Official Report
Aithisg Oifigeil

DRAFT

Meeting of the Parliament

Coinneamh na Pàrlamaid

Tuesday 2 June 2026

Session 7

The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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Scottish Parliament

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): The first item of business this afternoon is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader today is Leo Cushley, Archbishop of St Andrews and Edinburgh.

The Most Rev Leo Cushley (Archbishop of St Andrews and Edinburgh): Thank you, Presiding Officer. First of all, many congratulations to you and to the members of the new Parliament. I am confident that all Scots wish you well, and we hope that your work will build up the fabric of our society and promote the common good among us all.

A long time ago, in a very different incarnation, I spent a lot of time going to meetings that required a lot of reading, a lot of speech making in public and a lot of taking important decisions and positions. Nearly 200 people in the room had the right to speak, which was fine, except that it meant that some speeches were being delivered after midnight.

Everyone had the right to speak, but not everyone was really being heard, not least because once people had made their own speeches, they started to drift home, especially as the evening wore on. That was not a failure of organisation or a failure of the right to speak, but when others went on and on, the right to speak meant that some speakers did not get the right to be heard.

I should add quickly that I am describing not any institution in the United Kingdom, but rather part of my experience while burning the midnight oil as a diplomat at the United Nations in New York. There was important work to be done and we all took it seriously, but the right to speak occasionally overcame the right to be heard. That was a pity and—dare I say it—a shame, too. When we were too busy talking about ourselves and our own bright ideas, we occasionally missed the other side of communication, and that is the listening bit.

There is an art to speaking well, especially in public, and all of you know that. We are here to try to convince others that we have something worth considering—something that we think could promote the common good. However, the corollary of that is that we also need to develop the art of listening. A friend of mine liked to say, “Best idea wins.” Of course, he said that because he was sure that he had the best ideas. Okay, the best idea wins, but we will not know what the best idea is if we are not listening as well as speaking.

In my own church, we have recently been trying to remedy that listening deficit. The remedy has various names, one of which is “synodality”. That need not detain you here, but it has become a reminder not to talk all the time and instead to find time to listen, and to do so consciously, actively, willingly and humbly. Good listening will go a long way towards finding what the best idea actually might be. It might be found in obvious places, but it might instead be found in an unexpected voice. Let the best idea win, and let us be listening out for it.

General Question Time

14:04

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): The next item of business is general question time. Before I take the first question, I wish to clarify that, as in the previous session, members who have a general question also have a supplementary question. Other members can also press their request-to-speak button should they wish to ask a supplementary to a particular general question. The fact that a member has been selected to ask a general question does not preclude that member from asking a supplementary to another general question or, indeed, putting a question to the First Minister later this afternoon.

Sheriffhall Roundabout

1. **Colin Beattie (Midlothian North) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the progress of the Sheriffhall roundabout project. (S7O-00002)

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Tourism and Transport (Stephen Flynn): Congratulations on your new role, Presiding Officer—it certainly suits you.

The Scottish Government is committed to the promotion of improvements at the Sheriffhall roundabout as part of a £300 million commitment to the Edinburgh and south-east Scotland city region deal. The Scottish spending review includes funding to continue to make progress in delivering those improvements, and the project is also included in the infrastructure delivery pipeline. The scheme remains subject to a statutory authorisation process, including the consideration of outstanding objections and the report of a public local inquiry.

I know that Colin Beattie MSP eagerly awaits the conclusion of that process, and I want to assure him that work on it is continuing at pace. I am awaiting urgent advice from officials on the project, and I will provide a further update to Mr Beattie and others with an interest in the matter as soon as possible. If the scheme is ultimately authorised, the construction of the proposed scheme can commence thereafter, when a programme and timetable for the scheme's progress can also be set.

Colin Beattie: It is now almost nine years since funding for the project was first announced, and my constituents are growing very concerned about the delay. Will the cabinet secretary outline what reassurance can be given to the people of Midlothian North on when the scheme will be delivered?

