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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 4 March 2026

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

Portfolio Question Time

Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands

Outdoor Access and Dog Walking

1. **Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how it and its partner agencies promote and raise awareness of the need for responsible outdoor access and dog walking to reduce any instances of livestock worrying and damage. (S6O-05579)

The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie): I very much thank Bob Doris for raising this issue, because the Scottish Government clearly recognises the distress and the serious welfare and financial implications of livestock worrying for people and for the stock. The Scottish Government supported the introduction of legislation to address those issues. The Dogs (Protection of Livestock) (Amendment) (Scotland) Act 2021 gained royal assent on 5 May 2021 and came into force on 5 November 2021. Under the 2021 act, owners of dogs that attack or worry livestock can be fined up to £40,000 or face a prison sentence of up to 12 months. The small minority who do not treat livestock with respect and care must be held accountable, and consequences must appropriately reflect the severity of their crime.

Education is a key factor in prevention of livestock worrying incidents and the associated unnecessary suffering for all who are involved. Messaging is promoted widely on social media by NatureScot as part of on-going communication campaigns to promote responsible behaviour for dog owners.

Bob Doris: Does the minister agree with me about the importance of awareness raising, given the serious welfare impacts, in particular for sheep at lambing time around this time of year? Does he agree that there is a need to emphasise the shared interests of stakeholders such as NFU Scotland and Ramblers Scotland in enhanced education and engagement with the public on access rights and responsibilities? Will he commit to working with key organisations such as those that I mentioned to ensure that everyone is aware of their responsibilities and of the consequences of not doing the right thing?

Jim Fairlie: Bob Doris is absolutely correct and, as I said, I am delighted that he has brought the subject up, in particular as we go into lambing season. The worrying of livestock by dogs is completely unacceptable, and we, as a Government, take it very seriously. We know that it is a particular problem as we go into the lambing season, and the Scottish outdoor access code sets out how to exercise rights and responsibilities when walking dogs in the countryside. We will continue to work with NatureScot, the Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and any other organisation, including NFUS and Ramblers Scotland, to raise awareness of this important issue.

Following a stakeholder summit in 2024, we established the expert advisory group on dog control and dog welfare, comprising key stakeholders, to make recommendations on a number of issues relating to dog control. The group has established a number of sub-groups focusing on specific topics, including one on prevention, education and communication.

Finally—if the Deputy Presiding Officer will allow me just one second—I wish our sheep shearers Gavin Mutch, Hamish Mitchell, Katie O'Sullivan, Rosie Keenan, Willie Craig and Murray Craig, who are currently competing in the New Zealand golden shears competition, all the very best of luck.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): Bob Doris's question shows that livestock worrying is an issue not just for rural communities but for all of Scotland, urban and rural. With lambing season already in progress in many areas of Scotland, and the wee good turn in the weather this spring, the risks for livestock are at their highest. Can the minister therefore reassure my constituents that the full panoply of legal sanctions, including the powers available under the 2021 act, will be deployed by the authorities against those who ignore sensible and reasonable advice about keeping dogs under control, so that havoc is not caused to livestock in this season?

Jim Fairlie: As the member knows, decisions by the judiciary on how they handle sentences are entirely up to them. However, I make this plea to everyone who is walking dogs in the countryside over the spring period, when lambing and calving is going on: please keep control of your dogs, keep them on a lead if possible and make sure that you stay away from breeding livestock.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): I recently held a round-table meeting with local stakeholders to discuss how best to promote responsible use of the outdoor access code to combat irresponsible dog ownership, livestock worrying and disturbance to ground-nesting birds.

What more can the Scottish Government do to support local authorities and rural stakeholders in their role in education about the matter?

Jim Fairlie: I am delighted that Beatrice Wishart has carried out that work, because the more widely that we spread the word that there are serious consequences to people walking their dogs, the better. People often say, "My dog wouldn't do that, because my dog is nice and friendly. It wouldn't harm a fly". However, a dog's instincts mean that, as soon as it starts chasing behaviour, it can go from being playful, to a little bit of rough and tumble, to worrying, before the owner knows what has happened. I urge people not to think that, just because their dog has a lovely nature, it will not be a sheep worrier. Such behaviour can get the dog shot and have very serious consequences for the owner.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): Question 2 has not been lodged.

"Who Owns Scotland 2025"

3. **Foysol Choudhury (Lothian) (Ind):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the report, "Who Owns Scotland 2025". (S6O-05581)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): I welcome the report's contribution to the land reform debate. It highlights that land ownership in Scotland is still deeply unequal. That issue is hundreds of years in the making, and addressing it will not be quick or easy.

The recent Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2025 is a huge step forward. Once implemented, ministers will have lotting powers to split up large landholdings when they are being sold, provided that it is in the public interest to do so. The 2025 act will also ensure that communities can receive advance notification of impending sales or transfers of land by large landholders.

Foysol Choudhury: In 2024, half of Scotland's privately owned rural land was in the hands of 421 entities. That is now down to 408 individuals or companies. Does the Scottish Government agree that land ownership is going backwards?

Mairi Gougeon: I agree with Foysol Choudhury in the sense that the pattern that we have seen is going in completely the wrong direction; it is not the direction that we want to see it going in. However, I emphasise exactly what I outlined in my initial answer about the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2025. Although it has not yet been implemented, it is a massive step forward when it comes to land ownership and land reform in Scotland more generally.

The Scottish Government is making significant interventions for the first time, and that includes our having the ability to intervene directly in the land market. I believe that we are taking steps in the right direction. Although the 2025 act will have to be implemented before we can hope to see any improvement, I look forward to seeing how that develops in the coming years and any impacts that it might have.

Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): Will the cabinet secretary outline a summary of the ways in which the concentrated patterns of land ownership in Scotland are being tackled, and community ownership encouraged, thanks to the Scottish National Party Government?

Mairi Gougeon: We know that the concentration of land ownership in Scotland is a massive issue. Through some of the landmark powers that we already have, we are seeing steps in the right direction when it comes to community ownership. Over recent years, the number of assets in community ownership has risen, and it has done so through each year of this parliamentary session. The most recent information that we have shows that more than 213,000 hectares of land are in community ownership; they are owned by more than 500 groups across Scotland.

It is also important to remember the mechanism by which we enable people to access or consider community ownership, which is the Scottish land fund. Since the latest fund opened in 2021, the committee of the Scottish land fund has awarded a total of £32.4 million to more than 249 community groups. We are supporting that community ownership because it has the power to be transformative for local communities, whether they are in urban or rural Scotland.

Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab): The "Who Owns Scotland 2025" report shows that only 2.8 per cent of rural land in Scotland is owned by community groups. The Scottish Government can do far more to make community ownership of land easier. The cabinet secretary mentioned some financial support, which could go further. However, what action is the Scottish Government taking to provide dedicated legal and structural support for community land purchases?

Mairi Gougeon: Mercedes Villalba raises an important point. She is absolutely right that there is more that we can do. A number of powers are available to communities to take ownership of assets or land in the areas where they live. However, we know that some of those powers have been very rarely used, and that groups have found them challenging to get to grips with.

Another important piece of work that we have taken forward is the community right to buy review, which is about getting to grips with exactly the issues that Mercedes Villalba raises in her question.

We have undertaken that work over the past couple of years, and it was raised during discussions on the 2025 act. I hope to publish the outcome of the review in the coming weeks. I hope that that will provide further recommendations for the next Government to take forward and implement.

Ptarmigan (Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981)

4. **John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the progress of the joint review with the United Kingdom Government regarding the potential removal of ptarmigan from schedule 2 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. (S6O-05582)

The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie): The Scottish, Welsh and UK Governments are currently working on a draft joint consultation document, which will include proposed changes following our consideration of NatureScot's assessment of the bird species listed in schedule 2 to the 1981 act. We expect to publish the consultation document over the coming weeks once it has been finalised, alongside NatureScot's report.

John Mason: Maybe the minister can correct me if I am wrong, but we do not know how many ptarmigan there are, and we do not know how many are being killed. There are no ptarmigan in England and no ptarmigan in Wales. This is a Scottish problem. Is the minister happy that ptarmigan get shot in August?

Jim Fairlie: We are currently carrying out the review. We have had this debate for a number of years, now. We can look at the matter once we get to the end of the review period and we publish the results of the review.

The member asked about shooting ptarmigan in August. The season for ptarmigan is from 11 August to 11 December—it is a short open season. There is no need to ban the shooting of ptarmigan right now, because there is no shooting going on. We will publish the review and, once we have done so, we will decide what to do next.

Deer Management

5. **Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how proposed changes to deer management policy will affect land use and biodiversity across Scotland. (S6O-05583)

The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie): Good, sustainable deer management is integral to our effectiveness in addressing biodiversity loss and protecting and restoring the natural environment. That is why we brought forward reforms to the deer legislation through the Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill and will develop a national deer management plan in collaboration with the sector that addresses the barriers to managing deer across Scotland. We continue to trial incentive schemes and we will work closely with the venison sector in developing those further.

It is about achieving a balance, and our work on deer management is supported and underpinned by the objectives that are included in the Scottish biodiversity strategy.

Gordon MacDonald: Deer numbers have doubled since the 1990s and the population is estimated to be close to 1 million. Deer are now so numerous that, even in my constituency of Edinburgh Pentlands, there are regular near misses as deer run across the A70. With an improved deer management scheme and a venison plan helping to create more business opportunities, what could the impact be on the rural economy?

Jim Fairlie: The improved deer management legislative framework and strengthened regulatory powers that were introduced through the Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill will deliver opportunities for rural communities and create significant demand for skilled workers who are able to carry out the increased management that is needed and to support nature restoration.

Expanding Scotland's deer management capacity will be essential to supporting a sustainable venison supply chain to ensure that rural communities benefit from new business, employment and training opportunities. Reducing overgrazing pressure from deer will lower losses to forestry and agriculture, improve woodland regeneration and, importantly, help to reduce road traffic collisions, which Gordon MacDonald mentioned, and their associated economic costs to rural areas.

If we want healthy communities, sustainable food production and vibrant rural industries in the future, we have to invest now in thriving ecosystems and in the skilled workforce that is required to manage them.

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I remind members of my entry in the register of members' interests—I have a farm in Moray, where I control deer.

Does the minister agree that deer management on the uplands of Scotland is now, in most cases,

covered by deer management plans and that the problems are in the woods and the low grounds? Does the minister also agree that, rather than Forestry and Land Scotland using contracted stalkers, it would be better to have full-time employees doing proper deer management rather than just contract killing?

Jim Fairlie: I disagree with that point. We need a range of options across the sector. It is not just roe deer or deer in lowland Scotland that we are talking about—it is deer across all areas. Deer will be overgrazing in some areas and undergrazing in others.

I get the point that the situation is varied, but demonising contractors is not helpful. They have to do a very difficult job. They might be getting paid more than full-time employees, but they work incredibly hard and are doing a very difficult job that is required by the Scottish Government to allow us to achieve our ambitions.

Tree Equity (Urban Areas)

6. **Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what renewed action it will take to improve tree equity in Scotland's urban areas. (S6O-05584)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): The Scottish Government is committed to improving tree equity so that more communities, particularly those with limited existing tree cover, can enjoy the full range of benefits that are provided by urban trees and woodlands.

Through our forestry grants and support for the Clyde, Forth and Fife climate forests, we are supporting tree-planting projects across towns and cities in central Scotland, with a focus on areas that have the greatest need for trees. When we review future support mechanisms, tree equity will remain an important consideration, to ensure that we effectively address inequalities in access to urban woodlands and trees.

Annie Wells: More than a quarter of Glasgow's neighbourhoods have less than 10 per cent tree canopy cover, and those areas have some of the lowest tree equity scores in Scotland. Almost 40 per cent of our neighbourhoods are considered to be a high priority for action to improve tree equity. I listened to the cabinet secretary's answer, but what action will she take for Glasgow specifically to make sure that the protection, management and expansion of Scotland's urban trees and woods will benefit those in the Glasgow community?

Mairi Gougeon: As I hope I was able to outline in my initial response to Annie Wells, the intention is very much to focus on the cities and areas in which there is less tree cover and where more can be done. We are constantly looking at our support and how we can better provide it. I mentioned the Clyde climate forest, which we have invested in.

I also want to emphasise that the Government has worked with local authorities for more than 20 years to expand and manage urban woodlands. That has included funding project officers to try to identify where the opportunities are and then to go on and deliver them. We are also providing support through the woods in and around towns grants, which are under the forestry grant scheme.

Annie Wells raises an important point. We are always striving to do more and to consider how we can use funding mechanisms in a way that ensures that we are expanding the benefits of our trees and woodlands to urban parts of Scotland, too.

Future Farming Investment Scheme

7. **Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government when the new future farming investment scheme will be open for applications. (S6O-05585)

The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie): The First Minister announced that the Scottish Government has allocated another £14.25 million to a second round of the future farming investment scheme for the 2026-27 financial year. That builds on the £21.4m that was delivered through the first round of FFIS. The application date for the next round has not yet been set. We are carefully reviewing the scheme and will engage with industry stakeholders to discuss how the scheme could be improved upon.

Willie Rennie: I hope that the Government is carefully reviewing the scheme, because many in the sector, particularly crofters and tenant farmers, feel that they were badly let down. What is the Government going to change and improve this time round to make sure that the outcome for those people will be what is advised? Last time round, many people spent a lot of time filling in applications, and that time was considered to have been wasted.

Jim Fairlie: First, crofting has a range of specific schemes that crofters can make applications to. Secondly, on the future farming investment scheme, we are still working out why people did not pick up the information that they needed to pick up and why it was not clear enough to them, despite the fact that the information about what should have been included when making the applications was in the guidance. We will work out how to make that simpler for people and, once we have completed that work, we will bring the scheme forward.

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I remind members of my entry in

the register of members' interests, which states that I am a partner in a farming business.

The Scottish Government found itself forced into providing a drip feed of information about the chaotic introduction of round 1 of the scheme, whether through parliamentary questions, freedom of information requests or information that came directly from applicants. Does the minister intend that to be the case with round 2, or will he commit to proactively publishing—in good time—the sort of data on round 2 that I and other colleagues attempted to compel through amendments to the Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill, which he and his party colleagues joined in voted down?

Jim Fairlie: I reject the idea that the Government was forced into doing anything. We voluntarily put up a £21.5 million fund to help investment in farming. As I just stated to Willie Rennie, we are currently considering how the scheme operated last time and how we can make improvements. We are looking to make sure that there are clear instructions on how people should read the forms and fill them in. That way, I hope that the people who want to get the money will get it at the right time.

Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): Does the minister agree that the £21.4 million investment, which will be augmented by at least a further £14.25 million this financial year, in addition to the most generous direct support package in the UK, highlights that positive action is being taken to invest in our rural businesses, which is in stark contrast to a UK Labour Government that is turning its back on our food and our farming?

Jim Fairlie: Karen Adam is absolutely correct. Despite an extremely challenging budget situation, the Scottish Government will invest more than £660 million in support for our farmers and crofters under the Scottish Government's budget for 2026-27, which is similar to the amount that was allocated for 2025-26.

The support that we deliver through the FFIS is in addition to the most generous package of support on these islands, including more than £100 million in voluntary coupled support for livestock producers. In contrast to the UK Government, we have committed to supporting active farming and food production through direct payments, to provide the certainty that the industry asked for, and we have brought forward payment dates to ensure that farmers and crofters are paid at the earliest possible opportunity, to assist with cash flow.

Funding for Scottish agriculture is no longer separately identified in the UK Government's settlement. I have made representations to make it clear that applying a Barnett-based population settlement is inappropriate for land and sea-based support and that it fails to recognise the potential of Scotland's land and seas to contribute significantly to the UK's climate and restoration targets.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): The minister will be aware that many small farmers and crofters and those in island areas spent a lot of money preparing applications for the previous scheme, from which they gained little or nothing, even though they should have been prioritised. Will he make the new round of the scheme easier to apply to, so that people do not have to risk their own finances and end up getting nothing in return?

Jim Fairlie: Rhoda Grant said that those people should have been prioritised. I remind the member that applying to the scheme was not—and was never meant to be—a guarantee of funding for the priority groups, who still had to meet the scheme's objectives. I see Rhoda Grant shaking her head at my point. The objectives of the scheme were about investing in what we were trying to achieve in relation to our climate and nature restoration targets, and we made it a priority to encourage the priority groups to apply for the fund.

As I said in my initial answer to Willie Rennie, we are looking at the scheme to work out why people did not understand the forms that we were asking them to fill in. By doing that, we will, I hope, get them to fill in the forms and put in applications that are eligible.

Future Farming Investment Scheme (Guidance on Grounds for Rejection)

8. **Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** I do not know whether there will be anything left to answer on this topic. To ask the Scottish Government, in light of reports that a large number of applications have been rejected in the future farming investment scheme, what analysis and guidance it has issued explaining the grounds for rejection. (S6O-05586)

The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie): A detailed assessment document explaining eligibility, verification, scoring and ranking for the 2025 round was published on the rural payments and inspections division website on 19 December 2025. Applicants may request further clarification of the outcome of their FFIS application by contacting the FFIS team.

Christine Grahame: I am glad that something has been published, because, as the minister knows, more than 5,000 people applied in 2025 but there was a 70 per cent rejection rate. Although this is an excellent scheme, the minister will know that it will, yet again, be oversubscribed.

Something must be going wrong. I ask the minister to consider testing out any draft guidance to see whether it does what it says on the tin.

Jim Fairlie: I should say first, in response to Christine Grahame's point, that the scheme was hugely oversubscribed because that very generous package offered 100 per cent grants. However, as I stated in my response to Willie Rennie, we are carefully reviewing the scheme and will engage with industry stakeholders to discuss how it could be further optimised.

If we had something wrong in how the scheme was laid out and how people were interacting with it, we will look at that. We will engage with stakeholders to ensure that the views from across the sector are taken into consideration. Details of the next round will be announced once the necessary stakeholder engagement has taken place.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions on rural affairs, land reform and islands. There will be a short pause before we move on to the next item of business to allow for a changeover of front-bench teams.

Health and Social Care

Renfrewshire Health and Social Care Partnership

1. **Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government when it last met Renfrewshire health and social care partnership and what was discussed. (S6O-05587)

The Minister for Social Care and Mental Wellbeing (Tom Arthur): Scottish Government ministers and officials meet regularly with representatives of health and social care partnerships. A Scottish Government official met the chief officer of Renfrewshire health and social care partnership on 17 February this year, when local financial pressures were discussed. A follow-up meeting between officials, the chief officer and the chief financial officer is scheduled for 13 March this year.

A Renfrewshire health and social care partnership representative also attended the collaborative response and assurance group on Monday 24 February this year. The meeting focused on delayed discharge performance.

Neil Bibby: I bet that funding pressures were discussed because, despite the welcome £5.7 million of support that was announced by Renfrewshire Council last week, the health and social care partnership still faces a significant budget shortfall. That means that the closure of the disability resource centre in Paisley, cuts to the autism connections programme and the merger of day centres for adults with learning disabilities are still on the table. Information from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities shows that the Scottish Government's underfunding of social care has resulted in an estimated £497 million funding gap for integration joint boards across Scotland this year.

The decision on those vital services in Renfrewshire, which some of the most vulnerable people I represent rely on, has been conveniently pushed back to after the election in June, leaving them anxious. Given that the Government has ignored that issue in the budget, what will the minister do now to address that gap? Given the Scottish National Party's record until now, is it not the case that, if—I emphasise the "if"—the SNP is still in power after May, it is almost certain that those service cuts will go ahead?

Tom Arthur: I thank the member for raising those important issues. The first point to highlight is that we recognise that social care is under significant pressure in Scotland, just as it is elsewhere in the United Kingdom. That is why there is an uplift in funding for social care in the budget, why there is an uplift in funding overall for health and social care and why there is an uplift in funding for local government. That has been achieved through the parliamentary process in setting the budget. We will continue to engage closely with local partners, recognising the pressures that are faced, but, ultimately, as has been expressed as the will of the Parliament, those decisions are for local partners to take.

Social Care Workers

2. **Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what progress it is making on tackling the reported critical shortage of social care workers. (S6O-05588)

The Minister for Social Care and Mental Wellbeing (Tom Arthur): The Scottish Government is taking forward a range of actions to address the social care workforce shortage, including investing more than £1.1 billion annually to support the real living wage, funding national recruitment platforms such as caretocare.scot, funding free vacancy advertising on the myjobscotland website and working with the Department for Work and Pensions to promote career pathways. We have also funded the £500,000 displaced workers scheme, which supports employers to recruit international workers who are already in the UK and who find themselves without sponsored employment through no fault of their own. We will continue to press the UK Government for a visa system that better meets Scotland's needs.

Alex Rowley: I hope that the minister agrees that we need to create a proper career structure for care workers across Scotland to make it

attractive for people in Scotland to become carers. The story of care workers in Scotland so far is one of being undervalued and underpaid, with mixed terms and conditions, depending on the employer—some have very poor terms and conditions compared to others. Does the minister accept that, if we are to build a proper career in care, we need national pay bargaining and national terms and conditions, and that we need to treat all care workers in Scotland with respect and recognise their value?

Tom Arthur: I thank Mr Rowley for his question and his tone. As always, he approaches these matters in a thoughtful, considered and constructive way.

We recognise that need, which is why we are uplifting support for payment of the real living wage. The budget also contains provisions to enhance terms and conditions and waive the protecting vulnerable groups scheme membership fee.

