and to support equity of access to NHS dental services across Scotland. That is backed by an increase of almost 15 per cent in funding in 2025-26, which takes total funding to more than £500 million for the first time. I echo Willie Rennie's point about the support that we got from the Liberal Democrats in that area.

I agree with Mr Rowley, Ms Baker and others that prevention is hugely important, as is teeth hygiene, especially in the early years, which we are addressing through the Childsmile programme. That fits within our population health

framework, in which dentistry is a key aspect of health prevention work.

Craig Hoy: Will the minister give way?

Jenni Minto: Once I have finished my point.

I was struck when one director of dentistry told me—I think that others have made this point—that a person's mouth gives an indication of their health, which is why dental health is so important. That is why, along with the chief dental officer, I have pressed for dentistry to be included in the preventative health agenda and have increased the budget this year.

Craig Hoy: If those initiatives are working, why does the minister think that, in some of the most deprived areas, the number of children who are presenting for dental treatment is falling rather than rising?

Jenni Minto: That situation is very concerning, which is why we have continued to invest in Childsmile, and we have increased the budget, given the impact of the pandemic, when children were not able to see their dentist and Childsmile nurses were not able to visit children. We have ensured that that activity has ramped up again. We have a number of dental nurses who can go out and provide that education. I do not have the figures to hand, but we are seeing improvements.

I am acutely aware that access continues to be challenging in some areas of Scotland. Fife and Dumfries and Galloway have been mentioned. The challenges are largely due to historical non-dentistry-specific recruitment and retention difficulties in those areas, which some members have recognised.

We continue to make available a range of additional financial support to areas of unmet dental need, and we will work to better target that as part of the commitments that are set out in our operational improvement plan. This year, we have taken targeted action in Shetland and in Dumfries and Galloway through the provision of additional funding to sustain access to dental services and ensure that there is adequate patient care.

Finlay Carson and Emma Harper mentioned the outreach facility that NHS Dumfries and Galloway has been operating, where 12 undergraduates are providing care. I am pleased to say that it is looking at how it can expand that.

That is in addition to practice funding support that is provided through the Scottish dental access initiative. As Alex Rowley said, a practice in Dunfermline with five SDAI-supported surgeries opened in August. We have also been able to approve applications in Inverclyde and in Dumfries and Galloway.

Increasing the dental workforce is a priority for the Scottish Government, and I am encouraged by the progress that we are seeing, with the number of high street dentists working in Scotland increasing by 5 per cent in the past year. We have also committed to providing additional funding this year, to increase the number of domestic dental students by 7 per cent from this month. We are growing the pipeline of staff entering the NHS workforce and providing additional capacity for NHS dental services in the future.

Alex Rowley: What about the issue of large companies? As NHS Fife said, it has no control over them, and they seem to pull out of providing NHS dental treatment, which leaves communities with no access to services.

Jenni Minto: I will come on to that exact point, because we have talked about that in relation to the governance of dentistry.

Alexander Stewart asked for there to be broad change. We are making that change. We are also looking beyond domestic capacity and working closely with NHS Education for Scotland to deliver an innovative training package that will better support dentists who qualified overseas in achieving registration as a dentist with the General Dental Council. In fact, the chief dental officer and his team met the organisation today to press it to be a bit more flexible in that regard.

Carol Mochan and, I think, Willie Rennie called for my leadership on the issue. Acting with leadership is exactly what I have been doing. As others have pointed out, the regulation of dentists remains reserved to the UK Government. I am very disappointed that, despite discussion at four-nation meetings, which I led and in which all nations spoke of their concerns for the dental workforce, the UK Government has decided not to proceed with the necessary legislative changes to enact provisional registration for overseas qualified dentists. Although that makes the delivery of our programme with NES more challenging, I remain committed to exploring all alternatives to widen our pool of available dentists in the shorter term, in addition to growing our domestic talent. I would appreciate support from Scottish Labour in speaking with the UK Government about that.

Finlay Carson: Will the minister give way?

Jenni Minto: I will continue on this topic and then come to Mr Carson.

Immigration is another matter that is reserved to the UK Government. I do not understand why the UK Government chose to remove key dental care professions from eligibility for the skilled worker visa from July 2025. That will impact on dental nurses, hygienists and technicians—exactly the roles that Claire Baker spoke about—who could

help us to improve the dentistry service that we provide.

I share the British Dental Association's concerns about the significance of those changes to the capacity of dental practices and to dental treatment. The move comes amid a significant drop in the number of dental professionals relocating from the European Union to practise in the UK following the UK's exit from the EU, which puts further strain on dental care in our communities. I have therefore written to UK Government ministers to urge them to reconsider those detrimental changes, which will further negatively impact our available workforce.

Finlay Carson: I have no issue with agreeing that leaving the EU will have had some impact on the number of dentists in Scotland, but the elephant in the room is that, although we have seen a reduction of 4.9 per cent in the number of dentists, that pales into insignificance compared with the number of dentists who have opted out of providing NHS services. That is the main issue. Will the minister outline why she believes dentists are opting out of providing NHS services?

Jenni Minto: I thank Mr Carson for his intervention. As he will recognise, dentists operate independent businesses, and it is up to them to decide on their model. That is why we introduced payment reform in November 2023 and why we are continuing to work through the regulatory, workforce and governance issues. That touches on exactly the point that Mr Rowley made about corporates.

As part of further long-term transformation, my officials are taking forward work to consider how we strengthen the existing governance model in NHS dentistry to improve the patient experience and ensure that patients can be seen and offered the appropriate care. As part of that, we are exploring options to make mandatory training for dentists, with its focus on patient safety, more efficient and flexible, to expedite recruitment across Scotland.

Officials are also looking at opportunities for boards to influence the provision of care in their area, including consideration of a declaration of compliance to raise awareness of dentists' terms of service and their social and community responsibilities. They are also considering how to support boards in ensuring that dentists and dental bodies corporate adhere to those commitments.

I recognise that, in some of the areas that have been discussed today—specifically Fife, which a number of contributions have focused on—overreliance on practices with certain business models can present issues when the NHS footprint is suddenly reduced. I have therefore tasked my

officials with looking at the issue to better secure continuity of care for affected patients.

Meeting closed at 18:32.

In closing, I reassure members that, through the introduction of a new payment system—which, as I have been clear in saying, was the first step—and through investment in our workforce and local tailored solutions, we have implemented a policy framework that will support NHS dental services and deliver on our ambition to ensure high-quality, sustainable and equitable public services.

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Members and other meeting participants who wish to suggest corrections to their contributions should contact the Official Report.

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