Stephen Flynn: Absolutely. I am new to the chamber, but I am certainly not new to the challenges of traffic at the Sheriffhall roundabout, the delays that have been experienced in relation to the project or the advocacy of Mr Beattie, which is reflected in the fact that he has been elected to the chamber on four separate occasions. I share the frustration of individuals who have been impacted by the delays in the project, and who are keen to see progress made. However, I remind colleagues that 2,770 objections were made, and some 1,200 pieces of information are there to be analysed. Notwithstanding the depth of that detail, I can give an assurance that we are very keen to make progress. I will try to come back to the chamber as soon as possible with further details for Mr Beattie and others who have an interest in the matter.

Miles Briggs (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Con): What the cabinet secretary has had to say is incredibly frustrating. When I raised the matter before we went into the election, the former transport secretary said that she was angry and frustrated that we did not have an opportunity for a decision to be taken. For 10 years, I have been asking different transport secretaries to get on and take a decision. What timetable can we expect for the transport secretary to come back to Parliament? Before summer recess would be ideal.

Stephen Flynn: I reiterate the points that I have already made. I understand Mr Briggs's frustration, but I re-emphasise to him that there were 2,770 objections and that more than 1,200 pieces of evidence were given to the public local inquiry. I am sure that he would agree with me that it is important that due process is followed, but I share his frustration and that of those who want progress to be made. I commit to him that we will come back to the chamber as soon as possible to give further detail.

The Presiding Officer: I call Katherine Sangster.

Katherine Sangster (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what actions are being taken to address wildfire risks and to ensure appropriate—

The Presiding Officer: Excuse me. I called you for a supplementary to the question that was asked by Colin Beattie.

Katherine Sangster: Sorry.

The Presiding Officer: Please resume your seat.

The next question is from Emma Roddick.

Public Sector Reform (Inverness and Nairn)

2. **Emma Roddick (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it will undertake of any impact of its planned public sector reform on employment in Inverness and Nairn. (S7O-00003)

The Cabinet Secretary for Public Service Reform (Ivan McKee): The Scottish Government will consider the impacts of public service reform across communities, including on employment, as we implement the public service reform strategy. The strategy recognises that improving delivery will involve workforce changes. Impact assessments, including an equality impact assessment, will be undertaken as proposals are developed. We will work closely with partners, including staff and trade unions, to support redeployment, reskilling and transition where necessary, while empowering staff, who know their roles and service users best, to improve and better integrate services. We will continue to engage with partners, including in Inverness and Nairn, as that work progresses.

Emma Roddick: The cabinet secretary will appreciate that there is great concern among employees of Government and arm's-length organisations in the Highlands, who often do incredibly valuable work to ensure that national policies and decisions work for us. Many comments were made during and after the election campaign by various parties regarding the size of the current workforce and budgets. Will any public service reform keep it in mind that Highlands and Islands Enterprise, the Scottish Land Commission and many other organisations that are headquartered in the Highlands add real value to our policy landscape and protect local jobs in Inverness and Nairn?

Ivan McKee: We are committed to providing effective and efficient public services across the country. That includes the Scottish Government's objective to support economic activity and employment across all regions, including rural and island areas. As our public service landscape changes, we will work with all parties, including public bodies, service users and trade unions, to ensure a smooth transition. That will include organisations in the Highlands and Islands and across the rest of the country.

Subsidence (Coalsnaughton)

3. **Helen McDade (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform):** To ask the Scottish Government what role it has in response to the incident of subsidence in Coalsnaughton Road, Tillicoultry, in which 30 houses have been evacuated—the figure is now 97 houses. (S7O-00004)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Neil Gray): Presiding Officer, I welcome you and congratulate you on your new role.