On the broader point about sectoral bargaining, we continue to engage on that and make progress in Government and with partners—providers, third sector representatives and trade unions—and we will keep the Parliament up to date and informed.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): There is a chronic shortage of care staff in many rural and island communities. For example, Montrose house on Arran has 15 staff—that is around 30 per cent of the required complement, which necessitates a reduction in capacity to ensure that safe care standards are maintained. Will the minister advise the Parliament what impact the UK Labour Government's removal of social care visas for non-UK nationals on 22 July 2025 has had, and will have, on the provision of care across Scotland?

Tom Arthur: I recognise that Mr Gibson holds a particular constituency interest in the impact of the UK Government's decisions. As I touched on in my previous responses, we face a serious, considered and continuing set of fiscal and economic pressures with which households, businesses and public sector organisations in every part of the UK are wrestling.

We must also contend with those pressures being compounded by political choices made by the UK Labour Government, such as the increase in employer national insurance contributions and the decisions that it has taken on health and social care visas. The UK Government's visa policy is a completely needless and pointless attempt to manage its political challenge of engaging with Reform UK. It is having a devastating impact on social care, and it underscores why this Parliament should have full responsibility over such matters, so that we can take the right decisions for the people of Scotland.

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): Colleges report that they have had to turn away qualified applicants from social care courses due to a lack of Scottish Government funding. At Ayrshire College's Kilmarnock campus alone, 71 applicants have been turned away. Given the shortfall in social care worker numbers, would it not be prudent to ensure that applicants for those courses are fully funded?

Tom Arthur: It is important that we have a coherent and joined-up approach. I hope that the member recognises that the budget that the Parliament has agreed to—without the Conservative Party's support, I note—provides a significant funding uplift for not only health and social care but colleges. I hope that that demonstrates to Brian Whittle the Scottish Government's commitment to addressing those issues.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): The problem is that the crisis has been coming for a long time. For too long, the Government took it for granted that social care workers would work for a lower wage than those who work in the national health service. As a result, those workers are now leaving and we do not have the support that we need.

We will not be able to fix the NHS without fixing social care. We have already seen long waits at accident and emergency departments as a result of the lack of flow through hospitals. When will the Government step up with more measures to make a real difference, because we will not fix the NHS otherwise?

Tom Arthur: I recognise the constructive approach that the Liberal Democrats took to engagement with the Scottish Government during the budget process with regard to social care. As I touched on in my response to Mr Rowley, we are engaging with providers, those who work directly in social care and trade unions on an on-going basis. A key element of that will be the progress that we make towards achieving sectoral bargaining.

Mr Rennie highlighted the distinction between those who work in the NHS and those who work elsewhere, which reflects the existing structures. I recognise that most members of this Parliament opposed the creation of a national care service, so the arrangements that prevail and that are currently in place mean that such decisions are taken locally. However, the work on sectoral bargaining can help significantly to address the valid points that Mr Rennie has raised.

Foysol Choudhury (Lothian) (Ind): What assessment has the Scottish Government made of the impact that social care package reductions will have on unpaid carers, in light of concerns from Carers UK that the current budget is insufficient to allow unpaid carers and support services to thrive?

Tom Arthur: I recognise the significant contribution that unpaid carers make. There are an estimated 800,000 unpaid carers in Scotland. If we sought to quantify their contribution in financial terms, it would come to approximately £13 billion.

I recognise that decisions that have been taken by integration joint boards are causing concern in local areas. However, I remind members in the chamber that the position that the Parliament ultimately reached when considering the proposed national care service was that decisions should be taken locally. As a consequence of the budget that the Government put before the Parliament, we are seeing an uplift in funding for social care. However, we will continue to engage with carers' organisations, because we recognise the invaluable work that they do, and we will identify all opportunities that are available to enhance support for them.

MRKH Syndrome

3. **Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to support women with MRKH syndrome to access fertility treatment. (S6O-05589)

The Minister for Public Health and Women's Health (Jenni Minto): Couples who experience infertility as a result of conditions such as MRKH can be referred for national health service in vitro fertilisation treatment, including NHS IVF with surrogacy, provided that they meet all the additional NHS access criteria. Eligible patients may be offered up to three cycles of IVF when there is a reasonable expectation of a live birth.

Audrey Nicoll: Women living with MRKH cannot carry a pregnancy, but they may have children via IVF with a surrogate, as the minister highlighted, or adoption.

Sadly, one of my constituents is unable to access that surrogate option, as she cannot have her embryos developed until a commitment is made from a surrogate. However, to date, surrogates have been unwilling to commit to a surrogacy unless they receive an assurance that embryos are ready to be implanted at the time of agreement. That has made it impossible for her and her partner to start their family.

I understand that, in some situations, women can have their embryos frozen without having a surrogate in place—for example, if the woman has a cancer diagnosis. Given that MRKH syndrome is such a rare condition that provides no chance of spontaneous conception, will the minister commit to considering access to specialised fertility treatment for women such as my constituent?

Jenni Minto: I take this opportunity to recognise the caring and thoughtful way in which Audrey Nicoll has represented her constituents during her time in the Parliament.

The Scottish Government's guidance on the provision of fertility preservation in the NHS in Scotland, which was published on 27 February, provides information on patient groups to be considered for NHS fertility preservation treatment. The list is not exhaustive, and special consideration is likely to be necessary on a case-by-case basis to cover the range of possible conditions. Clinicians should use their local multidisciplinary group and/or a peer review process to facilitate rapid and equitable decision making. A surrogate is not required to be in place for NHS fertility preservation treatment, so I am happy to take away the points that Ms Nicoll has raised.

Changing Places Toilets Scotland Fund

4. **George Adam (Paisley) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the progress of the changing places toilets Scotland fund. (S6O-05590)

The Minister for Social Care and Mental Wellbeing (Tom Arthur): In December, I confirmed awards from the changing places toilets fund totalling £4.7 million for 59 projects across Scotland. On 20 February, a further £2.3 million was approved for 25 projects, which brought the total figure for awards to more than £7 million for 84 projects.

The provision of the new facilities in communities across Scotland will support people with complex disabilities and health conditions to participate fully in society and access community resources.

The 2026-27 budget, which the Parliament approved, includes an additional £10 million for changing places toilets over the next three financial years. That brings the total investment that has been committed to £20 million.

George Adam: As the minister will be aware, this issue is quite important to me personally. Along with the minister, I recently attended an event at the Tannahill centre in Ferguslie Park, in Paisley, which received funding for a changing places toilet. Does the minister agree that such facilities improve accessibility for disabled people and should be seen as standard throughout Scotland?

Tom Arthur: I recognise Mr Adam's long-standing interest in this area. He is absolutely correct that venues such as the Tannahill centre provide essential services and amenities that are well used by local communities. The installation of the changing places toilet will make a huge difference to the everyday lives of people in the community who have complex disabilities and health conditions, as well as their families and carers. These essential facilities ensure that disabled people can attend venues such as the Tannahill centre and use the services and amenities that are on offer, just like the rest of us. Changing places toilets are crucial to ensuring that communities are inclusive by providing individuals with greater freedom, dignity and independence.

NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and Royal Mail (Patient Correspondence)

5. **Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on any discussions it has had with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde regarding the implementation of the Royal Mail national health service-specific barcode system to ensure that appointment letters, test results and urgent patient correspondence are delivered on time, particularly during service disruptions. (S6O-05591)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Neil Gray): It is unacceptable for anyone's mail to be delayed unnecessarily, and such delays are especially concerning for patients who are awaiting hospital appointments. The First Minister visited Royal Mail at Christmas time. During that visit, he took the opportunity to discuss options for optimising delivery times for NHS mail. I have since asked my officials to work with health boards and Royal Mail to explore options for a roll-out of NHS barcodes, which are already in use in some mail rooms, to help to minimise delays to NHS correspondence.

Stuart McMillan: The cabinet secretary will be aware that I raised the issue with the First Minister just prior to Christmas. Unfortunately, some of my constituents' mail deliveries are still sporadic, meaning that they often receive large bundles rather than regular deliveries. Some say that they are receiving NHS appointment letters after the fact.

Notwithstanding what the cabinet secretary has just said, can he advise what progress has been made to enable health boards, health and social care partnerships and general practitioner practices, especially those that cover Inverclyde, to utilise the Royal Mail's NHS barcode system, so that patients across Inverclyde and Scotland can be assured that important health-related mail is prioritised?

Neil Gray: I am sorry to hear of Mr McMillan's constituents' experience. We all want patients to receive appointment offers that allow them sufficient time to plan for their appointment or treatment. Any delay to patients receiving letters that results in missed appointments is not acceptable.

As part of the updated waiting times guidance, patients now receive a period of at least 10 calendar days for an offer of appointment, which has increased from seven calendar days. Patients may also consent to different methods of communication for that offer of appointment, such as receiving a phone call. We will continue to work with NHS boards and Royal Mail to explore all options to ensure that appointment letters can be prioritised where possible.

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

How can Royal Mail possibly find patients at the Queen Elizabeth hospital when rooms have been sealed off due to mould and dirty water ingress? Surely, it is time for the board to admit by mail to patients that things may not be safe at the Queen Elizabeth hospital.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That supplementary goes a bit wide of the question, which was about forms of communication and not the destinations of the letters or where patients are expected to be.

I call a supplementary from Paul Sweeney.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): We support the introduction of NHS-specific barcodes, but it is quite frustrating that we are once again talking about an analogue stop-gap when Scotland is falling ever more behind in the latest digital patient technology. In England, the NHS app has been running for seven years now, with patients able to view and request prescriptions, book GP appointments, view health records and even change GPs from their phone. However, because the Scottish Government is unwilling to tap into the readily available system, Scots will not get to enjoy an NHS app until 2030. That is unacceptable. Will the cabinet secretary agree that it is time to end parochial posturing and work with the United Kingdom Government to roll out the NHS app in Scotland in an integrated way, as a matter of urgency?

Neil Gray: The picture that has been painted of the NHS app in England is not, as far as I have been told, the case universally. Furthermore, here in Scotland we are attempting to create an integrated health and social care app. That app is currently being piloted in Lanarkshire. Its further roll-out across Scotland is scheduled to begin in April. We are seeking to give people digital access

to their records and appointments and to be able to utilise the obvious advantages that—I agree with Mr Sweeney on this—will come from a roll-out of the application. However, there is no parochialism involved here. It is different technology with different applications, and here in Scotland we have a different aspiration for what the NHS health and social care app—the MyCare app—is to achieve, which is the integration of health and social care. That is not available in England.

NHS Agenda for Change Staff (Working Week)

6. **Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab):** I remind the chamber of my voluntary entry of trade union interests. To ask the Scottish Government whether it is confident that the changes to the working week for national health service agenda for change staff will be fully implemented by 1 April 2026. (S6O-05592)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Neil Gray): Yes, the final 60-minute reduction in the working week for NHS agenda for change staff will be implemented on 1 April 2026.

Richard Leonard: When half an hour was supposed to be reduced from the working week on 1 April 2024, it was only partially implemented. When half an hour was supposed to be reduced from the working week on 1 April 2025, it was pulled. Now, on 1 April 2026, a full hour is supposed to be reduced from the working week for NHS agenda for change staff. However, it has been reliably reported to me that although health boards have submitted plans to the Government, they have not been given assurances that the funding will be recurring. Neither, with four weeks to go, have they all reached agreement locally or nationally on how those plans will be implemented.

Why should our committed NHS workers believe that this time will be any different? Can the Government give our workers a cast-iron guarantee today—in Parliament and on the record—that they will all move to a 36-hour contractual working week in four weeks' time, and that they will all do so with no loss of earnings?

Neil Gray: With your forbearance, Presiding Officer, I would like to take what may be the last opportunity for me to pay tribute to the contribution that Richard Leonard has made to the Parliament. He is a local competitor, but never an adversary, and I am very grateful for the advocacy and service that he has given on behalf of the trade union movement in particular, and also on behalf of our shared constituents. I am very grateful to him for that, and I wish him well for the future.

On the points that Richard Leonard has made, I have to correct him on the matter of any perception of delay. That was not the case: there was no confirmation as to the roll-out of the working week as described. I recognise that there was some upset when I took the decision to ensure that the final hour was done at once, rather than in two stages, but I have set out clearly and plainly why I took that decision, and I have subjected myself to the scrutiny of trade union colleagues. I am confident, off the back of the assurances that I have received, with my chairs and chief executives, that this is non-negotiable, and that we will achieve that roll-out on 1 April.

Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): I welcome the 2026-27 Scottish budget, which provides record funding to our NHS and its dedicated staff. Can the cabinet secretary explain how measures in the budget will support the implementation of agenda for change workforce reforms, including a reduced working week?

Neil Gray: Yes—and this also addresses some of what Richard Leonard was looking for. We have invested a total of £300 million, which is recurring, to boards to help implement agenda for change workforce reforms. That includes the reduction of the working week to 36 hours for all agenda for change staff. I have written to NHS boards this week to confirm that they remain on track to implement the final hour reduction on 1 April and that they will continue to work closely with trade unions to ensure that that is facilitated.

Social Care Packages

7. **Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it will take in response to reports that local authorities are reducing or withdrawing social care packages at short notice, including how it will ensure there is clear communication, adequate notice and safeguarding in place for any vulnerable people affected. (S6O-05593)

The Minister for Social Care and Mental Wellbeing (Tom Arthur): The Scottish Government expects integration joint boards to safeguard vulnerable people affected by any change to their care package. It is their duty to strategically plan the delivery of integrated health and social care provision and to adhere to national health and social care standards. An individual's care package should be reviewed or ended because an individual's needs have changed, not for financial planning or other operational reasons. The Scottish Government will continue to work with local government and providers to deliver sustained improvement.

Clare Adamson: A constituent of mine was diagnosed with Alzheimer's in January 2025. They received no information apart from that they had not qualified for self-directed support. Ten months later, without any warning or communication, a

home carer arrived at the door, stating that they had been assigned to provide care. That caused extreme distress to my constituent with Alzheimer's, and also to their family and support.

Can the Scottish Government ensure that local authorities do not reduce, withdraw or alter care packages without clear communication and adequate notice, to ensure that vulnerable people are protected?

Tom Arthur: I thank Clare Adamson for bringing the circumstances of her constituent to the attention of Parliament. I am deeply sorry to hear about the circumstances that she has described, and I offer my sympathies and thoughts to her constituent for the distress that that has caused.

Local authorities, NHS boards and integrated health and social care partnerships are responsible for ensuring clear arrangements for delivering, commissioning, managing and monitoring care packages. The health and social care standards outline what people should expect from services, and it is clear that, in this case, those standards have not been met.

We are reviewing those standards, and I can tell the member that I will be asking my officials to look into the matter further immediately, to provide the member with a written update and to identify any appropriate support for her constituent.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 8 has been withdrawn. That therefore concludes portfolio questions on health and social care.

Education

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-20956, in the name of Willie Rennie, on judging the Scottish Government on its education record. I invite members who wish to participate to press their request-to-speak button.

14:51

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): This is a significant moment, not only because it is the annual Liberal Democrat debate in this chamber, which I know that everyone has been desperate to hear—[*Laughter*.]—but because it marks 10 years since Nicola Sturgeon said, "Judge me on education." It is a deadline that she herself set.

I suspect that this will be the last time in this session that Parliament will have an opportunity to debate education in a substantial way. Perhaps it will be the last opportunity for Nicola Sturgeon to come before us so that she can be judged on education. However, where is the former First Minister today? She is nowhere to be seen—certainly, she is not in the chamber. It seems that she was not prepared to be judged by this Parliament or by the voters of this country.

Let us remember how all this began. It was at Wester Hailes education centre in 2015, where Nicola Sturgeon gave what was described as an inspirational contribution. In that inspirational contribution, she said:

"If you are not, as First Minister, prepared to put your neck on the line on the education of our young people then what are you prepared to do? … I want to be judged on it."

On the back of that contribution, the Scottish National Party went on to win the largest number of seats in the Parliament at the next election, and Nicola Sturgeon continued as First Minister. The subsequent programme for government read:

"We intend to make significant progress within the lifetime of this Parliament"—

that is, 2016 to 2021—

"and substantially eliminate the gap over the course of the next decade. That is a yardstick by which the people of Scotland can measure our success."

I repeat those words:

"substantially eliminate the gap over … the next decade."

I know that the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills will have lots of statistics and that she will reel out her own selected ones. She has a right to do that and she will be able to identify areas where the gap has narrowed. I am not going to do that. If we traded statistics, none of them would show "elimination", substantial elimination or even substantial closing of the gap—certainly not over

the 10-year deadline that was set. So I am not going to trade statistics today.

The promise was very clear. It changed over time, but the programme for government was clear that SNP would "substantially eliminate" the attainment gap. There is no doubt that, by whatever measure we pick, that commitment has not been met. Sometimes, the gap marginally goes down; sometimes it marginally goes up; and sometimes it stays static. However, one thing is clear: there has not been a substantial reduction.

The impact is clear. If we tot up the number of children who have gone through the education system and to whom that promise was made—disadvantaged children from disadvantaged backgrounds—it amounts to 170,000 children in Scotland whose life chances have been limited because of the failure to keep that promise.

The commitment has not been met in 10 years and, at the current rate of progress, it will not be met in 20, 30 or even 100 years. At the current rate of progress, it will be the grandchildren of the grandchildren of those who are children at the moment who will have the opportunity to have the poverty-related attainment gap reduced in the way that was promised by Nicola Sturgeon 10 years ago.

The cabinet secretary will say that we are running down staff, but that is far from the case. I am backing staff. I believe that they are talented people who lift up the chances of children in this country. If only they had a Government that was prepared to back them up.

The international reports are what stimulated the debate, as is alluded to in Paul O'Kane's amendment, which we will support. Those reports highlighted the fact that Scottish education, which used to be the best in the world, had become just average. The ultimate goal should have been to drive up overall performance, as well as to close the attainment gap, which we all wanted to achieve, but even overall performance is static—no improvement has been made on that, either.

I know to my bitter cost that, if we do not stick to our word, the electorate will cast a judgment. We have learned from that bitter experience. We apologised for when we made mistakes in the past, but the Scottish Government dodges, slithers and deflects. It is always someone else's fault—someone else is always to blame. We will hear exactly the same story again today. However, when Nicola Sturgeon made her promise 10 years ago, she knew that the world is a volatile place and that, in making a promise to the poorest children in the country, it is necessary to have the mechanisms in place to deliver that policy, but the Government failed to do that.

Let us look at the individual measures that have not been delivered. They include the promised 90-minute reduction in contact time for teachers, who are on the verge of industrial action. The digital devices that were promised have not been delivered. The 3,500 extra teachers that were promised have not been delivered. The issue of bad behaviour and violence in schools has not been addressed.

Let us look at two measures that were introduced by the Government. The regional collaboratives that were introduced by the previous education secretary were scrapped by the current education secretary because they were not working.

The Government also introduced national testing. At the time, everybody warned that it would not necessarily be the answer to the problem. As I have said repeatedly, we do not fatten a pig by measuring it. It is necessary to put in place the measures that will drive up performance. Constant measuring does not drive up performance. All that has been created is a myriad of bureaucratic procedures and reporting mechanisms that have been bolted on to the system, which has made things even more challenging for teachers and classroom assistants.

There will be a debate in the run-up to the election—which I hope will be a positive one—about behaviour, additional support needs, parity of esteem between vocational and academic qualifications, and the need to improve knowledge in the curriculum and tackle workload. I hope that we will have a positive debate on all those issues, as we have had at various hustings with various educational audiences.

However, today's debate is about judging, because we were asked to judge Nicola Sturgeon on her record on education. Everyone in the Parliament, regardless of which party they are in, must recognise that Nicola Sturgeon and the Scottish Government have failed to deliver on the promise to substantially eliminate the poverty-related attainment gap. Every member should vote for our motion today, because that is exactly what has happened.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: They will be able to do so only if you move the motion, Mr Rennie.

Willie Rennie: I move,

That the Parliament notes that since 2016, the Scottish Government's key commitments and targets on education have either been missed or abandoned; further notes that these include free laptops for all pupils, free school meals for all pupils up to P7, 3,500 more teachers, reduced class contact time for teachers and the closing of the poverty-related educational attainment gap by 2026; believes that abandoning or missing these important targets and commitments has had a real impact on pupils, teachers and

parents; further believes that the Scottish Government has let Scottish education down with rising levels of classroom violence, a lack of additional support for pupils and record numbers of recently qualified teachers leaving the profession; notes that teachers are once again considering industrial action, and asserts that Scotland and Scottish education deserve better.

14:59

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Jenny Gilruth): In what is all but guaranteed to be the last education debate in this session of Parliament, I begin by paying tribute to Scotland's children and young people.

This is the generation who experienced their education in the teeth of a global pandemic. The upset caused by Covid and associated lockdowns has impacted on schooling and education globally. Changed behaviour, lower attendance rates and growing additional support needs are not factors unique to Scotland. Indeed, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization estimates that more than 1.6 billion students have been impacted by the pandemic, with the most vulnerable learners being hit hardest. I hope that members will hold those vulnerable young people—those most on the margins—in their thoughts this afternoon and will think critically about how the Parliament will serve them better in the next session.

I am grateful to the Liberal Democrats for selecting education in this last Opposition debate. It will not come as a surprise to Willie Rennie, however, that I am a bit disappointed in the tone that has been adopted, because I simply do not recognise the education system that he has attempted to portray here today. However, as members will know, this Government is an advocate of supporting positive behaviour in our schools, so I will attempt to apply the same approach in the chamber this afternoon.

I again wish to put on the record my sincere thanks to Willie Rennie and his party, in the first instance, for voting to back this Government's budget, which was passed only last Thursday. That budget is helping to provide an extra £3 million of funding in 2026-27 to further expand eligibility for free school meals, funding of up to £200 million to continue the Scottish Government's commitment to closing the poverty-related attainment gap, and continued investment of more than £57 million to support children and families with additional support needs.

Willie Rennie: We will do everything that we possibly can to get this Government on the right track, which is why we voted for the budget.

Does the education secretary not recognise anything in my motion? Does she deny everything that has happened in the past on the poverty-related attainment gap?

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

Jenny Gilruth: I will come to the points that Mr Rennie has addressed in his motion, but I have more praise for him first, which it is important for him to hear.

I am also grateful to Willie Rennie for his collegiate contributions to the cross-party review of additional support needs, particularly his suggestion that the Government convene a national event with practitioners to learn from and to share examples of what is working well in our schools. That event will be held next Thursday, when we will publish the cross-party review into additional support needs.

Finally, I am grateful to Willie Rennie for the final few words in today's motion, which state:

"Scottish education deserves better."

I think that we can all agree on that, because, across the political divide, we should all be thinking radically about the ways in which we intend to drive the improvements that I accept are required urgently in our schools, and we should be commending the progress that is being made right now in our classrooms.

Last Friday, I was pleased to visit Kinross high school to see for myself the difference that extra funding for additional support needs has made in that school. I was grateful to Jude for teaching me more about the unicorns and the history of Scotland, although I am not sure that I will be picking up boccia professionally any time soon.

The intensive support provision in Kinross high school is an excellent example of how tailored supports can be provided to school staff appropriately. There is, for example, classroom-level additional support needs provision, a principal teacher for inclusion and a bespoke intensive support provision unit for pupils with the greatest need. Importantly, all that work is happening in a mainstream setting, and it is being enhanced and supported because of extra funding that was provided by last year's Scottish Government budget.

I put on record my praise again today for the Green Party and the Liberal Democrats for their support of last year's budget, which has made that investment possible. I also want to thank them for their positive behaviour in relation to teacher numbers, because, in the past year alone, teacher numbers have increased for the first time since 2022, thanks to extra investment from last year's budget flowing to our councils. That investment is

helping to support a record low pupil teacher ratio and smaller class sizes in our primary schools.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): The cabinet secretary talks about increased teacher numbers, but does she realise that three quarters of newly qualified teachers are struggling to find permanent employment and are stuck on supply lists?

Jenny Gilruth: I very much recognise that point, and I know that Mr Cole-Hamilton recently raised it at First Minister's question time. To give him some assurance, I note that we have convened a national working group on the issue, involving the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the teaching trade unions and our initial teacher education institutions, to identify and target the issues that pertain to permanence. It was important that last year's budget made extra funding available to councils to ensure that they could create more permanent posts, which is why I am pleased that, for the first time since 2022, we have seen an increase in teacher numbers.

I am mindful of time, Presiding Officer.

This afternoon's debate is about our children. I saw the importance of the issues that we are discussing when I visited Kinross high school last week. I know that colleagues across the chamber will regularly experience what I experienced on Friday, but I think that we all carry a responsibility in this place to be solution oriented.

Therefore, I will close by encouraging more positive behaviour this afternoon. Yes, the Government should be challenged, but we should hear ideas for improvement and radical solutions to unlock potential for the benefit of Scotland's children and young people.

I move amendment S6M-20956.3, to leave out from first "notes" to end and insert:

"welcomes the passing of the 2026-27 Budget, following a deal reached with the Scottish Liberal Democrats, which will deliver over £4.8 billion investment for Scottish education, including up to £200 million to close the poverty-related attainment gap, building on December 2025's Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels (ACEL) data, which demonstrated record levels of literacy and numeracy in Scotland's primary schools and data from February 2026, which recorded the joint second highest level of school leavers going on to positive destinations on record; recognises that the Budget will further expand the provision of free breakfast clubs and free school meals to reduce the poverty-related attainment gap, building on the 2025-26 Budget deal reached with the Scottish Green Party to expand free school meals in secondary schools; welcomes the continuation of extra funding for pupils with additional support needs (ASN) within the 2026-27 Budget, and looks forward to the publication of the cross-party commissioned-ASN review early in March 2026, and believes fundamentally that Scotland's teachers, pupil support staff, parents, carers and pupils deserve the gratitude of the Parliament for their hard work and dedication every day."

15:05

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): I thank the Liberal Democrats for using their party business time today to bring this debate to the chamber. I will not necessarily love bomb Willie Rennie as much as the cabinet secretary just did, but I welcome the fact that the Parliament has what the cabinet secretary said is the last time this session for it to debate education. I note again that that is only thanks to Opposition parties bringing the debate to the chamber today. I also note that the Government debate on Tuesday 24 March has still not been allocated. I imagine that that is when we will have the Scottish Government debate on improving literacy in schools, which was cancelled, not another debate on independence ahead of the election.

It is little wonder that the Scottish Government has not wanted to devote more of its time to education, because it is now more than a decade since Nicola Sturgeon promised to eliminate the attainment gap and demanded to be judged on the issue. The SNP has failed to meet its own targets or restore Scotland's once world-leading education reputation.

I do not underestimate the vision that Nicola Sturgeon was trying to drive forward 10 years ago. Any First Minister should bring that to the position that they hold. However, the fact that the Government has not taken forward the work to deliver on those outcomes is what today's debate is really about. I agree with Willie Rennie that we have to look at the Government and judge it on that 10-year pledge. The Government has now been in office for 19 years.

Another pledge that the First Minister drove forward was on the Promise. The bill that is going through the Parliament does not feel like the vision that was outlined to care-experienced young people. I hope that there is still time for all of us members to turn that piece of legislation around, but it is important that we take stock and look at what has happened.

The number of students who find positive destinations after leaving school remains static. Meanwhile, the least-advantaged students are still let down in comparison with better-off pupils. Their chances of ending up in further education, an apprenticeship or another positive destination are not improving.

As Andrea Bradley, the general secretary of the Educational Institute of Scotland, said:

"If Scotland is to eradicate the poverty-related attainment gap and deliver an education system that truly and equitably meets the diverse needs of all learners, then greater investment in schools and colleges, in resources, and in teaching and support staff, is essential."

I agree with the cabinet secretary that the

Parliament needs to look towards education reform in the next session. I hope that the coming election will give us all that opportunity.

We on the Conservative benches have been leading the calls for better access to training opportunities. Given the vast number of Government reviews that have not been implemented, we know what could have made a difference in this session.

I agree with Willie Rennie's motion. The Scottish Government has let education down, with rising levels of classroom violence, a lack of additional support for pupils and record numbers of recently qualified teachers leaving the profession. We have trained people to become teachers, but then they cannot find work. That has been a real tragedy during this parliamentary session. Furthermore, over the past five years, there has been no co-ordinated action to empower our teachers and make our schools safe again.

I turn to my amendment. I continue to be concerned at the failure to address violence in our classrooms. Given that Scotland now has the United Kingdom's highest rate of violent injuries to school staff, it is clear that there has been no meaningful action to end such violence in our classrooms.

This is, potentially, the last education debate this session, but I hope that, when the Parliament reconvenes, all those who are lucky enough to be re-elected will come back with education reform at their heart. There has to be a better way to deliver the outcomes that we all want but that have not happened over the past decade.

I move amendment S6M-20956.2, to leave out from "further believes" to end and insert:

"recognises that Scotland has the highest rate of violent injuries to school staff in the UK and that the Scottish Government has failed to take meaningful action to protect pupils and teachers; notes with concern the high levels of work-related stress reported across the profession; further notes the record number of newly qualified teachers leaving the profession, and believes that, by any reasonable measure, the Scottish Government has failed Scotland's children and that this failure should be a source of shame."

15:09

Paul O'Kane (West Scotland) (Lab): I thank Willie Rennie and the Liberal Democrats for bringing today's debate—which is, I believe, the last education debate of the current session of Parliament—to the chamber and once again using Opposition time to debate these issues. It provides us with an important moment, at the end of this session, to reflect on whether the Government has actually delivered better life chances and opportunities for children and young people and for all learners. However, we should reflect on the fact that not only are we at the end of a five-year session of Parliament, but we have had almost two decades of SNP governance in Scotland.

It would be easy for us to reflect solely on the commitment that Nicola Sturgeon made, which we have heard articulated today, and the promises that she made as First Minister. However, we know that she is heading off into the sunset, so it is perhaps more crucial that we ask ourselves who is still in Parliament who was sitting beside Nicola Sturgeon when she made that commitment. It was the current First Minister who stood beside her as she made those commitments, and he stood there as Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills when he made decisions about the life chances of working-class children and young people in this country and chose to downgrade their exam results in the Covid-19 pandemic. He was the man who promised us, at the beginning of the current session of Parliament, a recovery from Covid. We have heard a lot already today from the Government about Covid and the challenges that it has presented, but we were promised that that recovery would be the priority for this Parliament. That came off the back of the broken promise on the poverty-related attainment gap, so we were not exactly starting from a strong position.

We could rehearse many of the other broken promises that have littered not just this session of Parliament, but the preceding two decades. There was a promise of universal free school meals so that no child would go hungry—that was delayed and deflected, and not delivered in full. There were the jettisoned manifesto pledges of free iPads and free bikes for all children and young people, which were made with great fanfare at the last election and are sitting in tatters today. For completeness, we should not forget the Government's previous promises on class sizes, new teachers and non-contact time for teachers, which were all abandoned or undelivered.

That is the reality, and we have to face it, because there will be people listening to the debate—teachers in our schools, parents of our young people or young people themselves—who are experiencing it daily. Time and again, cabinet secretary after cabinet secretary on the SNP benches has led those people up the garden path, promising them the earth, only for them to find nothing when they get there.

The consequences of that lack of action and delivery from the Government are felt acutely. Scotland has fallen down international league tables during the SNP's time in Government, declining from being the best in the UK in maths, for example, to the second worst. Teachers, if they can find a job at all, are burning out and leaving the profession early at an alarming rate. There has been an unacceptable decline in classroom

behaviour and a rise in violent incidents in our schools, at the same time as attendance rates have failed to return to pre-Covid levels.

Although the current cabinet secretary may not admit it, the reality will be an in-tray of challenges and problems a mile high for whoever comes into Parliament in the role of Government and, more broadly, for those who have to scrutinise that Government.

That is why I have been clear, since I took on the role of shadow education spokesperson for my party, that we have first to deal with order in our classrooms, and give our schools and teachers the support to deal with disruptive behaviour and the high levels of violence and low levels of attendance that are robbing children and young people of the opportunity to learn and putting teachers in an impossible position.

There is much that I could say, but my allotted time this afternoon is short. However, colleagues will be delighted to know that I will be closing for my party as well, so they will get another opportunity to hear a Paul O'Kane contribution this afternoon.

We have heard a lot this afternoon about reflecting on what we can do in the next session of Parliament. Of course, building consensus where it can be built is important, but we cannot escape the fact that we have had almost two decades of this governing party, which has made promise after promise and has delayed and deflected, and has not delivered.

I move amendment S6M-20956.1, to insert at end:

"and that effort should be made to reverse the decline in Scottish scores in international league tables, which has been seen since 2012."

15:13

Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): This debate cannot be reduced to the idea that Scottish education is simply failing, because that is just not true. Yes, there are pressures; yes, there are areas where improvement is needed; and yes, Opposition parties are right to raise those concerns. However, they should always be honest enough to recognise the good that is being done, too. If everything is framed through a negative lens, all that it does is risk demoralising teachers, support staff, pupils and families who are living the daily reality of school life.

The truth is that the picture is more mixed than that. There is record funding going into education, continued investment to tackle the poverty-related attainment gap, support for additional support needs, and progress in outcomes, too. That does not mean that the job is done; clearly, it is not. As the cabinet secretary said, there is always room for improvement. However, that does not mean that it is a story of blanket failure.

I look at this through my own lens. I have children who have been through the school system, as I am sure that many of us have.

Willie Rennie: If Karen Adam does not think that it is blanket failure, will she identify some failure in what has happened in the past 10 years?

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

Karen Adam: I identified in my opening remarks that we are not saying that the situation is perfect. There are areas that need improvement. The cabinet secretary said that herself. However, it is not blanket failure—absolutely not.

I have lived experience of things that have not gone well, and it is important that we talk about those things. It is not always about money or process. I will focus my comments on additional support needs. Sometimes it can be about attitudes, sometimes it can be about barriers, and sometimes it can be about gatekeeping and misunderstanding getting in the way of a child getting the support that they need. If we are serious about improving ASN delivery, we need to be honest about that and not shy away from it.

I have also seen the flip side, in a personal capacity, with my children and grandchildren, and professionally, with my young constituents. I have seen them thrive when they have an attentive, understanding teacher with them, and I have seen the difference that good practice makes. There are fantastic examples of that across Scotland. This cannot become a debate in which we pull everything down and ignore people who are quietly getting on with it and getting it right every single day.

I remember being in a high-level meeting, when I was a local councillor. I will not risk identifying anyone, but I heard someone say that autism is caused by too much screen time. That told me a lot about why there were so many barriers for my family and for other families around that area. I have also sat in a meeting with one of my own children and heard the words, "You cannot blame your ADHD for that. That was just you." If anyone wants to say that attitude is not a part of the issue, I tell them plainly, from lived experience, that it is.

No cabinet secretary can control every individual's attitude in school, and ministers cannot legislate away that type of ignorance. Leadership and culture matter, and there needs to be a shift in understanding in many ways. As Dr Jason Lang put it so well, if a supermarket shelf is too high for half of your customers, you do not build a whole individualised support system around the bad

design—you lower the shelf. That is a key point, and I agree that we need to reassess systems.

Issues are arising now, and this is a new and growing challenge. Post-Covid, education is in a very different setting, and we are just beginning to understand that impact. I know that the cabinet secretary has been listening and acting on that point, and it is important to have those constructive conversations. Schools need support, but we also cannot keep expecting schools and teaching staff alone to carry the pressures. We need to change wider systems.

Let us listen to the concerns and be honest about what still needs to improve. However, simply painting Scottish education as a story of failure completely misses the mark. We need a whole-community approach involving families, local services and the third sector. No school should be left carrying the pressures alone. If we are serious about improving outcomes, let us acknowledge the good, be honest about what needs to change and, importantly, be constructive. Let us also stop the silo working, because a lot of this rests not only in the education portfolio. As I have said, it is about a whole-society approach. Let us involve our young people in these discussions, because not including that lived experience risks missing the point.

15:19

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Presiding Officer,

> "There is no doubt that Scottish education can rightly claim many distinguished achievements in its long history, for which we have been admired throughout the world. However, the Parliament should be in no doubt about the concern among today's employers that in some areas we are failing to live up to that reputation, given our inability to produce a workforce that is adequately skilled to cope with the demands of the 21st century.
>
> In particular, it is deeply worrying that the CBI, in its recent manifesto for the elections, highlighted the fact that it is now commonplace for the Scottish business community to spend an unacceptably high percentage of its … training budget on what is, in effect, remedial education … rather than on new skills and on ensuring that Scotland is better able to compete on the international stage. The reality is that the basic levels of reading, writing and arithmetic of too many of our school leavers is … not good enough".—[*Official Report*, 30 May 2007; c 214-5.]

All those words are a direct quote from my maiden speech in the Parliament on 30 May 2007. I genuinely regret that they are just as relevant today as they were back then. Despite a few improvements in some aspects of Scottish education, our schools overall are not doing nearly as well as they should be, for the reasons that have already been set out by previous speakers.

In that maiden speech, I went on to highlight what I felt should be done to improve matters. I have not really changed my views in the intervening time. Before I offer some final thoughts before standing down, I will repeat one comment that was made by Ian Hughes from the Construction Industry Training Board at the Finance and Public Administration Committee just yesterday. He noted the size of the vast pool of potential talent in our young people and how colleges are doing well to try to harness that. He then said that, from the employers' point of view, there are not enough young people coming through schools and FE with the competency level that is needed, which often relates to poor attitude and poor discipline—not turning up on time, missing transport or asking to leave early without a valid excuse.

That, to me, is just as serious an issue as the concerns about attainment levels. It relates to something else that I mentioned in my maiden speech; namely, that we need to do far more to prevent too many of our young people from becoming disengaged at school, because that is when the poor discipline sets in.

In what is my last contribution to an education debate, I want to leave the Parliament with the following thoughts. Schools should be an opportunity for every single young person to reach their potential, whatever their abilities and whatever their background. Every single child is good at something, and it is the job of the school, in conjunction with the child and their parents, carers and guardians, to identify and nurture that capability. For many children, that might not be something that they find in the classroom, but something that they find in the field of extracurricular activity.

At the risk of repeating what I said at the time of the passing of my Schools (Residential Outdoor Education) (Scotland) Bill, why on earth do we not learn the lessons from what works well to motivate young people and deliver the best outcomes? If we learn those lessons, we will radically improve the levels of resilience, self-esteem and confidence, and, as a direct result, improve attainment, attendance and behaviour. If we do so, we will raise aspiration across the board and put an end to the mediocrity and negativity in the education system that too often affects the lives of our young people.

15:23

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): I remind members of my entry in the register of members' interests.

It is very powerful to follow what might be Liz Smith's last contribution on education. I would like to take a moment to say that it has taken you a long time, since 2007, to graduate—longer than many of our young people in university—but you

are good at something. Your empathy, wisdom, knowledge and ability to advocate for what our young people need, even though they might not know that they need it, have been exceptional. You will be greatly missed in the chamber, and your contribution to education will be greatly treasured and also missed, so thank you.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am almost tempted not to say, "Through the chair", given those remarks, but please speak through the chair.

Martin Whitfield: One of the enduring tests of education is not simply that we affirm but whether we are prepared to examine claims rigorously rather than just accept them uncritically. That principle serves this Parliament well when we assess claims of success in public policy. It is in that spirit that I rise to support the motion in the name of Willie Rennie and to support the Scottish Labour amendment, because they ask the Parliament to do something entirely reasonable: to judge the Scottish Government not on promises made but on commitments delivered.

Since 2016, the Government has set out a series of headline pledges on education with clear targets that were publicly stated and repeatedly affirmed. The pledges included free laptops for all pupils, free bikes for children who cannot afford them, free school meals for all pupils up to primary 7, an additional 3,500 teachers, reduced class contact time and, critically, the closing of the poverty-related attainment gap by 2026. Those were not Opposition demands; they were Government commitments. However, many of those commitments have been missed, diluted, delayed or quietly abandoned altogether. That matters, because, when education targets are missed, it is not spreadsheets that suffer; it is schools, teachers and families—it is our children who are let down.

The Government might argue that circumstances have changed. It might point to the pandemic or wider pressures. However, leadership is not tested when delivery is straightforward; it is tested when priorities must be defended and promises must be honoured under strain.

The motion is right to state that the failure to meet the commitments has had real and tangible consequences, which we can see in the classroom. Teachers speak of rising levels of violence and disruption, while pupils with additional support needs too often face delay or denial when they seek the help that they are legally entitled to.

At the same time, the profession is under profound pressure. Record numbers of newly qualified teachers are leaving the profession not through a lack of vocation but because the system is failing to sustain them. Workloads are excessive, class sizes remain high and promised reductions in class contact time have not been delivered. It should surprise no one that teachers are once again considering industrial action. That is not a system at ease; it is a system that is stretched close to breaking point.

The motion directs us to the attainment gap, which is perhaps the clearest measure of this Government's education record. For years, ministers have rightly described closing the poverty-related attainment gap as their defining mission. However, the gap remains wide, and progress has been uneven and fragile. The motion does not deny the complexity of the challenge, but it rejects the idea that ambition alone is a substitute for delivery. Scotland's children do not have the luxury of waiting, because they get one chance at their childhood.

That is why I support the Labour amendment, which recognises that international evidence matters. Declining performance since 2012 is not about league table vanity; it is a warning signal that long trends in literacy, numeracy and equity are falling.

I turn briefly to the cabinet secretary's amendment. It offers an impressive catalogue of budgets, figures and future intentions. However, it confirms the problem that this debate is about, because it substitutes announcement for achievement and asks the Parliament to look forward rather than account for what has not yet been delivered. Investment is not in dispute, but delivery is. It is right to have gratitude for teachers, staff, parents and pupils, but that cannot be used as a shield.

Education is one of the clearest tests of whether opportunity in Scotland is broadly shared. It is disappointing that this SNP Government has not learned that lesson.

15:28

Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP): I thank the Lib Dems for securing this debate. I am delighted to speak just as we have agreed to the 2026-27 budget, as the cabinet secretary referred to. That was secured through constructive agreement with our Lib Dem colleagues.

The budget delivers tangible investment in the future of every child and young person. It contains more than £4.8 billion for education, including £200 million specifically targeted at closing the poverty-related attainment gap. That is record investment, which the Parliament can be proud of. It is not just about the funds, as has been said; it is about achievement.

I come to the debate with evidence of progress and achievement, which is the important thing. We can all stand in the Parliament to make speeches, trade statistics and trade our records of manifesto promises. The achievement of curriculum for excellence levels data that was published in December 2025 showed that there are record levels of literacy and numeracy in our primary schools. Just last month, in February 2026, we learned that the proportion of school leavers who move on to positive destinations—college, university, training or employment—reached the second-highest level on record. Those are not abstract statistics; they are the direct result of the hard work of teachers, pupil support staff, parents and carers across Scotland.

The budget builds on that success. It will expand free breakfast clubs and free school meals even further, helping to ensure that no child arrives at school too hungry to learn. The constructive work with colleagues and the budget deal with the Scottish Greens last year rolled out free school meals in secondary schools. Every extra meal served is another barrier removed and another child is given the best possible start to their school day.

I, too, welcome the continuation of extra funding for pupils with additional support needs. The demands for our ASN services are significant and sustained investment is essential. I look forward to the publication early next month of the cross-party ASN review that this Parliament commissioned. I am confident that the review, combined with resources and the budget, will help us to deliver the support that our young people deserve.