Residents' safety is my first priority. On Friday, I was pleased to meet the leader of Clackmannanshire Council and Keith Brown, the local constituency MSP, to ensure that immediate support is in place for those who are affected. Following that meeting, the Scottish Government continues to work directly with the council and the local resilience partnership to co-ordinate response efforts. Ministers have also activated the Bellwin scheme and stand ready to assist.

The Mining Remediation Authority, whose decision making is crucial in a case such as this, is leading site investigations, and we will work closely with it to ensure that decisions are made as quickly as possible, so that clear next steps can be identified for residents who will be understandably concerned and upset by what has happened to their homes.

Helen McDade: As has been acknowledged, the number of houses had reached 97 at the latest count. I also met some of the residents, and it is good to know that that work is happening. Due to the incident's seriousness and the likelihood of lengthy disruption for residents, will the Government commit to establishing an emergency hardship fund?

Neil Gray: I congratulate Helen McDade on her election and thank her for her questions. The Government has already taken a number of steps to support residents and Clackmannanshire Council in its immediate response. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the immense effort that has been put in by Clackmannanshire Council staff, who have gone above and beyond to support local residents.

We have triggered the Bellwin scheme. The Government is looking to provide additional human resources support to Clackmannanshire Council. Neighbouring authorities are also assisting through local resilience partnerships. We are looking at providing potential support for geological surveying, and we are working with utility companies to support residents and ensure that they do not continue to be charged.

I am pursuing an immediate meeting with the MRA to ensure that an immediate decision is made on whether the mine workings will have an impact, as well as looking to engage with the United Kingdom Government, given its MRA responsibilities. I am happy to keep in touch with Helen McDade and Keith Brown, the constituency MSP.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): This is not the first time that Clackmannanshire residents have been evacuated at short notice. The reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete evacuations were handled badly by the council; houses were boarded up and personal possessions were left to rot for months on end. I hope that lessons were learned from that incident about the need to address the evacuees' trauma while, at the same time, protecting their personal safety. What reassurances has the cabinet secretary had that the evacuation will be handled more sensitively than the previous one?

Neil Gray: I welcome Mr Ruskell back to his place and congratulate him on his re-election.

I hear his point. That is part of what was discussed with the leader of Clackmannanshire Council and Keith Brown on Friday. I am confident that the local authority is doing all that it can to provide such support. The greatest uncertainty that residents and Clackmannanshire Council face is the Mining Remediation Authority's future decision making, which will be critical for insurers, residents, the council and this Government.

Responsibility for the MRA rests with the UK Government, which is why I am pursuing an urgent meeting with the MRA and asking the UK Government to ensure that the fastest possible decision making is undertaken in this case, so that residents are able to get a clearer picture of the situation.

Market Economy

4. **Jamie Langan (South Scotland) (Reform):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it supports a market economy and the role of the price mechanism within it. (S7O-00005)

The Minister for Business and Fair Work (Tom Arthur): The Scottish Government supports a fair economy and recognises that, already, not all goods and services in the economy operate on an unregulated free market price basis. Prices are often regulated to affect wider externalities, such as societal or environmental harms, or to ensure a fair market price for industries or sectors with natural monopolies.

Scotland faces a cost of living crisis that is disproportionately affecting vulnerable households and placing pressures on public services. Rising energy, food and housing costs have made it harder for people to maintain a reasonable standard of living. As a result, the Scottish Government is clear that it will take action, when necessary, to protect people and support those who are most impacted by the cost of living.

Jamie Langan: I thank the cabinet secretary for his response. However, in the light of the Government's conversion of price controls, can he confirm whether my constituents in South Scotland who work day in, day out to put food on our plates will be allowed to keep the full value of their produce, or will they have to settle for an arbitrary sum decided by the Government?

The Presiding Officer: Alas, you are only a minister, Tom.