Another important point that has not been touched on in the debate is the second cross-party summit on neural developmental support, which brings together health, educational, academia and local government. Those in the next session of Parliament will have a vital role in ensuring that children and parents have the support that they need to maximise their child's potential. I commend the work that Stronger Together for Autism and Neurodivergence undertake in East Lothian in supporting children and parents.

I want to focus on one local issue. It is incredibly worrying to see some autistic children in East Lothian being denied essential support because of the Labour council's decision to block private therapists from working in local schools. That directly affects families in East Lothian, where many children rely on specialist input to communicate, learn and thrive. Parents and professionals across East Lothian have been clear in speaking to me. When independent therapists are refused access, there is often no suitable alternative in place. Children are left waiting, falling behind and missing out on interventions that could make a life-changing difference.

All qualified therapists meet the same regulatory standards. What matters is that children receive the help when they need it. I am working with the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists in that regard. It would be helpful if the cabinet secretary could refer to that in her summing up. I raised the topic in committee last week, and Tom Arthur said that he would take the point forward.

Children are suffering in East Lothian because of that specific issue. I am also asking East Lothian Council to urgently rethink its approach and put children's needs at the centre of decision making.

No progress would be possible without the dedication of those in our classrooms, nurseries and communities, which we see day in and day out. Scotland's teachers and pupil support staff go above and beyond. Parents and carers give tirelessly of their time and energy. Our pupils do, too—the young people turn up ready to learn to their full potential. They are the reason that we are all here. I want to place on record our deepest gratitude to every one of them. Their hard work and commitment are what make Scottish education the success story that it is becoming.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We come to closing speeches.

15:32

Paul O'Kane: I will pick up on a theme that I started with, because it came up a number of times in the debate: reflecting not only on the previous five years of this Parliament but on the 10 years since the pledge on the attainment gap was made and on the 20 years of the SNP in power.

A number of members commented on that and on what has and has not happened during that period. Karen Adam spoke passionately about the importance of ASN provision and support and the work that still requires to be done. I am very familiar with that, as someone who worked in the learning disability sector for many years before being elected to Parliament. As she was talking about the innovations, the reviews and what is happening now, I reflected that those very issues were being discussed in 2016, when I was working in the sector and helping people, particularly parents, to advocate for their views. At the time, John Swinney was the education secretary, and he pledged to look at a number of recommendations that were made, including those in "#IncludED in the Main?!", which was Enable's piece of work on the issue. None of that was progressed in a particularly meaningful way.

We find ourselves in the position of revisiting much of that 10 years on and we are only just making a start on the issues that need to be dealt with. That leads me to Liz Smith's speech. I pay tribute to Liz Smith, because she will be a loss to the Parliament. She reflected on her time in the Parliament over that 10-year period and beyond and she considered the issues of apprenticeships and skills, what we are teaching young people and how we are preparing them for work. She said that, in many ways, we have not moved beyond the issues that she raised back in 2007. That tells us all we need to know about the progress that has, and has not, been made during this session of Parliament—these past five years—and, more acutely, over almost two decades of SNP government.

Karen Adam: I understand what the member says about time, but things have changed so much in the past six years since Covid. Also, young people just do not know what type of roles and jobs will be available in the future. They might be in school right now, but the jobs that they will be going into do not even exist yet. There are a lot of unknowns out there. We are trying to move at pace and, at the same time, deal with rapid change.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can give you the time back for that, Mr O'Kane.

Paul O'Kane: Of course I recognise what Karen Adam says about the challenges. Any Government has to deal with shocks and other such issues, but we are reflecting on almost two decades of the SNP's decision making in this space. We have to ask what the picture and position was on many of those issues pre-Covid. Similarly, in the health service, the Government sometimes desires to point to the pandemic as the root of all challenges, ills and issues, but the reality is that things were in a difficult situation prior to the pandemic.

As I said at the outset of the debate, we were promised a recovery from Covid in this session of Parliament—that was to be the relentless focus of this session. It was going to be the relentless focus of John Swinney, the man who now finds himself in the role of First Minister. However, we are nowhere near where we need to be in that recovery from Covid.

The debate has allowed us to reflect on what has gone before, but it also gives us an opportunity to put on record what needs to happen to move forward. For me, that is about giving confidence and support to teachers to allow them to teach, to maintain discipline and order in their classrooms, to drive up literacy and numeracy across the board and to deal with the significant challenges relating to additional support needs, not just in terms of funding but in terms of structure.

We will debate those issues in the days ahead in the coming election. However, it is clear to me that, after almost two decades of the SNP Government being in power, we need a new direction in Scotland.

15:36

Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): We all remember the "judge me" pledge that was made in 2015 by the then First Minister, and it has already been referenced today. Nicola Sturgeon asked to be judged on her ability to reduce the attainment gap between rich and poor students. That was her promise and the standard that she set. However, in the 10 years since that definitive statement and the 19 years of the SNP leading our education system, Scotland's once-proud reputation of educational excellence has taken a hit, and the poverty-related attainment gap remains deeply rooted for Scotland's children.

By any fair measure, the SNP has failed. I noted in Karen Adam's personal and passionate contribution the ASN issues that she highlighted. She also commented that we are discussing educational failure. However, I state categorically that we are not talking about that; we are talking about the Government's failure to deliver on educational promises, which is a different thing. Let me be clear that that is not a reflection on any of our teachers, staff, schools or pupils. We can all agree that, when we speak of such issues, we are aware that our teachers and staff are doing a fantastic job. The failure lies solely at the feet of the SNP Government and is due to a failure to meet those promises.

Recent curriculum for excellence data shows that, in primary schools, the gap between the most and least deprived pupils when it comes to meeting expected levels is still wide, at 19 percentage points in literacy and 17 percentage points in numeracy. In secondary schools, the divide is just as worrying. Among those getting A to C grades for national 5, the gap is more than 16 percentage points and, for highers, it is more than 17 percentage points. Among pupils getting As in national 5, the difference is a striking 27.5 percentage points, which is almost the same as it was before the pandemic. That is not progress; it is generational injustice.

Karen Adam: Does the member agree that the two-child benefit cap and a restriction in public service spending would affect the poverty-related attainment gap?

Roz McCall: That is something that comes up regularly. Although I understand the Government's position on that, we are talking about educational attainment and the situation in our schools. We must realise that our schools have to teach

everybody, and that everybody needs the same standard of education, but they are not getting that from the Government.

It is important that I return to the point that behind every percentage point is lost potential—a child who has been told, directly or indirectly, that their future is limited by where they live or by the circumstances in which they grow up. That is an appalling situation.

I have listened today—and, indeed, every day—to the Scottish Government's education team focusing, as even the Government's amendment to the motion does, on the various sums of money that the Government has invested in Scotland's schools rather than on the outcomes of that investment. Throwing money at a problem only works for so long. It is fundamental that we address the roots of the issues head on.

Over the past 19 years, none of the SNP Government's budgeted spend has shifted the dial. In recent years, more than 73,000 pupils have had attendance rates below 50 per cent. In other words, 73,000 pupils have checked out of Scottish education and the hope that comes with it. Those are not just numbers; they are children. Scotland's programme for international student assessment scores in maths and science are at record lows.

Violent incidents in classrooms have led thousands of teachers to seek medical treatment, yet there is little in the way of discipline for pupils' actions, so many teachers face worse behaviour every day. When teachers are attacked and assaulted in our classrooms, learning and consistency suffer and discipline is forgotten. Not only should teachers not be forced to work in such conditions, hard-working and diligent pupils also suffer from the disruption. The worst effect of that is on children from deprived areas and the toughest backgrounds, who rely most on school for stability because their home life is not as secure. This Government is letting them down.

Even respected experts now admit the truth. Professor John McKendrick has said that the Scottish Government cannot claim significant progress in closing the gap. Nicola Sturgeon herself has called the failure to close the gap one of her biggest regrets.

The Scottish Conservatives believe that every child, no matter their background, deserves a chance to succeed. We believe that children should be children; that classrooms are places of safety and equality; that actions should have consequences; that funding should be well targeted and carefully monitored; that children should be taught literacy and numeracy from the outset; and that people should be held truly accountable for results. Those principles are all common sense.

Closing the attainment gap should not have been just an election slogan, like so many of the elections slogans that we hear now, or a piecrust promise to be easily made and easily broken. It should have been a real promise to Scotland's children, and in that regard this SNP Government has been found wanting.

15:42

Jenny Gilruth: In this debate, I was keen to praise the positive behaviour of children. If everything is framed through a negative lens, all that it does is risk demoralising parents, pupils and teachers. Karen Adam was absolutely right about that. We need to be mindful of how we characterise Scotland's schools. For example, the behaviour in Scottish schools research—which involved surveying 4,000 staff who work in our schools every day—showed that most of Scotland's young people are well behaved. We lose nuance when we focus overtly on extremes. I am particularly worried about that in relation to debates on behaviour, because we risk demonising a generation when we characterise Scotland's schools in such a way.

To return to some of the comments that I made at the beginning of the debate, this is the generation that lived through a global pandemic, so their experience of our education system will be different. I reflect, though, having listened to contributions from colleagues—

Roz McCall: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Jenny Gilruth: I am happy to do so.

Roz McCall: Does the cabinet secretary at least accept that this debate is not about our schools, but about the promises that the Government made to the people of Scotland and the changes that it intended to deliver but did not?

Jenny Gilruth: I accept that the debate is about the Government's record on education. I listened to some of Roz McCall's points on outcomes, but it is important to record that the recent statistics on outcomes for our primary pupils show that the proportion of pupils who achieve expected curriculum for excellence levels in literacy has increased to the highest level to date. Among S3 pupils, the proportion of pupils who achieve third level or better in literacy and numeracy is also at its highest ever level, and the poverty-related attainment gap for primary pupils in literacy narrowed in 2024-25 to its lowest ever level. Those are the outcomes for our children and young people. Let us be careful about how we characterise the schools in which they learn.

We heard from Karen Adam about the importance of leadership, culture and the wider

system, as well as the need to change. Things have been difficult in our schools since the pandemic, the effect of which we must not diminish because it continues to affect attainment, attendance and engagement in the broader life of the school.

I was struck by Liz Smith's comments on readiness for work. I am very sorry that she will be leaving the Parliament at the election. Like me, she is a former teacher, and we have engaged in many debates and sat together on education committees over the years. I am sorry that she will not be contributing as an MSP in the future, but I am sure that she will continue to make a contribution and will watch closely to see the impact of her Schools (Residential Outdoor Education) (Scotland) Act 2026.

One of the major shifts in recent years has been the increase in the number of technical and vocational qualification awards. Last year alone, more than 116,000 such qualifications were awarded. As Liz Smith knows, the skills for life qualifications cover topics such as teamwork and personal finance more broadly. Therefore, the curriculum provides broader opportunities to address some of her points about readiness for work. It is also worth recording that the Qualifications Scotland statistics that were published showed that, last year, there was the highest level of attainment in such qualifications since 2019. However, on readiness for work, we need to do more to support young people who struggle during the transition from school to work or, indeed, higher education.

Paul McLennan talked about the Scottish Government's record and mentioned the achievements in our schools. He talked about pass rates for national 5s and highers having increased since 2019, which is important, and the attainment gap in primary schools having narrowed to a record low level, as I mentioned. The latest Universities and Colleges Admissions Service data shows that record numbers of 18-year-olds have secured a university place, including a record number of 18-year-olds from deprived backgrounds.

None of that progress would have been possible without the hard work of Scotland's dedicated teaching workforce, so I am pleased that we were again able to offer an uplift in teacher pay at the end of last year. That means that Scotland's teachers continue to be the best paid in the United Kingdom, with classroom teachers at the top of the scale now being paid just over £52,000 per year. That is significant investment. In fact, since 2021, the Government has invested more than £800 million in increasing teacher wages. We have done that because we value our teachers, and when we value our teachers, they deliver results.

I am mindful of the time. In closing what I expect to be the final debate on education during Opposition time in this parliamentary session, I will return to the words that I used in a debate on the national discussion on Scottish education nearly three years ago. At that time, the facilitators of the national discussion noted

"an optimism for the future of Scottish education",

and I said that there was

"an overwhelming appetite for change in Scottish education."—[*Official Report*, 31 May 2023; c 31.]

I am a bit heart-sore, but not surprised, that we have not heard much of that optimism for the future of Scottish education this afternoon, because things are getting better in our schools following Covid, and things will need to change if we are to intensify that progress.

I hope to be a member of the next Parliament that ensures that the opportunity for meaningful improvement and constructive debate is not missed. Scottish education and Scotland's children deserve better.

15:47

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I remind members that my wife is a primary school teacher.

I will start with the words of the former First Minister Nicola Sturgeon:

"My aim—to put it bluntly—is to close the attainment gap completely. It will not be done overnight—I accept that. But it must be done."

That was said in 2015. Willie Rennie was quite right to point to the fact that the former First Minister made a promise to the poorest children in Scotland—a promise that she has singularly failed to keep. It is very dispiriting and disappointing that she is not in the chamber to defend her record, even though she is on the estate. Presiding Officer, you could have a coffee with her in the garden lobby and ask her why she is not here. Perhaps she is working on the last chunky chapter of her book. I hope that she finds time in it to explain and apologise for her record of failure.

The reality is that the SNP has given up on closing the poverty-related attainment gap. That theme was eloquently taken up by Miles Briggs. The reality is that the gap between school leavers from the most deprived areas of our country and those from the least deprived areas has worsened or barely changed over the past decade since Nicola Sturgeon made those remarks.

Paul McLennan said that he did not want to trade statistics and then gave a slew of statistics, so let me reply to him. The SNP's pledge to close the gap within 10 years lies in tatters. At the current

rate, it will take 133 years to close the primary school numeracy gap and 57 years to close the primary school literacy gap. I could go on. At that pace, we will all be long dead before we achieve the lofty goal that Nicola Sturgeon set us and herself all those years ago.

Teacher recruitment is in crisis. Record numbers of early career teachers are quitting. Scot Lib Dem figures show that more than 400 recently trained teachers left the profession last year alone, and newly qualified teachers cannot get stable jobs. Only 23 per cent of newly qualified teachers report being able to secure a full-time teaching job in their profession of choice, down from 56.5 per cent. Since 2018, thousands of teachers have left the register within five years of starting, and supply lists are swelling.

Moving on to violence in our schools, as a former youth worker who will never do down young people, I recognise that violence is a product of the environment in which young people have been brought up and the impact of the pandemic. However, we cannot ignore it. Some 40,000-plus violent incidents were reported in 2023-24. In Glasgow alone, 2,500 violent incidents were reported in one year.

The cabinet secretary sought to kill Willie Rennie with kindness in her opening remarks, but there was a cognitive dissonance in those remarks. I am sure that the 400 newly qualified teachers I spoke of who left the profession last year will be reconsidering their life choices and reaching to phone the education authority now that they have learned about the Government's working group to look at the problem. Stop the press—it is all going to be fine.

That cognitive dissonance was also taken up by Karen Adam. I was disappointed in her. She usually speaks incredibly well but leant into the lazy SNP tactic of suggesting that, by having the temerity to raise the topic in Opposition time, we are somehow doing down teachers or pupils. Ms Adam would do well to remember that teachers are growing tired of the Scottish Government and its back benchers using them as human shields in that way. Those teaching unions and pupils would be over the moon to have just one afternoon of Government time devoted to the problems in the education system that the SNP has presided over.

I was so glad to be present to hear Liz Smith's last contribution on the education topic. She has brought so much light and expertise to the chamber since her entry to the Scottish Parliament in 2007. In every one of those debates, she has lifted the standard of public debate and the ambitions of the Scottish Parliament. I fundamentally agree with the excellent tribute that was paid to her by Martin Whitfield. Her voice will be such a loss to the chamber when she steps down in May. [*Applause*.]

When the Liberal Democrats last left government in 2007, Scottish education was among the best in the world. Only a handful of countries ranked above us in maths, but now, under the SNP, Scottish education is just average. Our maths scores in the international rankings are the lowest that they have ever been—that is not doing down teachers; it is a statement of fact. It is the same for reading and science—now, under the SNP, we have the worst ever scores. That theme was picked up well by Roz McCall.

Remember what John Swinney and the SNP said that they would do? Paul O'Kane ably reflected on that: a free laptop for every pupil, free school lunches up to primary 7, teachers spending fewer hours in front of class and more time preparing, smaller class sizes, closing the poverty-related attainment gap, and 3,500 more teachers. None of that has been delivered—not one bit of it.

The impact, after 19 years of the SNP, is that Scottish education is just not what it used to be. People feel let down. Every week, without exception, I meet families—as I am sure you do, Presiding Officer—who are worried that their child's additional support needs are not being met or that their teenager is frequently absent from school, toiling under that long shadow of lockdown, or they are worried about the violence in their schools, which is captured on phones and spreads across social media like wildfire. Children, parents and teachers all deserve better than that. Education is the best investment that we can make in our children's potential and in our country's future.

Here is the optimism that the cabinet secretary was looking for in this debate. Here is the Scottish Liberal Democrat plan for how we would do things differently. We will invest in pupil support assistants and specialist support, such as speech and language therapists. We will create a young carers lead in every school to help young carers balance education and caring for a loved one. We will use youth work as a means of reaching young people who are not successfully engaged in formal education. We will legislate to make classrooms mobile phone free, so that children can learn and teachers can teach. We need that legislation in order to make the cultural change required. It is just not fair to leave it up to headteachers and ministerial guidance.

We will also open up a new route for qualified primary school teachers who are stuck in precarious work to quickly gain the right to teach in our secondary schools—some of which are crying out for teachers. If someone needs to be able to teach an additional subject, we will help them, too.

That will improve the teacher's job prospects and will ensure that pupils have the teachers and the subject choice that they fundamentally deserve.

It is a scandal that three out of four newly qualified teachers are forced on to demoralising temporary zero-hours contracts. They are ready to shape young minds, and they have grafted for their qualifications. Why is the SNP Government forcing them to move abroad to find work or to spend years in jobs where they cannot pay their bills and rack up thousands of pounds of debt? It did not use to be like that.

We will end that scandal—and it is a scandal. It is part of our plan to fix the mess that the SNP has made of this country's education.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on judging the Scottish Government on its education record.

Ferries

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-20957, in the name of Jamie Greene, on fixing Scotland's ferries fiasco.

15:57

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (LD): Presiding Officer, I have been accused, over the years, of banging on about ferries in the chamber, and that is absolutely right. If you had told me 10 years ago, when I first spoke about ferries in the chamber, that the 23-year-old MV Caledonian Isles would now be 33 years old, that it would have broken down for 20 months while in service, that hull 802 in Port Glasgow would still not be carrying any passengers, that the Irish berth at Ardrossan would still be lying in tatters, that the Glen Sannox would have launched seven and a half years late at a cost of £140 million and that it would have gone offline for repairs for months due to design problems after less than a year in service, that the Ardrossan ferry would now be sailing out of Troon instead, and that all the ferries issues that I spoke to in my maiden speech would be featuring so prominently in one of my last speeches, my answer back then would have been, "I really do hope that won't the case, for the sake of our island communities." Yet here we are, some 10 years on. It is the same chamber and the same me—perhaps aged a little bit since then—addressing the same sorry saga of cancelled crossings, stranded tourists and missed appointments.

We are supposed to be a proud seafaring nation, yet we have a ferries strategy fit for Luxembourg. Let us start with those two now infamous ferries, the Glen Sannox and the Glen Rosa. Everyone from Unst to Arran knows the story. It has been the subject of numerous committee reports, Audit Scotland critique and endless exposés unearthed by journalists and by furious and frustrated taxpayers through freedom of information requests. It is the stuff that textbooks will use as a case study for decades, to teach marine engineers and, hopefully, Governments how not to build a ferry. Both of those ferries were announced with huge fanfare at the Scottish National Party's conference back in 2015. They were supposed to set sail in 2018, and they were supposed to cost £97 million in total. I bet that is a promise that the SNP now wishes it had never made—because, eight years and some £400 million of taxpayers' money later, the Glen Rosa is still not finished and the Glen Sannox, delivered only last year, has been out of action for more than three months. In fact, they have had to rip parts out of the Rosa to repair the Sannox.

Those were supposed to be our flagship net zero marine machines. They were supposed to cast off the idea of dirty diesel engines in favour of that darling of civil servants, liquefied natural gas—the same LNG that caused so much of the delay and so many problems. For what purpose? We are not even producing LNG in Scotland—it gets shipped in from Qatar to a terminal in Kent. It gets driven 460 miles in a diesel road tanker to Scotland and, even then, we have nowhere to store if. It is barely, if ever, used on the ferry that it was designed to be used on—a ferry that was designed for a harbour that it could not sail from. That is a genius idea if ever I heard one.

Of course, there is also the Ferguson Marine shipyard in my own backyard of Inverclyde. It was nationalised by the Government in 2019. Since then, four chief executives have been sacked or have resigned and £3 million has been paid in salaries, golden hellos, golden goodbyes, bonuses and consultancy fees. Six transport secretaries later, not one of them has ever resigned. We can be grateful that the current Cabinet Secretary for Transport has, to her credit, shown determination and commitment to getting stuff done. I am delighted with the announcement yesterday of the four new vessels being built at the yard. That is exactly the type and profile of work that the yard can excel at—I hope we all agree.

However, the yard needs to get the contract first. When I spoke to people in the yard last night, many were sceptical about the Government's announcement yesterday. The first stage of the small vessel replacement programme was awarded to Gdánsk, not to Greenock. Other contracts have been awarded to Turkey. The Parliament—including many on the Scottish National Party back benches—called for a direct award on all those occasions and the Government replied that it simply could not do it. Now, we are told that it can.

There is a massive difference between announcing an intention to award a contract and announcing the award of a contract. Yesterday, we heard the former, not the latter, so we have no idea whether ministers have sought Competition and Markets Authority approval or whether such approval has been denied or granted. None of that was in the statement. How do we know that it will not be denied again? For more than a decade, we have heard the words "Teckal" and "state aid" bandied around to explain why direct award was problematic. I might be long in the tooth and a bit suspicious, but I will believe it when I see it. The yard deserves nothing less.

I will sum up the motion and why it was right to use my first—and last—Lib Dem party business slot to focus on the plight of Scotland's island communities. One major ferry is massively overdue. A new one is already out for repair. Another does not fit the harbour that it is supposed to sail from. New ferries are being built overseas, not here in Scotland, and we have an ageing fleet that breaks down, leaving islanders feeling like second-class citizens. It is a mess that has been two decades in the making. It has been a shameful episode in Scotland's devolved political chapter, and I never have—and never will—apologise for raising it in the chamber.

I move,

That the Parliament believes that many of Scotland's island and coastal communities have been let down by the Scottish Government and have paid the price for the failure of the Scottish Ministers to provide them with the lifeline ferries they need; recognises that this has had an impact on businesses, livelihoods and local economies; notes that whilst the Scottish Government extended the Islands Business Resilience Fund, there are many impacted coastal communities, such as Dunoon and Ardrossan, where local businesses are not receiving compensation and calls on the Scottish Government to rectify this; notes with frustration that the delivery of the MV Glen Rosa has been delayed by another six months until late 2026 and that the MV Glen Sannox required months of repairs; believes that taxpayers, islanders and workers at Ferguson Marine have all been let down over this ongoing fiasco and expresses deep disappointment that no minister has ever taken responsibility by resigning, and further believes that Scotland's island and coastal communities deserve better and that new requirements to replace ageing vessels are needed alongside a rolling 30-year strategy for ferries and port infrastructure so that no community is ever left without a viable lifeline service.

16:03

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport (Fiona Hyslop): This debate is helpfully timed to allow me to build on my statement yesterday to the Parliament. Yesterday, I chaired a meeting of the Ardrossan task force to discuss next steps; this morning, I met CalMac Ferries to discuss its response to the operational challenges, and I met Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd to discuss the various vessel and port investment projects that I referred to in my statement. Finally, I had the pleasure of visiting the newest addition to the fleet, the MV Isle of Islay.

The motion asks for a 30-year investment plan. In May, we published the islands connectivity vessel and ports plan, which set out our plan until 2045. That is based on an assumed vessel operational life of 30 years and commits that we will

"reduce the average age of the total fleet … to around 15 years by the end of this decade".

In addition, we have committed that the plan will be

"fully updated every five years so that there is always a 20-25 year forward look."

That plan is well under way.

In addition to the MV Isle of Islay, her three sister ships are under construction, along with seven small vessels. I had an update on that from CMAL only this morning. When taken together with the addition to the fleet of the MV Glen Rosa, that means that one third of the entire CalMac fleet is being replaced. The plan also commits to providing a major vessel for resilience purposes until at least 2030, to minimise disruption and ensure that services are maintained.

Yesterday, as well as announcing that we will soon move to tender on the replacement for the MV Lord of the Isles, I announced the proposal to directly award the contract for two of the small vessel replacement scheme vessels to Ferguson Marine. We will soon make an announcement on the replacements for the Northern Isles freight vessels. I say to Jamie Greene that all the steps that need to be taken as regards CMA engagement, subsidy control and so on will be taken for the proposed award. We are now far more confident that we will be able procure the vessels in that way, which is why I made yesterday's announcement.

I also confirmed that I have approved funding for the redevelopment of Port Ellen. I am pleased to confirm that CMAL will award the £107 million contract to completely redevelop Port Ellen this week.

With regard to Ardrossan, the negotiations on purchase and wider legal agreements have now been concluded, and those will be signed shortly to confirm the harbour's purchase by CMAL this month. That was discussed last night by the task force.

Beyond that, we will continue to invest in new vessels and ports, and our programme of community needs assessments is under way. The outputs will inform future service design and the business cases for the pipeline of vessel and port projects.

The provision of ferry services is not only about new vessels and ports; it is also about how they are run. We are approaching the end of the first period of the new Clyde and Hebrides ferry services contract, following the direct award to CalMac in October. Those arrangements, which represent a step change in how services are delivered, were intended to bring flexibility and a community focus to the heart of operations. As was mentioned when I met CalMac this morning, the company is on a journey that involves a process of constant learning, as part of which key performance indicators are embedded in every part of its business.

For the Northern Isles ferry services, I can confirm that, this morning, we published the prior information notice. That is the initial phase in the procurement process for the next contract, which will be in place from the end of June 2028.

The introduction by the Government of road equivalent tariff has significantly reduced ferry fares on the Clyde and Hebrides network, and it saves ferry travellers around £25 million per year. We will fully retain RET for islanders and non-islanders alike.

Yesterday, Ariane Burgess raised the question of freight fares across the network. She highlighted not just the absolute level of freight fares but their level relative to charges for other vehicles. I can confirm that, starting this summer, Transport Scotland will undertake a review that will encompass those issues. Of course, I cannot prejudge the outcome of that review, but I hope that that confirmation is welcome.

We recognise that island businesses have experienced more than their fair share of disruption. That is why we created the islands business resilience fund and expanded its scope to include Coll, Tiree, the small isles, Mull, Iona, Ulva, Barra, Vatersay, Islay and Jura. It was essential that the fund remained tightly targeted so that the support was credible. I can confirm that the full £4.4 million will be deployed, and I can announce that we have uplifted the rate of awards to strengthen the resilience of small businesses that face the impacts of disruption.

That all sits alongside the vision of the national islands plan, which sets out a refreshed programme of actions to address the broader challenges and opportunities that our islands face.

I recognise the challenges that island communities have faced and the need to provide them with reliable and resilient services, which is why we are taking the range of actions that I have outlined and will continue to invest in those communities.

I move amendment S6M-20957.3, to leave out from first "believes" to end and insert:

"recognises the challenges that island communities have faced with disruptions and the need to give them reliable and resilient services; supports the announcements made by the Scottish Government on 3 March 2026 of the conclusion of the purchase of Ardrossan Harbour, the proposal to directly award two vessels for the Small Vessel Replacement Programme to Ferguson Marine, the competitive tender for the replacement for the MV Lord of the Isles, funding for the Port Ellen redevelopment on Islay, and that peak fares for islanders on NorthLink ferry services will be removed on 24 March 2026; notes that, with 11 vessels currently being built and with the recent arrival of MV Isle of Islay, one third of the entire CalMac fleet is being replaced, and further notes that the Island Connectivity Plan Vessels and Ports Plan sets out a long-term investment programme to 2045, and that community needs assessments, with community engagement at their heart, will shape these investments in ferries and ports for decades to come."

16:08

Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con): I am pleased to speak in support of the motion that was lodged by Jamie Greene on fixing Scotland's ferry fiasco.

For too long, Scotland's islands and coastal communities have been treated as an afterthought by the SNP Government. Lifeline ferries are not a luxury or a seasonal extra—they are essential infrastructure. They are the arteries that keep island and coastal economies alive, by connecting people to work, education, healthcare and family.

However, Scotland's ferry fiasco has been going on since 2014. The two vessels at the heart of the scandal—the MV Glen Sannox and the MV Glen Rosa—were originally budgeted to cost £97 million. Their combined cost has now reached almost £500 million, and both were meant to be in service in 2018-19. Instead, islanders have endured years of delay, disruption and uncertainty.

The MV Glen Sannox finally entered service in January 2025, and it has already required multiple periods of repair. The MV Glen Rosa has been delayed again, with delivery pushed back to the very end of 2026. The most recent delay alone has added another £12.5 million to the cost of completing the vessels, with the total cost since nationalisation of the yard now standing at £197.5 million.

What do islanders hear from ministers? They hear that the Government is carefully assessing the information that is provided, and that the situation is a source of great frustration. However, frustration is not accountability, and careful assessment is not delivery. Not one minister has resigned or taken responsibility. That is why my amendment explicitly notes that the combined cost of the Glen Sannox and Glen Rosa has reached almost £500 million. Taxpayers deserve to know how that was allowed to happen and how ministers will ensure that it never happens again.

Yesterday, the Scottish Government announced four direct awards to Ferguson Marine, a programme to upgrade the yard and an intention to return it to the private sector. If that is the strategy, ministers must clearly outline how those new vessels will be delivered on time and on budget. Warm words and press releases will not rebuild public trust.

Meanwhile, CalMac has spent more than £260 million over 11 years maintaining an ageing fleet. In 2024-25 alone, upkeep costs reached £50.1 million—double what they were just two years earlier. The average age of a CalMac lifeline vessel is now more than 25 years. In 1974, the typical ferry was just 13 years old. That is not progress; it is managed decline. Communities such as Dunoon and Ardrossan have faced repeated disruption, yet many local businesses are not eligible for compensation under the islands business resilience fund, despite clearly being affected. That is unfair and must be rectified.

In what I would describe as a very timely announcement yesterday, the Government has also set out its intention to purchase Ardrossan harbour. If that deal proceeds, ministers must provide regular updates on when the purchase will be completed and when the long-overdue upgrade will be delivered, because communities deserve clarity and certainty, not continued speculation.

In Ardrossan, the MV Caledonian Isles was out of action for 20 months for repairs costing nearly £12 million. On Arran, the MV Alfred has been chartered at a cost that has already reached £35 million, which is more than double what it cost Pentland Ferries to build the vessel.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention on that point?

Sue Webber: I will not, Mr Gibson, as I have very limited time and quite a significant amount to carry on with.

That figure will rise further now that the charter has been extended. That is not strategic fleet management; it is short-term crisis management.

Island and coastal communities have experienced repeated timetable changes, cancelled sailings and the absence of a real resilience vessel when breakdowns occur. Public services, local businesses, tourism and supply chains have all been hindered by that mismanagement.

The question is simple. How will the Scottish Government hold the ferry service providers to account to ensure that they deliver for island and coastal communities? Islanders and taxpayers deserve transparency and competence, and they deserve better than this.

Let me be clear: no one in the chamber doubts the dedication of workers at Ferguson Marine or the crews operating our ferry services. They are doing their utmost in extremely difficult circumstances. The failure here is not theirs. It lies with ministers, who have presided over years of delay, poor oversight and a lack of forward planning.

What Scotland needs now is a credible long-term strategy. We need a rolling 30-year plan for ferries and ports infrastructure, so that no community is ever left again without a viable lifeline service.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): Ms Webber, you must conclude.

Sue Webber: In conclusion, it is time to stop Scotland's ferry fiasco. It is time to restore trust.

I move amendment S6M-20957.2, to insert at end:

"; notes that the combined costs of the MV Glen Sannox and MV Glen Rosa has reached almost £500 million; acknowledges the Scottish Government's announcements of four direct awards to Ferguson Marine, a programme to upgrade the yard, and the intention to return the yard to the private sector; urges ministers to outline how these new vessels will be delivered on time and on budget; notes the Scottish Government's plan to purchase Ardrossan Harbour, and urges ministers to regularly update communities on when the purchase and upgrade of the harbour will be completed; further notes that the cost to charter the MV Alfred has reached £35 million, more than double the cost for Pentland Ferries to build the vessel, and that this cost will increase now that the charter has been extended; recognises that the public services and local economies of island and coastal communities have been hindered by the Scottish Government's mismanagement of the ferry network through repeated timetable changes, cancelled sailings and the lack of a resilience vessel, and calls on the Scottish Government to outline how it will hold ferry service providers to account to ensure that they deliver for island and coastal communities."

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Rhoda Grant, who joins us remotely, to speak to and move amendment S6M-20957.1.

16:13

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): As the cabinet secretary said, we had a statement yesterday that tried to draw a line under the ferry fiasco, but, sadly, it did not. We are still seeing prolonged dry-dock periods for both the new ferry and the older vessels in the fleet.

Making pre-election promises does not cut it with communities that have suffered years of disruption. People are missing health appointments, weddings and funerals, and they have to leave for events earlier than they should just to be sure to make appointments. That adds costs and takes money out of the pockets of islanders. Local businesses struggle, their losses mounting up, and haulage providers are disrupted—every aspect of island life is impacted.

We called for the fines that are levied on CalMac for contract breaches to be used as a resilience fund to support impacted island businesses. Instead, a one-off fund was set up in a way that caused more division, pitting community against community. Division is also caused by some routes being given more priority than others when it comes to getting the best boats or having their timetables disrupted.

That uncertainty means that services fail and businesses face increasing costs. Businesses have left the islands because they cannot work in these operating conditions. Indeed, it is only because of the resilience of businesses and their commitment to their communities that they have continued to operate under these conditions. However, they cannot do that indefinitely.

The situation impacts on the hospitality industry. Bookings are cancelled, and tour companies no longer take bus tours to many islands, because there is nothing that they can do to accommodate 40 people when a ferry has been cancelled at short notice.

That has a dire impact on the economy of our islands and it increases depopulation. The Government says that it is trying to stop depopulation but, in practice, its actions or inaction have caused it. What is really wrong at the core of the Government is its motto, "Put off until tomorrow anything that you cannot be bothered doing today." The ferry fiasco shows the danger of that approach, because to put right such omissions in the future takes longer and needs many more resources. The whole of Scotland is suffering from that approach, which, whether it is in relation to health or education, has let citizens down.

Scotland needs a Government that is not afraid to act and that does not put off until tomorrow what really needs to be done today. We need a Government that will put in place a sustainable rolling programme of ferry replacement to ensure that our island communities are never again left in that position. That is what Scotland needs.

I move amendment S6M-20957.1, to insert at end:

"; notes that disruption to ferry timetables is ongoing and continues to impact island communities; agrees that communities must receive support to deal with the economic and social impacts of disruption; calls for local representation ferry agency boards so that the needs of island communities and workers are at the heart of decision making; understands that the root cause of the ferry fiasco is the failure to invest in the ferry fleet and replace ageing vessels, and calls on the Scottish Government to have a rolling programme to replace the fleet going forward."

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call on Maggie Chapman to open on behalf of the Scottish Greens.

16:17

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): I am grateful to the Liberal Democrats for bringing this important debate to the chamber, because Scotland's island and coastal communities deserve much better. I will focus on a specific injustice that often goes unmentioned: the cost of freight. I acknowledge and appreciate the comments that the cabinet secretary made in her opening remarks.

We often talk about passenger fares, and rightly so. However, for our island and coastal

communities, the real inequality bites with the cost of transporting freight on Scotland's ferries—and that is when those ferries run at all. Put simply, the cost of ferry freight adds roughly 30 per cent to the cost of building a home on our islands; that is not a rounding error but a structural injustice that is baked into island life.

Yesterday, in the chamber, my colleague Ariane Burgess highlighted the stark disparity in pricing. Large motorhomes can cross by ferry at about the quarter of the cost of a truck that brings building materials, food or other essential goods that communities depend on. Across the network, commercial fares are far higher than those for motorhomes.

However, the disparity is inconsistent. On the Oban to Craignure and Lochaline to Fishnish routes to Mull, commercial fares are three times higher than those for motorhomes. For Tiree, they are 22 per cent higher; for Barra, 27 per cent higher. Why is the fare for a heavy goods vehicle that is heading to Mull three times the price of that for a motorhome, while to Arran—a similar distance—it is only twice as expensive? That makes no sense, and it is not fair.

That is not just a logistical or accounting problem but an equalities issue, and it is fuelling depopulation across our islands. Scotland faces a housing emergency, and island communities are in no way exempt. In many ways, they bear its full weight. When the cost of building materials is inflated simply because of freight charges, affordable housing becomes almost impossible. Councils, community housing enablers and housing associations cannot deliver at the scale that communities need.

The result is that people are living in unsuitable homes, waiting lists are growing and homelessness is rising. That disproportionately affects women, people on low incomes and young people who are trying to stay in the communities that they grew up in, as Rhoda Grant has already alluded to.

The ferry freight system is not neutral. It concentrates disadvantage. We cannot seriously address depopulation or the housing emergency in Scotland's islands while those freight charges remain unreformed.

High freight charges ripple through the cost of every staple good: food, healthcare supplies and energy. Island residents are paying more than their mainland counterparts, and people with disabilities face particular hardship when medical equipment, mobility aids or care supplies are subject to inflated freight costs. There is, in effect, a postcode lottery for basic human needs, and that should be unacceptable in 21st century Scotland.

So, what do we want? Scottish Greens have been calling on the Scottish Government to commit to a review of commercial freight charges. The review must aim to apply a fair, pro rata charge for vehicles; remove the punitive costs that currently apply to commercial traffic; consider the impact on housing delivery so that we confront the 30 per cent premium that makes island house building unnecessarily difficult; and reform pricing structures to reflect social need—just as passenger fares have been reformed—and examine the equality impacts on island communities.

Scotland's island communities are not peripheral—they are central to who we are. We will not retain vibrant, equitable communities if we allow freight charges to price out affordable housing and small businesses, and widen inequality year after year. That is just one element of ferries infrastructure and strategy that we need to change and get right.

A review of freight charges is needed, and I am grateful to the cabinet secretary for confirming today that that review will happen later this year.

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

16:21

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): Ferries are critical infrastructure for Scotland's islands—islands that are, according to Scottish Government social media posts, "central to Scotland's future". No community should be left without viable lifeline services or experience the ferries fiasco that is outlined in the motion.

Coincidentally, we heard again today at lunch time, at a meeting of the cross-party group on islands, convened by Jamie Halcro Johnston, about how critical it is that island communities have reliable ferries. It will come as no surprise to members in the chamber that my contribution today will focus on the northern isles.

The transport secretary said yesterday that the total of 1,100 responses that Transport Scotland received to its northern isles ferry service consultation was

"substantial for a project of this nature"—[*Official Report*, 3 March 2026; c 19.]

In contrast to the cabinet secretary, however, I am not surprised by how many responses were received. In 2023, I undertook a survey on the NorthLink passenger service—it received more than 1,000 responses. I sent the results to the Scottish Government and Transport Scotland and received lukewarm platitudes, yet the issues that respondents raised were the same in 2023—

Fiona Hyslop: Will the member give way on that point?

Beatrice Wishart: I do not have any time; I am going to continue.

Yet the issues that respondents raised were the same in 2023 as those that Transport Scotland reported in 2025.

I first raised the seasonal fares policy in 2021. The scrapping of peak seasonal fares for islanders on the northern isles ferry service will be a relief for island residents, who rely on the lifeline service all year round. The unfair fare structure became untenable after peak rail fares were scrapped. The Scottish Government, however, did not seriously engage on the issue until recently, and it has not escaped the notice of islanders that the announcement comes just before an election.

There are many other on-going issues with the northern isles ferry service that the Government could address if it were so minded. I have long called for a new rolling system of bookings. Cliff-edge dates, beyond which bookings are closed, make forward planning difficult, while at the same time islanders are advised by the operator to book well in advance. Passengers struggle to secure bookings for cabins on the dates on which they need to travel, and even more so if they need to take their cars.

The complexities of transporting time-sensitive freight exports from Shetland constrain local businesses and their ability to expand. High-value produce from Shetland such as seafood and livestock needs to get to market on time. Transport haulage companies in Shetland have told me of the investment and time that are required to navigate the limitations of freight capacity and meet customer demand. Work needs to be done now to procure extra tonnage to address that while the tender process is under way for the new freight flex vessels, as it will be years before those vessels are in service.

Meanwhile, despite my raising the issue repeatedly, Transport Scotland seems to be caught out each autumn by the requirements of the annual livestock sales, with little forward planning evident.

The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie): Will the member take an intervention on that point?

Beatrice Wishart: I have no time—sorry.

A prior long-standing policy of allowing sharing of cabins offered many people a cheaper, more comfortable way to travel. However, that was initially suspended due to Covid-19, and it never returned. Its removal is continually raised by my constituents, and I have repeatedly put the issue to the Scottish Government. I have never received a satisfactory answer as to why the change became permanent. No consultation took place with the community. The nebulous comment that it relates to safety does not hold up to scrutiny, given both the concerns raised about the behaviour of some passengers in the communal sleeping areas and the acknowledgement, and seemingly tacit approval, by ministers, the operator and Transport Scotland of social media pages for passengers to arrange shared cabins themselves, thereby ensuring that any operator liability for that arrangement is negated.

The removal of shared cabins is a troubling indictment of the lack of consideration for and understanding of the needs of those who rely on the service. Islanders in receipt of concessionary vouchers for two free return journeys have, in essence, had their entitlement halved as a consequence of the change of the shared cabin policy. When I raise the issue, Transport Scotland and the Scottish Government simply say that a voucher covers a pod or a chair, but that consistently fails to recognise that those with concessionary vouchers often have the greatest need to lie flat for a 14-hour voyage on the North Sea.

There is so much more that I could say on ferries, but time is not on my side. To conclude: islanders are not asking for special favours. To meet lifeline needs, they must have reliable ferry services.

16:26

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I first pay tribute to the cabinet secretary, Fiona Hyslop. Today we heard her last speech after 27 years serving her constituents in this Parliament, 17 of them in government. To be known as a woman who got things done, including the redevelopment of Ardrossan harbour and serving flourishing communities, will be one of her many positive legacies. We will miss you, Fiona. [*Applause*.]

I will discuss some of the ferry problems that are impacting my constituents, as it is important to recognise those. However, it is also important to recognise that there have been tangible improvements in our ferry services since 2007. Across the network, passenger and car numbers before the Covid pandemic were up by 25 per cent and 43 per cent respectively. That was thanks to the SNP Government's introduction of road equivalent tariff in 2014, in relation to which I campaigned to ensure the inclusion of the Clyde islands. Return fares from Ardrossan to Brodick today are £10.20 for passengers and £41 for cars.