Tom Arthur: Jamie Langan raises a very important issue, which is the wellbeing, welfare and sustainability of those who provide the food that we put on our tables. I reassure him and other members of the Parliament that, in recognition of the significant interest that has been reflected in the number of written questions that I have received, I will engage thoroughly and comprehensively with all relevant stakeholders. My door is open, as it always is on such matters, to all members of the Parliament for deep, considered and thoughtful discussion on the policy.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): Before the election, the First Minister had a fantastic visit to the farm that is operated by Cammy Wilson of "The Sheep Game", who explained that eggs are an important strand of his farming business. Similar to the member who asked the previous question, I am looking for assurance that, as we tackle the cost of living and get affordable food in supermarkets, farmers such as Cammy will still receive a fair price for the produce that they produce and will not be squeezed by the supermarkets.

Tom Arthur: I thank Mr Brown for reiterating this important issue. I want to work constructively with all relevant stakeholders in recognising the nature of the policy and the importance of achieving effective implementation that realises the policy aim, which is to ensure that the weekly shop is affordable. I think that everyone in the chamber agrees on that aim. To that end, I would welcome the constructive engagement of members to ensure that, collectively, we achieve that policy outcome.

Paul McLennan (East Lothian Coast and Lammermuirs) (SNP): Does the minister share my view that the Government has a responsibility to ease the burden on households during a cost of living crisis, including through targeted interventions when a broken Brexit economy places essential goods out of the reach of Scottish households that are struggling under decades of Westminster austerity?

Tom Arthur: Paul McLennan raises a number of important points. I recognise that immediate and acute pressures on the cost of living are emanating from the war in Ukraine and will ensue from the war in Iran, but those pressures are coming after a

concatenation of crises, including Brexit, austerity, the financial crash back in 2008 and the legacy of the pandemic. Although the Parliament does not have the full range of powers to address and mitigate all the impacts that are affecting people and their standard of living, it is incumbent on us to intervene, when we can, in an effective and proportionate way that supports those whom we have been elected to serve.

Island Communities

5. **Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to improve the resilience of island communities. (S7O-00006)

The Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Rural Affairs (Gillian Martin): Our new national islands plan sets out a programme of targeted actions that are collectively aimed at advancing social, economic and cultural prosperity on our islands and strengthening their long-term resilience. Delivery of the plan is supported by a dedicated £6.25 million budget in 2026-27, in addition to continued island investments across all Government portfolios.

That funding will continue to support projects such as the development of Kirkwall nursery, which received £1.6 million of funding in 2022-23. Our resolve to help island communities to thrive will be further supported by our commitment to establish a £10 million islands resilience fund within the Government's first 100 days.

Liam McArthur: I thank the cabinet secretary for that response, and I welcome her to her post. I look forward to working with her. In the past year alone, communities across Orkney and Shetland have suffered multiple subsea cable failures, including a month-long broadband outage affecting Orkney's northern isles in the spring. On each occasion, households, businesses and essential services have been hit hard. Does the cabinet secretary accept that those repeated failures demonstrate that network resilience remains inadequate in the northern isles? What specific steps will the Government take to strengthen critical digital infrastructure, and will the cabinet secretary agree to meet me to discuss options as to how those measures might be taken forward?

Gillian Martin: I want to meet Mr McArthur to discuss not just this specific issue—in the previous session he fiercely represented his constituents on the particular issue of cable outages—but every single area of my portfolio that affects Orkney.

We have project gigabit procurement to further extend gigabit-capable broadband coverage to more than 13,000 eligible premises across Orkney and Shetland. I note that Mr McArthur had been trying to get the provider to do more, and I will certainly do what I can to augment his attempts to get better and quicker resolutions to some of the issues that he has found, if he wishes me to do so.

East Kilbride Shopping Centre

6. **Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government, in light of the reported extension of the administration process of East Kilbride shopping centre, whether it will provide an update on its discussions with local stakeholders. (S7O-00007)

The Minister for Business and Fair Work (Tom Arthur): East Kilbride shopping centre is an important economic asset that serves its local community through its wide range of shops, restaurants, offices, hotels and leisure facilities. My officials have spoken with the administrators, Interpath Advisory, which is working closely with key stakeholders, including South Lanarkshire Council, to realise the site's master plan and to secure the best outcome for East Kilbride. I will remain updated on the situation as it progresses.