When Labour and the Liberal Democrats left office 19 years ago, those fares were £10.30 and £75. Had those fares risen with inflation, trips to Arran would be completely unaffordable. That is the reality of Labour-Lib Dem ferry policy.

The implementation of RET was visionary. It led to cheaper fares, boosting employment and businesses in many fragile island communities. In 2007, Brodick had only one service, backed by the geriatric MV Saturn, for six weeks each summer, during which an average of 14.2 per cent of sailings were lost due to mechanical failure. How things have changed since then. We have seen £32 million invested in Brodick harbour. Arran's Lochranza service has improved markedly, with six Sunday return sailings to Claonaig and Tarbert in winter, instead of just one, on the much bigger MV Catriona. That has increased the number of visits to Lochranza, its distillery and the rest of Arran, which has boosted local employment.

However, we cannot gloss over some substantial problems, which have been exacerbated by increasing demand. Arran has seen constant vessel redeployment and timetable changes, with far too few sailings from Ardrossan. Reliance on using the facilities at Troon last year meant fewer sailings and longer journey times. It curtailed day-tripper numbers, making it more difficult for islanders to attend mainland hospital appointments and funerals and to visit family. Supply chains and commuting patterns, including for NHS and care workers travelling to Arran, were disrupted.

Yesterday and today saw all Arran to Ardrossan sailings cancelled, as the MV Caledonian Isles developed yet another technical failure barely five months after returning from previous repairs. The Glen Sannox has been out for more than four months for warranty works, and vibrational issues must be sorted out for both that vessel and the Glen Rosa. However, to put that into context, even in 2025—which was one of the worst years that I can recall for disruption—there were more sailings to and from Brodick than in any year that Labour and the Lib Dems were in office. For Cumbrae, CalMac proposes to change the way that the route has functioned for 40 years and to double vessel turnaround time. Health and safety issues were recently cited, but they were not in 2024, when the cabinet secretary vetoed an identical move. It is a move that islanders want rejected, and one that the Cumbrae ferry users group and I will discuss with the cabinet secretary next week.

With Ardrossan harbour safely back in public hands, millions of pounds will be invested in redeveloping it to deliver the regular, accessible and reliable ferry services that Arran needs, bringing prosperity to both the island and Ardrossan.

At last night's meeting of the Ardrossan harbour task force, the cabinet secretary committed to delivering compensation to businesses that will be impacted when Ardrossan harbour undergoes full redevelopment. In due course, the Scottish ministers will outline who will qualify, together with the resource allocation. It would be helpful if the Lib Dems could explain in their closing remarks which communities, such as Dunoon and Ardrossan, which are mentioned in their motion, should be compensated now, as they propose, the mechanism for that delivery, how much it will cost and from where in the budget funding for it should be found.

In addition to the MV Isle of Islay, which is shortly due to enter service, 11 vessels are currently under construction. That will increase CalMac's fleet capacity, improve reliability and strengthen network resilience. Things have not been easy for our island communities in recent years, but with record investment and CalMac operating more sailings to Arran and serving more routes than ever before, the future now looks brighter.

16:30

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I thank the Liberal Democrats, particularly Jamie Greene, for bringing the debate to Parliament. Over the past 10 years, he and I have shared many committee meetings where we looked at hulls 801 and 802, and it is those vessels that I will concentrate on today.

When I was at school, when we were learning about history and Henry VIII, we were taught a little rhyme that went, "Divorced, beheaded, died; divorced, beheaded, survived". When it comes to teaching how the Government handled hulls 801 and 802, we will be reminded that it was a case of, "Redesigned, replaced, repurposed". When it comes to ministers, or anyone in Transport Scotland or CMAL, the one "R" that is missing from that saying is that no one was removed.

I am sure that I do not need to remind members of the many ministers who have presided over the ferries fiasco. We have had Derek Mackay, Humza Yousaf, Graeme Dey, Jenny Gilruth, Kevin Stewart and Fiona Hyslop, who, in her second incarnation when it comes to ferries, seems to be doing a lot better. We have had cabinet secretaries in the form of Michael Matheson, Màiri McAllan and now Fiona Hyslop again.

In all the time that I have been considering the ferries issue, I have not seen anyone being fired over this fiasco. I do not need to remind members, because we have already been reminded, that the contract was awarded in 2015, and it was 2017 when the—as it appeared to be at that stage—floating bathtub that was to become the Glen

Sannox was launched. When those contracts were awarded, we knew that most yards across the world were working on the basis of five stage payments when it came to ferries, but—oh, no—the Scottish Government decided to work with 18 stage payments. When the yard was eventually nationalised, we paid £82 million of the £97 million, but we did not even have a ferry that was fit for purpose.

Then things got progressively worse. We end up now, as we have been told, with £460 million having been spent on the ferries, with additional loans to Ferguson Marine of £15 million and £30 million. Interestingly, no one knew that the two loans were going ahead; they went ahead sort of independently.

If we look at the total money that has been spent on the Ferguson Marine yard, it is about £1.5 million per employee. Members should let that sink in—£1.5 million per employee. Do I begrudge them that? Not a bit of it, in the sense that it is not the employees who are at fault here but the management, together with the Government's failure to manage the situation. Let me be clear: the Government might think that it can argue that we have value for money, but, when the Glen Sannox was insured the other day, it was insured for £50 million. That is the rebuild cost. We know that building it has cost four times that amount. The market says that it would cost £50 million to replace the Glen Sannox, but look at how much we have paid.

As we come to the end of the debate, my question is, who has lost their job? No one in Transport Scotland. I can point to one or two civil servants who have moved sideways and then been promoted to other jobs. I can point to a few ministers who have moved sideways and then been promoted to other jobs. One or two ministers have disappeared out of the Parliament for other reasons, but we will not go into that.

What have the islanders got for that? They have lost business and they have lost out on receiving care—they have genuinely lost out. For that, the Parliament should be ashamed. I hope that the Government will hang its head when it comes to this ferry fiasco.

Before I close, I will just say that I have appreciated the companionship of Fiona Hyslop in the Parliament. I have enjoyed working alongside her—not always with her, and sometimes against her—and she has always done so with good humour, which has made my time in the Parliament all the richer.

16:34

Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): I remind members of my voluntary register of trade union interests.

It never ceases to amaze me that something just as distinctively and as quintessentially Scottish as our islands and the ferry links to them, which are a social and economic necessity, have been treated so badly by this Scottish National Party Government. That goes from the former First Minister famously telling BBC's Glenn Campbell,

"I didn't say 'don't go ahead'",

on the ordering of vessels 801 and 802, to the current First Minister, in an email exchange on the same subject—which, by amazing grace, once was lost but now is found—confirming the absence of banana skins. In between, we witnessed the Scottish Government being sued by the Scottish Government—or, at least, the ferry company that the Scottish Government is the sole shareholder of—in a dispute over the northern isles routes.

When I hear the Conservatives wrapping themselves in their arid ideology and spouting their dry dogma obsessed with private enterprise and the free market, I say to them gently that Ferguson Marine is in public ownership because private ownership failed.

Edward Mountain: It was the Government that failed.

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): It was private ownership.

Richard Leonard: In fact, because of persistent pressure from this Parliament's Public Audit Committee, the Government has been required to bring in the accountants—[*Interruption*.]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Leonard, please resume your seat for a second. I am looking at two members who are having a conversation across the chamber from sedentary positions, which is disrespectful to the member who has the floor.

Mr Leonard, please continue.

Richard Leonard: Thank you very much, Presiding Officer. Let me return to this point: because of persistent pressure from this Parliament's Public Audit Committee, the Government has been required to bring in the accountants Grant Thornton to conduct a forensic audit to track down exactly where £124 million of public money went when the yard was in private ownership. Yesterday in Parliament, I asked the Deputy First Minister when that forensic audit will be published, but I did not get an answer. So I ask the Government the same question again today: when will this forensic audit be published?

There is another, wider point that I want to make about private ownership, which is this. When I recently sought information on ferry delays and cancellations from the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, I was told in a written answer, which was released just two days ago, that

"Western Ferries and Pentland Ferries… are both privately owned and operated companies",

so

"The Scottish Government does not hold this information."—[*Written Answers*, 2 March 2026; S6W-43859]

I might add that neither Western Ferries nor Pentland Ferries is within the current scope of freedom of information laws, which Katy Clark is giving this Parliament an opportunity to reform. There is a real lack of transparency and accountability over the delivery of public services paid for by public funds.

That leads me to the northern isles ferry routes operated by Serco. Passenger revenue is up over the past decade by 40 per cent, but public subsidy is up by nearly 300 per cent. So what we have is a monopoly, and the question is: do we want it as a private monopoly or a public monopoly?

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Will the member take an intervention?

Richard Leonard: If I have time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Briefly, Jamie Halcro Johnston.

Jamie Halcro Johnston: I always enjoy listening to Richard Leonard speak. However, I tell him as an islander—I think that I speak on behalf of many islanders in the northern isles—that we would be worried about having CalMac Ferries run the ferry service in the northern isles. We do not want a public organisation such as CalMac to run it.

Richard Leonard: That sounds a bit more like some of the old ideology that I was referring to earlier on.

Finally, let me turn to the Labour amendment, which highlights that there is a democratic deficit here. It is not just about seats on boards; I have never believed that nationalisation plus a seat on the board is socialism. What we need—and what we already have the powers in this Parliament to do—is to give much greater control to island communities and to delegate more responsibility to the workers engaged with the services, whether they are the crews who operate our ferries and ports or the workers at Ferguson's who are building our ferries.

That is something that I hope that the next Parliament will do—invest in our communities, invest in our fleet, invest in our people and drive out, once and for all, the profit motive and the shareholder dividend from the provision of these lifeline services.

16:39

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): First, I apologise to you, Presiding Officer, to Richard Leonard and to members in the chamber for my part in the sedentary discussion earlier.

I, too, want to mention Fiona Hyslop, particularly as this is her final debate in the chamber, as Kenny Gibson mentioned. She is one of the class of 1999 and has certainly had a very distinguished period of service in the Scottish Parliament. I thank her for everything that she has undertaken in her time here. When she leaves Parliament, our Parliament—our country—will be in a better place for her contribution to the parliamentary process. [*Applause*.]

I highlight the fact that my wife works part-time for CalMac Ferries, as I usually do when I speak about ferries.

Yesterday's announcement by the Cabinet Secretary for Transport and the Deputy First Minister that Ferguson Marine is to build four new vessels, in addition to the Government's intended purchase of Ardrossan harbour—which my colleague Kenny Gibson mentioned and has lobbied for consistently over many years—helps to shape today's debate.

Like my Ayrshire colleague, I have been persistent in my lobbying for Ferguson Marine, because it is not just a constituency issue; it is a personal one for me, too. I have said it before, but this is another opportunity to do so again in the chamber. When my father passed away, he was an employee of the yard, and the workforce was very supportive of our family. I have never forgotten that, and I never will. I know that my family were very grateful to those in the workforce for their support at that time.

My support for the yard goes back long before I was elected. During the Westminster election campaign of 2005, I was the SNP candidate for Inverclyde, and I started a campaign to try to save the yard. During the campaign, the then Labour-Lib Dem Scottish Executive awarded the fisheries protection vessel order to the Remontowa shipyard in Poland. The situation at the Ferguson Marine yard was so severe that it laid off 100 workers. In minutes of a Cabinet meeting on 1 June 2005, the then Lib Dem MSP Ross Finnie, who was the environment minister and the one

who signed off the contract for Remontowa to carry out the work, stated that

"the yard had declined to a state that was close to irreversible."

When politicians fail to acknowledge the challenges faced by the yard long before 2014, they do the workforce and the yard an absolute disservice.

Ferguson has lived more than nine lives, and I dare say that it will live many more, with many twists and turns still to come in its journey. If that is the case, it means that the yard will continue building ships and creating opportunities. Let there be no doubt that, but for the actions of the SNP Government in 2014 and again in 2019, when the yard was nationalised—I did not hear anyone support the nationalisation in their speeches—we would now have Newark apartments, instead of a shipyard, sitting beside Newark castle in Port Glasgow. The jobs and opportunities would have gone, and all that would be remembered of a once-proud tradition would be the Skelpies 100m away.

I never want the SNP Scottish Government to apologise for saving hundreds of highly skilled, quality jobs in Port Glasgow, and I will never apologise for lobbying to save our yard and for lobbying to get work into our yard.

What many people, including some in the chamber, forget is that, no matter the well-documented issues regarding the MV Glen Sannox and MV Glen Rosa—some of which are true, I hasten to add—the yard has launched five vessels since the Scottish Government took it into public ownership. Many aspects of what has happened at the yard have been regrettable, to say the least. I have shared many frustrations with the shop stewards John McMunagle, who has since retired, Kenny Meechan, who has taken on John's role, and Alex Logan. The strength and resolve of Alex Logan is absolutely immense. His belief in the yard and the workforce has now been rewarded, and I hope that the management will repay his and the entire workforce's loyalty and commitment by delivering a yard that we can all be proud of.

Yesterday's announcement was a categorical show of support that Port Glasgow will still be building ships. I am delighted about that, and I am proud of what the SNP Government is doing. I also know that the workforce and their families are delighted. I am looking forward to taking that message to the constituency and to the voters in the election in May.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to closing speeches.

16:44

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): I am pleased to close this debate on Scotland's vital ferry services on behalf of Scottish Labour. I thank the Liberal Democrats for bringing the motion to Parliament. As many members have highlighted, our ferry network has become increasingly unreliable and inaccessible in recent years. Delays and cancellations have become a regular occurrence, with an ageing ferry fleet and decisions about the ferry network that often fail to take the views of islanders and workers into account.

Jamie Greene and Kenneth Gibson referred to the significant disruption on the Ardrossan to Brodick route in recent years. That has been to the extent that islanders and tourists have not been able to rely on the service, which has been a massive problem for Arran and Ardrossan. Indeed, some islanders have moved away from the island. As Sue Webber said, the Glen Sannox and Glen Rosa were chosen to service that route, at an original estimated cost of £97 million yet, as of last year, the cost was estimated to stand at £380 million. As she also pointed out, unofficial estimates now put the cost nearer £500 million.

The Glen Rosa has still not come into service on the route and is not expected to do so until the end of the year at the earliest. Although the Glen Sannox came into service last year, it has been plagued with problems and is now being repaired with parts stripped from the Glen Rosa. That led to the unacceptable situation in which there were no ferries running on the route for several months last year. Services were also temporarily transferred to Troon, and anyone who has used the service there will be aware of the accessibility issues for disabled passengers and anyone with mobility issues. Of course, there are also longer journey times for all passengers. Just this week, there were no crossings on the route because of an issue with MV Caledonian Isles.

Despite all the disruption to the people of Ardrossan and Arran, there has been a failure to adequately compensate communities. It would be helpful to hear more from the cabinet secretary on some of the comments that she made today in relation to compensation.

I warmly welcome the work that has been done on public ownership of Ardrossan harbour. It has been more than a decade since a strong local campaign forced the Scottish Government to commit to the redevelopment of the harbour, but successive transport ministers had previously resisted the call to take the harbour into public ownership. It is clear to me that the cabinet secretary has undertaken a significant amount of work. She took the decision in principle that it was acceptable to bring the harbour into public

ownership and has ensured that negotiations have got to this point.

Kenneth Gibson: Is it not the case that the process has taken so long because Peel Ports was not willing to negotiate and because the Scottish Parliament does not have the power to issue a compulsory purchase order on the harbour?

Katy Clark: I agree with the member that the private owner has been extremely unreasonable—indeed, I have made that point many times. However, that has been clear for many decades, as there have been other issues with that private owner. The issue was very clear a decade ago, which is why, over that decade, North Ayrshire Labour group has been campaigning for municipal ownership or some form of public ownership. As I said, previous transport ministers did not think that the move was possible and quite often ridiculed people such as me who argued for it.

I strongly welcome and support the decision that the cabinet secretary has taken and I hope that whoever is in that role after the election will have the same drive to ensure that progress is made to redevelop Ardrossan, which I am sure will not be straightforward. I think that the cabinet secretary said that there was an Ardrossan task force meeting last night or this morning. It would be helpful to get more details on what decisions have been taken, because there is a great deal of concern that, despite the announcement, which has been made just before an election, there might not be speedy progress and it might be many years before we have a fully operational ferry service at Ardrossan again. Anything that the cabinet secretary can say to give comfort and more detail on that would be appreciated.

16:49

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I add my thanks to Fiona Hyslop for all her work, although there are a few things that I need her to sort out before she rides off into retirement.

One of the most important things that we have heard voiced in today's debate is how communities have been affected year after year by ferry disruptions. Many of us—particularly those who represent the Highlands and Islands—have too often heard at first hand about the direct consequences of the Government's failure for our communities and constituents. Perhaps it is easy to forget down here in Edinburgh how many of the communities that rely on lifeline ferry links are already disadvantaged. Such rural communities, which are generally remote and often on islands, deal with the challenges of geography, distance and low population density. Some must deal with depopulation while others struggle to attract working-age people and businesses to their communities. Businesses in the places that I call home work on lower margins and struggle more to get deliveries or, in the case of the visitor economy, to attract customers.

The blow of an unreliable ferry service and the resulting increase in isolation and economic harm are extra burdens for those communities to bear at a time when the Scottish Government talks in grand terms about making them attractive and sustainable places to live and work. Too often, SNP members have dismissed those concerns. Plenty of times, Opposition members have risen to ask a question about ferries and been met with groans from central belt MSPs, who simply do not understand or care about our island communities.

Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Jamie Halcro Johnston: If it is brief, yes.

Alasdair Allan: I take it that I am an exception, because I am a member who lives on an island and who has raised such issues frequently. Does he also accept that, as much as we might agree on the problems that the ferry services have faced, yesterday's important announcement about the replacement of the MV Lord of the Isles should be welcomed?

Jamie Halcro Johnston: I feel like Dr Allan is looking for an endorsement ahead of the election. I recognise that there is some good news—

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): He deserves one!

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Stewart, please let Mr Halcro Johnston continue.

Jamie Halcro Johnston: It would not be a debate without Kevin Stewart shouting something from a sedentary position, would it?

We welcome the good news, but it does not make up for 19 years of complete failure on our ferries. We have heard about the many procurement issues. The truth is that the future of our ferry routes is shrouded in mystery. There is no forward planning for the capital expenditure that is needed to keep the fleet afloat or for the billions of pounds that is required across Scotland, and there is not even clarity about what the Scottish Government intends to pay for.

We have ferries that are run by private enterprises—although certain members of other Opposition parties are not great fans of that—by local authorities, by the Scottish Government through CalMac, and, in the case of NorthLink, through competitive tendering. The argument about fair funding between the CalMac interisland fleet in the Western Isles and the interisland routes in the northern isles, which are run by Orkney

Islands Council and Shetland Islands Council, was ostensibly accepted by the SNP. However, does the Government equally accept the argument that capital expenditure and vessel requirements for council-run services must, as a matter of principle, be treated equitably? Will fixed links be seriously considered on a sensible basis that reflects the additional benefits of a tunnel or bridge on routes where that is realistic and wanted?

In the Highlands, the locally run Corran ferry was again suspended a fortnight ago after the MV Maid of Glencoul, the half-century-old ferry that serves as its back-up vessel, required maintenance. Highland Council will have to seek an extension to its maintenance schedule in order to keep it running, while the MV Corran, the main vessel, sits awaiting parts.

As has been highlighted, the problem is that we have ageing vessels and absolutely no resilience or flexibility in the system for when they fail. A new electric vessel for the Corran Narrows crossing is due for delivery in 2028-29, but a replacement is desperately needed now. As Scotland's fleet gets older, those issues will become the reality on more and more routes. More vessel failures means greater costs for repairs and servicing.

We have heard from my colleagues Sue Webber and Edward Mountain about the delays to the MV Glen Rosa at Ferguson Marine, which is a saga that continues to roll on but not roll off. Yesterday, when SNP ministers were back-slapping themselves about the Ferguson Marine news, the island communities that the boats will serve seemed of secondary importance to them. Those communities would be justified in their concerns that their new vessels are to be built by a company in which the Scottish Government clearly has more confidence than the Scottish public or islanders themselves do.

Confidence in Ferguson Marine or this SNP Government is a luxury that my constituents do not have. They suffer the economic and social costs of unreliable services, ancient vessels and reduced timetables now, and costs are falling on the communities that are least able to shoulder them. As my colleague Sue Webber highlighted, the fiasco was not inevitable; it was the result of this SNP Government's mismanagement. Edward Mountain laid out that failure in detail. He said that no one has lost their job and that ministers should hang their heads in shame.

I have no doubt that islanders and others in ferry-dependent communities have lost out and suffered real harm because of the SNP Government's failures. Although jobs and businesses have been lost, it is telling that not a single SNP minister has lost their job. Ferry-dependent communities, like everyone in the chamber, know that the blame does not lie with council headquarters, the workers at Ferguson Marine or the ferry operators and their hard-working crews. It lies squarely at the Government's door.

16:54

Fiona Hyslop: This morning, I met CalMac and CMAL in Inverclyde and visited the MV Isle of Islay as it prepares to enter service. That followed my series of announcements and delivery updates on ports and harbours yesterday. This is an opportunity to note more publicly my thanks to the teams across CMAL, CalMac and NorthLink Ferries for their on-going work to deliver services and their complex work behind the scenes to deliver improvements and projects, working for and alongside island communities.

If members do not vote for the Scottish Government's amendment, they will not be showing support for the specific measures that are set out in it: Ardrossan port being brought into public ownership and redeveloped for the people of Arran; Port Ellen being developed for the people of Islay; the proposal to directly award Ferguson Marine the contract for two vessels under the small vessel replacement programme; the competitive tender for the replacement for the MV Lord of the Isles; and the removal of peak fares for islanders in the northern isles travelling on services run by NorthLink Ferries, with a family of four travelling from Shetland with a car and a cabin saving up to £193 per return journey.

On fares, the SNP Government's introduction of the road equivalent tariff on the Clyde and Hebrides network has saved passengers about £25 million per year. For example, on the Stornoway-Ullapool route, before RET was introduced in 2008, single fares were £15.30 for a foot passenger and £75 for a car. Without RET, the fares would now be £25 and £128 respectively, but RET means that they are only £12.30 and £66.

I have always been clear that, following the Clyde and Hebrides ferry services 3 direct award, we would turn our attention to further potential reform of the governance of Scotland's ferry bodies. As part of the new Clyde and Hebrides ferry services contract, we have already amended elements of the governance arrangements between the Scottish ministers and CalMac. The new arrangements allow—and, indeed, require—the Scottish ministers to more closely supervise and directly intervene to improve Clyde and Hebrides ferry services. I say to Jamie Greene that a direct award to Ferguson's might require further steps in that regard. We will consider further reforms, including any that are necessary to support direct awards and maximise the opportunities for public service reform.

I have always been clear that, alongside any consideration of reform, we must ensure that the focus remains on delivering new tonnage, improving our ports and bedding in the new contractual arrangements for the Clyde and Hebrides ferry services contract.

The Scottish ministers remain committed to ensuring that island communities shape the future of Scotland's ferry services. We continue to work with public bodies to widen the reach of board appointment campaigns across island communities.

I suspect that this will be my last speech in the Parliament after 27 years of elected public service. I thank MSPs for their kind remarks. I want to state how much I believe in a strong Parliament as well as good government—both need one another for accountability and for constructive public policy development.

My experience on the Education Committee, including its early years inquiry, as an Opposition member 20 years ago shaped my drive for expanded early education and childcare provision and universal free school meals pilots when I was the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning.

Similarly, my two years on the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee as a back bencher—keeping Edward Mountain in check as his deputy convener—including during its ferries inquiry, informed my work as the Cabinet Secretary for Transport. Members can see that in what I have delivered and in what I announced yesterday.

I say to all MSPs: defend the strength of this Parliament, be a responsible Opposition and support Governments when they invest in our communities and drive and deliver improvements. In supporting the Government's amendment, they will be supporting all the investments that I set out yesterday, including investment in our island communities. Again, I thank members for their remarks earlier in the debate.

16:59

Jamie Greene: I pay tribute to that great and incredible final speech from Ms Hyslop. It has been warmly received by members across the chamber, who clearly have a huge amount of respect for and value the time that she has spent in public service. The Liberal Democrats thank the cabinet secretary for that.

I want to move away from some of the statistics that we talked about in the opening part of the debate to the human cost of what the issues have meant to people. Those issues probably come as a source of regret to all of us who have had our inboxes filled over the years for many of the reasons that I mentioned, such as the MV Glen Sannox operating out of Troon instead of Ardrossan; the hiring of the MV Alfred, no doubt at great cost to the Government—which, I am sure, would have rather spent that money elsewhere—and the issues around small businesses being out of pocket and the compensation scheme that has been required for them. I reiterate that I would like to see that compensation scheme extended where possible.

I also want coastal communities such as Ardrossan, whose small businesses are affected by the lack of footfall, to be taken into account. If the ferry is not operating and the passengers are not there, people are not there spending their money. I appreciate that money does not grow on trees. However, we should note that a huge amount of money has been spent on repairs over the past 10 years on an ageing fleet. No doubt, some of that money would have been better spent supporting the small businesses that are affected by cancellations.

Yesterday, we heard the welcome news that Ardrossan harbour will come under the control of CMAL and de facto public ownership. The cabinet secretary will know well that if her amendment is supported, it will effectively delete the premise of my motion. However, I want to put on the record that I support the Government's moves on Ardrossan and the announcements it has made of contracts being awarded to Ferguson Marine in Port Glasgow, and I hope that the Government can get through some of the issues to allow it to make that offer as soon as possible. The Government will have the support of the Liberal Democrats in doing that.

I would argue that all that could have been done years ago. Mr Humza Yousaf once promised to purchase Ardrossan harbour. To Ms Hyslop's credit, she is once again finishing a job that Mr Yousaf clearly did not start in the first place.

Another issue that has emerged as we have talked about ferries is the juggling act that so many of us have unfortunately become used to. It is the emails that we get in our inboxes week after week from CMAL's head of communications, someone who is quite well known to some people on the Government front benches. Those updates are as confusing as they are frequent. They tell us, as MSPs informing our constituents, which vessels are broken during any given day or week, which route is having to lose a secondary vessel to another route, which return of a vessel has been delayed due to further repairs by engineers, and which island will be left suffering as a result of the constant juggling act that CalMac is forced to do.

I also suspect that there is a fair amount of frustration within CMAL, because although

Transport Scotland seems to be making the decisions and pulling the strings, it is ministers who control the purse strings. The Scottish Parliament has debated that tripartite mess over the years, and the problem should have been resolved and overhauled years ago. That is what the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee concluded in a report back in 2020, which I and Mr Mountain penned, but nothing seems to have changed since then. That is an issue that the next Parliament will surely have to grapple with.

I have talked many times in the Scottish Parliament about the frequency and volume of cancellations, but it is not about the sailings that are cancelled; it is about the people who should be on them. They are who I fear for the most. My inbox and that of any MSP who represents an island community will have harrowing stories of the human impact of cancellations. People are missing urgent hospital appointments and funerals; farmers are missing opportunities to get their cattle to market; young students are missing exams and valuable education; and people are missing mental health appointments. Those are not abstract views but real examples of casework that I have had to deal with over the years. Our islanders have always understood that the weather has not always been—and will not always be—kind to them, particularly on the west coast. However, what adds to their frustration is when cancellations are surely due to technical delays because of ageing vessels. That is where that sense of palpable frustration has come through over the years. It has been tragic to read some of those stories.

That is why I believe that we need a rolling 30-year ferry replacement strategy and a port strategy. The reason I mention that in a different tone from that used in the Government's amendment is that that strategy cannot be at risk to the whims of ministers or changes of Government. In my view, it must and should be underpinned by legislation, removing it from any form of political convenience or expedience. That would move it out of the political cycles in which we are so used to debating in here.

We need a complete restructuring of the governance of Scotland's maritime strategy. CMAL, CalMac and Transport Scotland currently operate in a triangle of confusion, with lines of accountability blurred and decisions about services being made miles away from the communities that they affect the most. Ferries are transport infrastructure, like roads, bridges, airports and trains, and we should treat them as such.

I will say in closing, and in response to the words of Ms Hyslop, that I, too, believe in working across the political divide when it is appropriate and when it is necessary. In my 10 years as an MSP, that is how I have always worked: through consensus, agreement and compromise. Those have been my watchwords, and I hope that my record demonstrates that.

It is in that spirit that I would like to offer the next Scottish Government some collegiate advice. The Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 that we passed will be meaningless on paper if we cannot connect our islands in the first place. In the next session, the Parliament will have to find a way of working together to find long-term solutions to connect every town, village and island in Scotland, because no one and nowhere should be left behind by their Parliament or their Government—and that is especially the case for our islands.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): That concludes the debate on fixing Scotland's ferry fiasco.

Business Motion

17:06

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-20970, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 10 March 2026

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

10.00 pm Decision Time

Wednesday 11 March 2026

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:

Constitution, External Affairs and Culture, and Parliamentary Business;

Justice and Home Affairs

followed by Ministerial Statement: Skye House: Progress and Assurance

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Crofting and Scottish Land Court Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

8.00 pm Decision Time

Thursday 12 March 2026

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:

Education and Skills

followed by Ministerial Statement: Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Building Safety Levy (Scotland) Bill

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Greyhound Racing (Offences) (Scotland) Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.25 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 17 March 2026

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Non-surgical Procedures and Functions of Medical Reviewers (Scotland) Bill

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

8.00 pm Decision Time

Wednesday 18 March 2026

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:

Deputy First Minister Responsibilities, Economy and Gaelic;

Finance and Local Government

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) (Scotland) Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

10.00 pm Decision Time

Thursday 19 March 2026

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body Questions

2.15 pm Portfolio Questions:

Climate Action and Energy, and Transport

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Restraint and Seclusion in Schools (Scotland) Bill

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Visitor Levy (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill

followed by Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body Motion: Amendments to the Scottish Parliament Salaries Scheme

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

6.20 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 9 March 2026, in rule 13.7.3, after the word

"except" the words "to the extent to which the Presiding Officer considers that the questions are on the same or similar subject matter or" are inserted.—[*Graeme Dey*]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motion S6M-20971, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Marine Licensing (Exempted Activities) (Scottish Inshore Region) Amendment Order 2026 [draft] be approved.

17:07

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): When the draft Marine Licensing (Exempted Activities) (Scottish Inshore Region) Amendment Order 2026 came before the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee, I was ambivalent about voting for it.

The Government carried out a consultation on the draft order, and there were a number of responses. Numerous people who responded, if not most, whether they agreed or disagreed with the SSI, raised concerns about the Scottish Environment Protection Agency being inadequately funded. I want to speak to that point and raise it in the chamber.

I am seeking reassurance this evening that, if we agree to the SSI and expand the scope of SEPA's regulation workload, the agency will be adequately funded for the work. I know from what we heard at the committee that SEPA will not be regulating that many types of things at the moment, but that could increase. I want to ensure that SEPA is adequately funded to carry out that work, given that it is heavily impacted in other areas of its work at this time.

17:08

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): I first wish to set out that we committed to clarifying the consenting processes for aquaculture development between 3 and 12 nautical miles, as a key deliverable in our programme for government and as part of our vision for sustainable aquaculture. Legislative changes are being introduced to ensure that the best regulatory arrangements are implemented, which includes identifying those who are best placed to lead.

Last year, we consulted on two Scottish statutory instruments, and the one that is now before us is interdependent with another. The first of those instruments is the Environmental Authorisations (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2026, which the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee discussed and agreed to last week. It makes SEPA the responsible authority for

the regulation of fish farm environmental discharges.

The second statutory instrument, the draft Marine Licensing (Exempted Activities) (Scottish Inshore Region) Amendment Order 2026, which the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee also debated and approved last week, extends an existing exemption to marine licence requirements for fish farm environmental discharges from 0 to 3 nautical miles to 0 to 12 nautical miles.

It also extends and clarifies the application of an existing exemption for the deposit of fish and shellfish farm equipment, strengthening the prerequisite requirements for its use.

Taken together, those SSIs provide a consistent consenting framework for Scotland's inshore marine area and identify SEPA, Scotland's independent environmental regulator, as the lead regulator for fish farm discharges between 0 and 12 nautical miles.

I highlight the interdependent nature of this SSI and the former one. If this order is not approved, there will be a dual regulation and dual license requirements between 3 and 12 nautical miles, which will lead to confusion and a cumbersome consenting system. Further, minor amendments to clarify and strengthen the existing marine licence equipment deposit exemption, which are supported by the vast majority of consultation respondents, would not be introduced.

I will touch on the points that Ariane Burgess raised in relation to the resource requirements and pressures that could be put on SEPA. There has been consultation with SEPA, it has engaged with the process and it is content with the proposals because they relate to work that it deals with at the moment. SEPA has the ability to recover costs for any charges that it puts in place. As I outlined at committee, if the SSI were not agreed today, there would be the opposite situation: there would be more resource pressure on the Scottish Government marine directorate and on SEPA, because we would still have to consult SEPA on any licence applications but SEPA would not be able to recover the costs for it.

SEPA is in agreement about the SSI. We believe that it has the resources in place to deal with it. There are no applications in place at the moment and we do not believe that there will be a massive deluge, should the SSIs be agreed to. I urge members to approve the Marine Licensing (Exempted Activities) (Scottish Inshore Region) Amendment Order 2026.

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

The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motion S6M-20972, on approval of an SSI.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Conservation of Habitats and Species (Offshore Wind) (Miscellaneous Amendments) (Scotland) Regulations 2026 [draft] be approved.—[*Graeme Dey*]

17:11

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): Scotland's coastal communities are being asked yet again to carry costs that other parts of the country will never see and to absorb disruption that other industries would never accept.

The Government knows that,

"By supporting the expansion of offshore wind development in Scottish waters and increasing the demand on marine space for the implementation of compensatory measures, the policy is anticipated to have a negative impact on fisheries."

Fishermen are being asked to pay for net zero twice: first, through disruption to their jobs and displacement of their place of work; then, potentially, again through new restrictions and closures dressed up as environmental compensation.

It is insane that the Scottish National Party Government wants to damage fishing grounds in order to hit its net zero targets by building ever bigger wind farms out at sea. Even more scandalously, it wants to solve that damage by restricting fishing, all but destroying the livelihoods of the fishermen who fish those same waters. Let me repeat that: the Government wants to ruin the livelihoods of our fishing communities by building turbines, then penalise those same communities for that decision. Clearly, this rotten Government will not be happy until every fish and meat producer in the north-east is driven out of business.

The fishing community is clear: it does not want this. It is overwhelmingly opposed to the measures. There needs to be proper compensation in place—[*Interruption*.]

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, members.

Douglas Lumsden: —for our fishers, who are seeing their fishing grounds removed by offshore wind and, now, compensation measures for wind energy in completely different parts of the country that have also had their fishing grounds taken away.

We all know that, and we all know the Government's dirty little secret when it comes to energy infrastructure: the SNP does not care if you object to wind turbines in your fishing zones and it

certainly does not care if you have pylons in your back garden—[*Interruption*.]

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear Mr Lumsden.

Douglas Lumsden: —because you know what? It is going to try to build them anyway. Coastal communities are realising what communities across the Mearns, Turriff, Oldmeldrum and so many other communities across Scotland have known for years: that this rotten SNP Government does not care. It cares about an arbitrary net zero target and about selling off as much of Scotland's countryside and fishing grounds as possible to the highest bidder. It is selling Scotland down the river—literally.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. Members, let us hear one another. I call the Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Energy, Gillian Martin, to respond.

17:14

The Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Energy (Gillian Martin): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak to the draft Conservation of Habitats and Species (Offshore Wind) (Miscellaneous Amendments) (Scotland) Regulations 2026, which have a critical role to play in supporting Scotland's net zero ambitions and the Scottish economy. The regulations have been developed under powers that are set out in the Energy Act 2023, which was introduced by the previous United Kingdom Conservative Government to support delivery of offshore wind across the UK.

Under the current habitats regulations, projects that affect protected sites must secure compensatory measures that are targeted specifically at the impacted habitat or species. In practice, only a limited range of measures can be evidenced to that standard. That creates a significant constraint for offshore wind development and puts Scotland's climate and energy security ambitions at risk. The SSI that is before us is designed to introduce a more flexible approach to such compensation, but with strong safeguards. The core habitats regulations assessments remain in place, new environmental safeguards will be put in place and projects that could have adverse effects must still secure robust compensatory measures.

The SSI will enable compensatory measures that support the wider UK marine protected area network, not just the impacted feature. Additional safeguards include the establishment of a compensation hierarchy that will prioritise like-for-like measures, as well as enabling wider alternatives, when they are appropriate and offer enhanced ecological benefits. The Scottish ministers will publish guidance on how to apply the legislation and the hierarchy, and it will review both regularly to ensure that the framework remains robust—

Douglas Lumsden: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Gillian Martin: I would like to respond to Mr Lumsden's remarks.

The Scottish ministers will publish guidance on how to apply the legislation and the hierarchy, and it will review both regularly to ensure that the framework remains robust, transparent and responsive to new evidence.

We have committed to working collaboratively with our key stakeholders on the development of the guidance. By doing so, we will ensure that the guidance is fit for purpose and grounded in scientific and industry expertise.

The SSI applies to Scotland's inshore region. A corresponding instrument has been introduced by the UK Government for offshore waters. The two instruments have been designed to align closely, and the Scottish guidance will be applied across inshore and offshore areas to support a consistent, joined-up approach.

We are aware that the co-existence issues for other marine users need careful planning and consideration. However, strategic compensation offers significant opportunities for new positive investment in the marine environment. We believe that the challenges can be addressed, and I was pleased that the majority of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee recognised that. Ultimately, the SSI will enable offshore wind to grow at the scale that is needed if we are to meet Scotland's net zero targets and deliver those economic opportunities, while supporting long-term benefits for marine biodiversity.

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

The next item of business is consideration of eight Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask the Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motions S6M-20973 to S6M-20980, on approval of SSIs.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the National Bus Travel Concession Schemes (Miscellaneous Amendment) (Scotland) (No. 2) Order 2026 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Budget (Scotland) Act 2025 Amendment Regulations 2026 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Legal Aid and Advice and Assistance (Fees) (Miscellaneous Amendment) (Scotland) Regulations 2026 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Care Home Services (Visits to and by Care Home Residents) (Scotland) Regulations 2026 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Community Care (Personal Care and Nursing Care) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2026 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Early Removal of Prisoners from the United Kingdom (Amendment of Specified Time Periods) (Scotland) Order 2026 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Social Security Up-rating (Scotland) Order 2026 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Social Security (Up-rating) (Miscellaneous Amendments) (Scotland) Regulations 2026 [draft] be approved.—[*Graeme Dey*]

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

Decision Time

17:18

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): There are 11 questions to be put as a result of today's business.

I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Jenny Gilruth is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Miles Briggs will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S6M-20956.3, in the name of Jenny Gilruth, which seeks to amend motion S6M-20956, in the name of Willie Rennie, on judging the Scottish Government on its education record, 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.

17:18

Meeting suspended.

17:20

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We move to the division on amendment S6M-20956.3, in the name of Jenny Gilruth. I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Jenny Gilruth is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Miles Briggs will fall. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is closed.

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): [*Inaudible*.]

The Presiding Officer: Mr Hoy, although your audio is not clear in the chamber, I can tell you that your vote has been 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, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
Ewing, 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)
Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Ind)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Ind)
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Ind)
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (Ind)
Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)
Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Ind)
Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)
Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Reform)
Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-20956.3, in the name of Jenny Gilruth, is: For 60, Against 60, Abstentions 0.

The vote is tied. As is usual when the Parliament has not been able to reach a decision, I am obliged to exercise a casting vote. The established convention is for the Presiding Officer to vote in favour of the status quo, as I am required to act impartially. Therefore, I cast my vote against the amendment.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-20956.2, in the name of Miles Briggs, which seeks to amend motion S6M-20956, in the name of Willie Rennie, on judging the Scottish Government on its education record, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

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)
Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Ind)
Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Reform)
Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Webber, Sue (Lothian) (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)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
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)
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)
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)
Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Abstentions

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Ind)
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (Ind)
Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
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)
Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-20956.2, in the name of Miles Briggs, is: For 29, Against 66, Abstentions 25.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-20956.1, in the name of Paul O'Kane, which seeks to amend motion S6M-20956, in the name of Willie Rennie, on judging the Scottish Government on its education record, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (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, Foysol (Lothian) (Ind)
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Ind)
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (Ind)
Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)
Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Reform)
Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
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)
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) (Ind)
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)
Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-20956.1, in the name of Paul O'Kane, is: For 54, Against 67, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-20956, in the name of Willie Rennie, on judging the Scottish Government on its education record, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Ind)
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Ind)
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)
Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Ind)
Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)
Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Reform)
Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
Ewing, 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)
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)
Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-20956, in the name of Willie Rennie, on judging the Scottish Government on its education record, is: For 59, Against 61, Abstentions 0.

Motion disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-20957.3, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, which seeks to amend motion S6M-20957, in the name of Jamie Greene, on fixing Scotland's ferry fiasco, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app would not connect. I would have voted no.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Whitfield. 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, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
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)
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)
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)
Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Ind)
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Ind)
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (Ind)
Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Ind)
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)
Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Reform)
Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Abstentions

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-20957.3, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, is: For 66, Against 53, Abstentions 1.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-20957.2, in the name of Sue Webber, which seeks to amend motion S6M-20957, in the name of Jamie Greene, on fixing Scotland's ferry fiasco, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Ind)
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Ind)
Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Ind)
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)
Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Reform)
Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
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)
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)
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)
Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Abstentions

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Ind)
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-20957.2, in the name of Sue Webber, is: For 52, Against 66, Abstentions 2.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-20957.1, in the name of Rhoda Grant, which seeks to amend motion S6M-20957, in the name of Jamie Greene, on fixing Scotland's ferry fiasco, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Ind)
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Ind)
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (Ind)
Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Ind)
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)
Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Reform)
Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
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)
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)
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)
Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)

Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Abstentions

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-20957.1, in the name of Rhoda Grant, is: For 53, Against 66, Abstentions 1.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-20957, in the name of Jamie Greene, as amended, on fixing Scotland's ferry fiasco, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Ind)
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Ind)
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)
Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
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)
Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
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)
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)
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)
Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

Against

Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (Ind)
Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)
Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Reform)
Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Abstentions

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Ind)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-20957, in the name of Jamie Greene, as amended, on fixing Scotland's ferry fiasco, is: For 85, Against 33, Abstentions 1.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament recognises the challenges that island communities have faced with disruptions and the need to give them reliable and resilient services; supports the announcements made by the Scottish Government on 3 March 2026 of the conclusion of the purchase of Ardrossan Harbour, the proposal to directly award two vessels for the Small Vessel Replacement Programme to Ferguson Marine, the competitive tender for the replacement for the MV Lord of the Isles, funding for the Port Ellen redevelopment on Islay, and that peak fares for islanders on NorthLink ferry services will be removed on 24 March 2026; notes that, with 11 vessels currently being built and with the recent arrival of MV Isle of Islay, one third of the entire CalMac fleet is being replaced, and further notes that the Island Connectivity Plan Vessels and Ports Plan sets out a long-term investment programme to 2045, and that community needs assessments, with community engagement at their heart, will shape these investments in ferries and ports for decades to come.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-20971, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Marine Licensing (Exempted Activities) (Scottish Inshore Region) Amendment Order 2026 [draft] be approved.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-20972, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My electronic device would not function properly—I will deal with that later. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Grahame. 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)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
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)
Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Ind)
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) (Ind)
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)
Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
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)
Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
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)

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)
Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

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)
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (Ind)
Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Ind)
Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Reform)
Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 92, Against 28, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Conservation of Habitats and Species (Offshore Wind) (Miscellaneous Amendments) (Scotland) Regulations 2026 [draft] be approved.