Collette Stevenson: The impacts of the news on the East Kilbride master plan and indeed on the local economy of the town are worrying for many of my constituents. Will the minister outline how the Scottish Government is working to support the retail economy, particularly in towns such as East Kilbride where there is a shopping centre rather than a high street, and also to support culture and an affordable housing supply, given the links with those areas in development plans?

Tom Arthur: I recognise Collette Stevenson's long-standing advocacy on behalf of her constituents regarding this issue. I assure her that the Scottish Government is committed to supporting the retail industry, and it will continue to engage directly with the sector to monitor the evolving impacts of the ongoing cost crisis. We will continue to work with the strategic housing leads in South Lanarkshire Council to deliver on their priorities.

We recognise that culture is important to Scotland's prosperity and national identity, and we are offering a package of support to expand the reach and impact of cultural activities in communities. That includes funding the Camglen Buddies Leisure and Social Club in South Lanarkshire, which gives adults with additional support needs the opportunity to produce their own films.

Capital Projects (Delays)

7. **Max Bannerman (Highlands and Islands) (Reform):** To ask the Scottish Government whether its commitment to reform public services includes removing reported blockages and inefficiencies in delayed capital projects, such as

the A9 and A96 dualling, to expedite their completion. (S7O-00008)

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Tourism and Transport (Stephen Flynn): The Scottish Government is committed to public service reform to ensure the delivery of excellent public services in a fiscally sustainable manner. The infrastructure delivery pipeline sets out investment plans for the next four years, and our work on public service reform will inform future updates.

We have met all key targets since the A9 2023 delivery plan was published. Changes at this stage would increase disruption and reduce cost certainty, and they would introduce a greater risk of delay than under the published delivery plan.

We also remain committed to dualling the A96, and we are already starting the dualling process from Inverness to Nairn.

Max Bannerman: I thank the cabinet secretary for his answer and I welcome him to his new post. I take the opportunity to pay tribute to my constituent, the former MSP Fergus Ewing, for his steadfast work in holding the Government to account on this issue.

The A96 dualling from Inverness to Aberdeen was supposed to be completed by 2030. In February this year, the then transport secretary admitted that construction of the Nairn bypass would begin in 2030. With new housing developments and growing traffic, local residents frequently report that it takes as long as an hour to drive the 2 miles on the A96 through Nairn. Is it fair that local people should have to endure a worsening problem that should have been fixed by now?

Stephen Flynn: I am familiar with the A96, given my local geography. I have to admire the brass neck of Max Bannerman in coming to the chamber to lambast the Government on the delivery of the A9 and the A96 when the Reform UK manifesto has not one mention—not a single mention—of either of those projects. Perhaps that is why he came third in his constituency contest and won less than half the votes of the Scottish National Party.

We are committed to both those projects. Max Bannerman can sit this one out; we will get on and deliver.

Laura Mitchell (Moray) (SNP): It is wholly disingenuous to talk about delays to capital projects without talking about the financial pressures that have been placed on the Scottish Government by fiscal and economic mismanagement at Westminster. On behalf of the new SNP Government, what is the cabinet secretary's message for my Moray constituents, who are eagerly awaiting the dualling of the A9 and the A96? What benefits will those projects deliver for my region?

Stephen Flynn: My message is simple and unequivocal—we will deliver on our manifesto commitments in relation to the A9 and we will dual the A96. Work has already begun and we will conclude it.

David Green (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (LD): I welcome the cabinet secretary to his new role and wish him well. He will be aware that my Liberal Democrat colleague Andrew Baxter has called for a dedicated A9 scrutiny committee in this session of Parliament. Although the matter is for the Parliament, will the cabinet secretary welcome that? What further steps will he take to ensure that the project has the level of transparency that communities in the Highlands deserve?