The Presiding Officer: I propose to ask a single question on eight Parliamentary Bureau motions unless any member objects.

As no member objects, the question is, that motions S6M-20973 to S6M-20980, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on approval of Scottish statutory instruments, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the National Bus Travel Concession Schemes (Miscellaneous Amendment) (Scotland) (No. 2) Order 2026 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Budget (Scotland) Act 2025 Amendment Regulations 2026 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Legal Aid and Advice and Assistance (Fees) (Miscellaneous Amendment) (Scotland) Regulations 2026 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Care Home Services (Visits to and by Care Home Residents) (Scotland) Regulations 2026 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Community Care (Personal Care and Nursing Care) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2026 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Early Removal of Prisoners from the United Kingdom (Amendment of Specified Time Periods) (Scotland) Order 2026 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Social Security Up-rating (Scotland) Order 2026 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Social Security (Up-rating) (Miscellaneous Amendments) (Scotland) Regulations 2026 [draft] be approved.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Banking Charges for Charities and Not-for-profit Organisations

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-19214, in the name of Jackie Dunbar, on banking charges for charities and not-for-profit organisations. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament expresses its concern that a reported increasing number of banks have introduced banking charges for small charities, community groups, community councils and other not-for-profit organisations; recognises what it sees as the immense work done in communities across Scotland, including across Aberdeen Donside, by these groups, many of which operate on tight budgets and are being affected by such banking charges; believes that most people are still feeling the consequences of having to bail out banks following the 2008 financial crisis and that banks that benefited from a bail out now levying banking charges on community groups is distasteful and hinders the work of these groups, and notes the view that banks should allow community groups to use their funds for the purposes which they were gathered for, instead of bolstering the profits of banks.

17:39

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): I thank every member who took the time to sign my motion in order to allow the debate to go ahead.

"For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?"

Matthew, chapter 16, verse 26.

I lodged the motion for debate after the Rev Anne Robertson got in touch with me to highlight the difficulties that charities and voluntary organisations are facing, so it feels appropriate that I open with a Bible verse. I hope that she does not mind, and I welcome her, and members of her congregation, to the public gallery.

Every member of the Parliament will know of small community groups and charities in their constituencies that go above and beyond. Some of those are out-and-out charities; others will be community councils, church groups, men's sheds, lunch clubs or walking groups, to name just a few. Those groups are what makes a community.

Despite the huge differences that those groups make, they do not handle much money. They often operate on shoestring budgets that have been funded from small donations. In recent years, however, such groups have started to get letters from their banks to say that they will need to start paying for banking services for their community or treasurer accounts. Some banks are now charging monthly or annual fees, while others are now charging for specific transactions.

For the small groups that are affected, that is chipping away at the very humble sums of money that they work with, and volunteers' time is taken up in changing bank accounts to try to avoid those fees, if that is even possible—I know that some banks no longer allow new accounts to be opened. All that is compounded by the closure of local banks in the communities that we represent, which particularly disadvantages elderly and disabled people, many of whom are volunteers in those community groups.

On the point about branch closures, I will share the example of the Bank of Scotland, which is planning to close its branch in the Bridge of Don area of my Aberdeen Donside constituency in June. I will take aim at that bank shortly.

One of those letters, with details of new banking charges, was sent to a group in my constituency last year, and that is what caused the Rev Anne Robertson to email me. She is involved not only in her church. I should note that she and her Danestone congregation go out and help others. In fact, at the top of Danestone congregational church's Facebook page, it says:

"OUR MISSION IS HELPING PEOPLE IN ALL WALKS OF LIFE".

We can see that with the warm hubs and classes that the church runs; the food collections that it organises, which go to a local food bank; and the wider role that the church plays in its community. The Rev Robertson also volunteers with local charities that have nothing to do with her religion and everything to do with helping others. Those groups are among those that are being targeted by the bank charges.

To go back to the Bible verse that I opened with, why are banks seeking to profit from these groups? Such groups hold together their local communities, and they are being hurt by the charges. Are those banks—all of which, I believe, made billions of pounds in profits last year—now struggling so much that they need to charge a residents group 50p for writing a cheque, charge a Thursday club for depositing money and charge an exercise group £50 a year to keep its account open?

We have always had community groups and local charities, but their work has become much more important over the past two decades or thereabouts. Back in 2008, there was a financial crisis and it was decided that the banks needed bailed out, so the United Kingdom Government oversaw £137 billion of loans and share purchases. Shortly after that, we had austerity, although I accept that that was a political choice.

Austerity was how all of us, and the people we represent, helped to pay for that bailout.

Austerity was how all of us, and the people we represent, helped to pay for that bailout—that was so good that I said it twice, Deputy Presiding Officer. Ironically, a number of the groups that are being affected by the banking charges were set up to meet the social need that came about because of austerity. We can say that austerity was a political choice, not a choice made by the banks, but the charges on community accounts are very much down to the banks.

The bailing out of the banks was painful for this country, and many in our communities are still feeling the effects of it. That is why the charges really frustrate me. People across the country have suffered through 15 years of austerity because the UK bailed out the banks, and those same banks have decided that their billions of pounds of profits are not enough and they need to squeeze extra pennies out of the hard-working community groups and charities that do so much, charging them to write cheques, deposit money and simply keep their accounts open.

I do not think that it is asking too much for banks to step up and support those groups, in the same way that this country stepped up and supported the banks. In fact, are these charges even supporting the banks? There is a benefit to banks of having these accounts and holding the funds that are deposited in them, in relation to keeping customers happy as well as promoting strong communities for banks to do business in. We are just asking them not to charge such groups for the same banking services that I, and other members, get for free. Our banks are failing in their social responsibilities—and they are our banks, or at least they once were.

Let us take the Bank of Scotland as an example, as it has upset me with its plans to close its Bridge of Don branch, and it is one of the banks that I often hear mentioned in relation to banking charges for community groups. The Bank of Scotland was established by the Parliament of Scotland and was able to grow as a result of the strong roots that it had across our nation. When things went badly, the people of this country bailed out the bank, including through share purchase.

Banks need to step up and work for the communities that helped them to become the multibillion-pound entities that they are today. If banks are not going to step up and start showing social responsibility, the UK Labour Government, which holds powers of banking regulation, must step in and make them do so.

17:46

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): I thank Jackie Dunbar for bringing the debate to the chamber, and I acknowledge the contributions of Danestone church, in particular, and Age Scotland, which have sent in contributions to assist us.

Across Scotland, thousands of volunteers raise money for their communities to support older people, maintain local facilities, organise community events and step in where statutory services cannot always reach. They give their time freely, and they accept responsibility for managing funds carefully and transparently. In turn, the public gives generously, trusting that what is donated will be used directly for the community benefit. Every pound is raised with intent, and every pound is to serve a purpose.

Most of those groups operate on a modest turnover and thus have very straightforward banking needs. They are not complex commercial bodies; they are local lunch clubs, art clubs and exercise classes. They are organisations that plan carefully, and they often raise income locally through raffles, subscriptions and small grants. Expenditure is allocated with precision.

However, Jackie Dunbar's motion highlights the ever-increasing instances in which a portion of that money goes not to where it was intended to go but, instead, to the banks that hold it. An increasing number of banks have introduced charges on accounts that are held by charities, community councils and other non-profit organisations. Those include monthly account charges, transaction fees, costs for depositing cash and additional charges for writing cheques. For some groups, as Jackie Dunbar mentioned, those charges might amount to more than £50 a year. For others, in particular those handling regular cash donations or cheque payments, annual costs can approach £300.

Those charges have to be taken from hall hires, subsidised transport for the elderly and the cost of essential supplies, thereby steadily eroding the funds that are available for front-line activity. That places such groups in an invidious position. Do they reduce services, increase fundraising simply to cover those administrative overheads, ask volunteers to shoulder additional pressure, or all of the above? None of that enhances community resilience. Across the thousands of voluntary organisations that operate in Scotland, we are talking about millions of pounds potentially flowing from community hands into bank profits.

Let us not forget, too, that the issue is compounded, as Jackie Dunbar reminded us, by structural changes in banking provision. More than one in five people over the age of 60 in Scotland

are not digitally connected, and the proportion is higher among disabled older people.

Many community groups rely on cash donations, as that remains the most accessible way for members to contribute, and digital banking is not necessarily appropriate for volunteer treasurers, who might lack confidence in online banking services.

We have debated recently in the chamber how bank closures severely restrict practical access to in-person banking. At a time when demand for community services grows ever larger, the charges, coupled with bank closures, are truly devastating.

We cannot be blind to the second part of Jackie Dunbar's motion. We all remember the financial crisis and how the banks received billions of pounds in public support. The public that funded that rescue is the same public that is now volunteering at food banks and organising care for elderly neighbours, and being charged for the privilege. The public bailed out the banks, but the banks are now billing the public's charities and voluntary work. That cannot be right.

Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab): Will Liam Kerr take an intervention?

Liam Kerr: I do not think that I have time for an intervention, unless—

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

Liam Kerr: In that case, I would be delighted to take the intervention.

Mercedes Villalba: I thank Liam Kerr for taking the intervention. I will make it brief.

On the point about the banks having benefited from the bailout, does Liam Kerr agree that that means that they now have a moral obligation to guarantee the Scottish public a public service that benefits people, rather than one that is solely about corporate profit?

Liam Kerr: The point that is being made is that the public bailed out those banks, and I think that it is morally dubious for the banks then to charge that very same public, which kept them afloat and solvent, for running community services. I am sure that Mercedes Villalba will expand on the point later, but I think that it is an interesting point that was well made.

This debate is not about undermining the viability of sustainable banking; it is about recognising the distinct role of non-profit organisations in Scotland. Community groups are, in general, not profit-seeking enterprises; they exist to meet local need, promote inclusion and improve overall wellbeing.

There is genuine concern across Scotland that already-stretched resources are being eroded by banking charges. Money that is raised for public benefit should be used for the purposes for which it was gathered, not to bolster bank profits. Banking arrangements for small charities should reflect their scale, function and social value. Banks should support Scotland's voluntary sector, not incrementally burden those groups. I join my colleagues across the parties in the chamber in hoping that the banks think again when it comes to the charges.

17:52

Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP): I am pleased to speak in support of the motion that Jackie Dunbar has lodged on an issue of importance to communities the length and breadth of Scotland. My Cumbernauld and Kilsyth constituency is no different in that regard.

I value the immense contribution that charities, voluntary organisations, community councils and not-for-profit organisations in Cumbernauld and Kilsyth make day in, day out. In my area—I am sure that this is the case for every MSP—we are blessed with an abundance of fantastic community organisations, which are often reliant on volunteers doing tremendous work for our local community. That is a vivid demonstration and reminder of the great sense of community spirit that we have in Cumbernauld and Kilsyth.

Local groups such as Cumbernauld and Kilsyth Care, which operates a school uniform bank, a baby bank and a clothing bank, provide practical help for families in need by pooling community resources to support children, carers and parents in very real ways. I should say that my wife was involved in establishing that charity, and I saw clearly, at first hand, how much effort went into that.

Another organisation is Watch US Grow, which, from its own dedicated garden in Palacerigg country park, works with and supports adults with additional support needs, creating opportunities for them to acquire new skills, to grow in confidence and to be able to live more independent lives.

We also have Cumbernauld and Carbrain community hub, Cumbernauld community memorial peace garden and the Kilsyth environmental group, and there are many sports and arts organisations in my constituency, along with various community councils. All those organisations are built on the backs of the efforts of local people, and they all deserve support.

Those organisations, and the many thousands like them throughout Scotland, rely on every penny that they receive. They do not operate on the basis

of having large reserves—they often depend on volunteers, modest fundraising efforts and the goodwill of local people. Any diversion of funds away from their core purposes, even if it is felt to be small, diminishes their ability to support those who most need and rely on the services that they provide.

However, we are seeing changes across the banking sector, with charges being introduced for accounts that are held by small charities and community groups, which previously had no such charges. For organisations with annual incomes that are often measured in only a few thousand pounds—indeed, sometimes less—even modest monthly fees and transaction charges can represent a significant proportion of their available resources.

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Jamie Hepburn: Yes, of course.

Claire Baker: I just want to point out that, while I completely agree that we should be critical of the banks that apply these charges to local groups that do so much work, we should recognise that some banks do not do so. At this point, I should say that I am a Co-operative Party member. My understanding is that the Co-operative Party runs a banking system that does not charge fees for charities. We have also seen the expansion of banking hubs to make it easier for local groups to access banking where there is a shortage of branches, which helps them to access a variety of different types of account.

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

Jamie Hepburn: I am not sure that I would have given way if I had known that the member's intervention was going to be an advert for the Co-operative Party, but I take her point. Banking hubs have an enormous role to play, and I was very pleased to see that Kilsyth will be getting such a hub in due course.

I want to pick up on a point that has been made in the debate. Jackie Dunbar's motion refers to the circumstances in 2008 when public funds were used on what was an unprecedented scale to stabilise the banking system. Taxpayers stepped in to protect financial institutions and the wider economy. On that basis, it is entirely reasonable to question whether it is appropriate for those same institutions to seek to recoup revenue from the very community organisations that hold our social fabric together and the very communities that funded the stabilisation of the banks almost two decades ago.

We should be looking for social return from the banks. Jackie Dunbar made the reasonable point that it should not be too much to ask that banks provide that form of social return. I agree with that, but I think, more fundamentally, that they should be told to provide it. We can cast it as a moral obligation, as Mercedes Villalba and Liam Kerr did in their exchange, but there are practical steps that can and should be considered. The UK Government has responsibility for banking regulation, and I believe that it should engage directly with banks—not to ask them, but to require them to provide protected, fee-free basic accounts for registered charities and small not-for-profit groups. The UK Government should ensure that conditions linked to past or on-going public shareholdings reflect the need for a social obligation on the part of banks.

In addition, the Financial Conduct Authority could review whether the cumulative impact of charges and branch closures—as has been mentioned—is creating barriers to fair access to essential banking services for the third sector, and it could consider producing guidance that recognises the distinct nature of micro-charities and volunteer-run groups. Those are practical steps that I believe should be taken. Community organisations should be enabled, not hindered, in their work, and they should be able to dedicate the funds that they raise to community benefit, not to the bolstering of bank profits.

17:58

Paul O'Kane (West Scotland) (Lab): I thank Jackie Dunbar for lodging the motion and for the debate that has ensued. I enjoyed much of her speech—if she does not obtain ministry in the Parliament, there is perhaps a calling to a different type of ministry in her future, given her opening Biblical verse.

We are debating a very important issue, as has been articulated by colleagues across the chamber. I declare an interest as a trustee of a charity in Neilston—the Neilston War Memorial Association—that uses banking services, for which it is now being charged by the Bank of Scotland. I recognise that that is a significant challenge for an organisation that was set up principally to be the custodian of the local war memorial and to provide remembrance events, and therefore does not carry a huge amount of money in its bank account, as it is now losing money through the bank charges that are being applied.

That is set against a backdrop in which other charities in the community are facing the same problem, and in which the Bank of Scotland has withdrawn its branch in Barrhead—the last bank in the town. That issue has been raised in the chamber on numerous occasions, in concert with colleagues across the country, who are seeing the

diminishing of banking services. It is therefore becoming more difficult to operate as a charity.

Having slightly teased Jackie Dunbar about her speech, I will say that later in the gospel of Matthew, Jesus says:

"render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

People read that in different ways, but what it says to me is that we should let people get on with doing what is God's work, or what is the common good—that is, the work that charities do—and leave the other bits to the state. That relates to much of what we have covered this evening. At the end of the day, charities do not want to be caught up in having to do overburdensome administration or to be charged simply for doing what is right and good. Charities are playing by the rules. They are doing everything right. They adhere to the rules and regulations of the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator. For all the reasons that we have heard outlined by colleagues, what they do not need is banks trying to make a profit off the back of their good endeavours.

If we expand on that biblical verse about rendering things to the right place, we can say—rightly, as we have heard articulated in the debate—that taxpayers have rendered to Caesar the money that was paid in to support the banks during the financial crash. Colleagues on this side of the chamber who know Gordon Brown and people like him know that, when he envisaged the plan to rescue the economy back in 2008, the end point was probably not seen as a position in which banks were able to make profits off the backs of charities, many of which he now supports and is involved in across Fife and elsewhere in the country.

As we have heard, there are clearly banks that are doing the wrong thing, and, as my colleague Claire Baker pointed out, there are banks that are doing the right thing. The Co-operative Bank is based on the values of the co-operative movement, which goes back hundreds of years and has a very proud heritage and history involving organisations such as the Fenwick Weavers Society that were set up by people coming together to create mutual concerns and to own their endeavours together. That sort of banking needs to be prioritised and supported.

Although we might call for legislation and intervention in order to regulate the banks—a call that I think has merit—we also need to look at how we support better ways of doing banking, whether that involves the credit union movement, mutuals or whatever. Those approaches are important, and expanding those opportunities to local charities and community groups could be a game changer for them in terms of where they can deposit cash and have their assets protected, so that they can continue to do the work that is greatly valued in all our communities across Scotland.

There is a degree of consensus across Parliament this evening, which is always good to hear. I am sure that we will return to this issue in order to try to get the right solution.

18:02

The Minister for Equalities (Kaukab Stewart): I thank all members who have contributed to this afternoon's debate, especially Jackie Dunbar, who very passionately articulated the essence of her motion.

Access to banking and financial services is fundamental to a strong, resilient economy and to the wellbeing of our communities. That principle holds true not only for businesses but for the thousands of charities that are working tirelessly across Scotland. Every one of us in the chamber recognises the essential role that the third sector plays. Charities and community organisations support our people, strengthen our neighbourhoods and often step in where the need is greatest. It is therefore vital that our financial systems operate in ways that enable, not hinder, their work.

Although financial services regulation remains reserved to the UK Government, we will continue to press banks and financial providers to listen carefully to their customers and to address the practical barriers that many charities face. Those organisations deserve services that reflect the realities of their work.

I will take a minute to acknowledge the contributions of members.

Liam Kerr clearly gave examples of the good work that charities do and the distinct role that the voluntary sector plays, but he also spoke about the impact of bank charges on what can be very small funds. Thankfully, many charities' funds fall below the thresholds for charging, but that point was well made.

Other members highlighted the amazing work that volunteers do. I point out to Jamie Hepburn that 66 per cent of charities have no paid staff at all and rely solely on volunteers, which shows how essential they are.

The Scottish Government always stands ready to work constructively with the UK Government, regulators and sector stakeholders to ensure that charities across Scotland have long-term, sustainable access to the banking services that they rely on, and has previously engaged with the Financial Conduct Authority regarding the matters that have been raised by Ms Dunbar. In February

this year, the FCA responded to Scottish Government officials and confirmed that it recognised the importance of third sector organisations being able to access appropriate financial services, but stated that, at present, it has not been provided with evidence indicating that charities or community groups are routinely being charged unfairly. However, it said that it is aware of broader banking challenges facing third sector organisations, and that, where it sees evidence that firms are consistently failing to meet standards, it will consider the need for regulatory intervention. I therefore encourage charitable or community organisations that feel that they have been treated unfairly to contact the FCA, so that the issues facing the sector can be recognised.

I understand that the Charity Finance Group and the three UK charity regulators are already working with the banking sector to ensure that the challenges that face the charity sector are fully understood. I express my thanks to them for the work that is already under way. The Scottish Government supports that engagement and will work closely with them and the FCA as more evidence emerges.

Charities are at the forefront of supporting some of the most vulnerable people in our society, and they respond daily to economic pressures and social challenges. To do that effectively, they must have reliable and timely access to their funds. Robust financial governance is a cornerstone of charity regulation, and appropriate financial controls are central to that responsibility. Charity trustees carry a clear legal duty to protect their charity's assets, and they must have systems in place that allow them to fulfil that duty confidently.

For all those reasons, we will continue to do what we can to promote banking services that work properly for the third sector. Those organisations, which provide vital services, deserve a financial system that recognises and supports their contributions.

I recognise the challenges that are being faced. That is why the Scottish Government is committed to delivering fairer funding for the third sector. Our initial fairer funding pilot provided £130 million in multiyear funding. We are building on that with the announcement in the budget that disabled people's organisations will receive a separate three-year funding agreement. Just last month, we announced additional multiyear investment in the delivering equally safe funding to national providers of advice services. All of that together means that almost half the total value of the third sector grants in the social justice portfolio in 2025-26 is now covered by multiyear funding agreements.

We want to go further and build on the progress that we have made, which is why the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice announced that we will work with the third sector to deliver Scotland's first-ever third sector partnership to further strengthen the role and place of the sector in Scotland. That new partnership will create a unique and valuable opportunity for Government to work more effectively with the sector and build on that progress.

To conclude, the third sector plays an indispensable role in our national life. It is essential that financial services work for it in practice, not just in principle.

Meeting closed at 18:09.

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