Stephen Flynn: I am more than happy to meet the member to discuss both those matters. On scrutiny, there is evidence of scrutiny in action right now on the Government's commitment to delivering the A9. We will continue to be scrutinised in the chamber to ensure that David Green's constituents and people across the Highlands know that they have a Government that will deliver on its commitments to them.

Wildfire Risks

8. **Katherine Sangster (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what actions are being taken to address wildfire risks and to ensure appropriate resource is given to the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, in light of last week's fire on Arthur's Seat in Edinburgh. (S7O-00009)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Neil Gray): I congratulate Katherine Sangster on her election. Her eagerness to get under way has been evident in this general question time.

I put on record my thanks to the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service for its work to deal with the Arthur's Seat grass fire so timeously. The Scottish Government's strategic action plan on wildfires sets out a co-ordinated approach to preventing, preparing for and responding to wildfires. It includes actions to raise public awareness of wildfire risk, promote responsible outdoor behaviour and enhance danger assessments. We have seen the widespread damage that wildfires can cause so, to prevent fires from starting, it is crucial that everyone plays their part in acting responsibly, heeding wildfire warnings and following advice when in the countryside.

Katherine Sangster: The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service will be meeting this month to decide on station closures that will have impacts

across the Edinburgh and Lothians East region. The proposed changes are expected to push average local response times from the current four to six minutes to six to eight minutes. Given the present risk of wildfires, can the public be sure that they are being made safe by such decisions?

Neil Gray: Yes. The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service received an additional £23.8 million in the latest budget, which takes total funding to £456 million. That underlines the Government's commitment to keeping Scotland safe.

The operational decisions on the deployment of those resources are for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service to take. We will work with it to ensure that decisions on infrastructure across Scotland are taken in a proportionate way that ensures that the continued safety of residents is paramount.

We also need to be cognisant of the fact that, with increased wildfires and reduced levels of house fires, the service is responding to the changing dynamic in the right locations and with the necessary resources. That is exactly what I expect the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service to do.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes general question time. I apologise to all the members who were unable to ask questions. I have to say that ministers were quite languid in some of their answers in the first half of the question session, so not everyone could be taken.

First Minister's Question Time

Back-bench Members

14:30

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): We will try to speed up in this question session. That is important because I have been told that we have more questions for the First Minister than ever before in the history of this Parliament, which means that not everyone's question will be taken. Members who wish to ask a question should press their request-to-speak buttons.

STV News (North-East Scotland)

Jack Middleton (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): Yesterday, the television regulator Ofcom announced that it had approved controversial plans to end STV's dedicated news coverage for the north of Scotland. Those plans are deeply unpopular and mean that my constituents will lose a news institution that they have trusted for decades.

Broadcasting matters are reserved to Westminster, but the Labour media minister, Ian Murray, has assured me that he will not intervene on the issue. What will the First Minister do to hold Ofcom to account in relation to both its conduct throughout the process and its obligation to protect local news? What steps will his Government take to help retain the jobs and wider economic activity linked to broadcasting in the north-east of Scotland?

The First Minister (John Swinney): I entirely agree with the concerns expressed by Mr Middleton on behalf of his constituents. Before the election, I expressed to Parliament the deep unease that I felt about the diminution of STV North news production capability and broadcast, because of the importance of broadcasting reflecting interests across the whole of Scotland.

I have written to Ofcom and STV to once again urge them to ensure that they are meeting their obligations to audiences and to dedicated journalists and to reiterate my whole-hearted opposition to the decision that Ofcom has made, which I think is ignorant of the needs and circumstances of the north and north-east of Scotland.

I know that Mr Middleton will meet tomorrow with the Cabinet Secretary for Education, Culture and Gaelic and the Minister for Business and Fair Work to establish further actions that can be taken and I assure him that the Government will do all that we can to support him in the efforts that he is taking forward on behalf of his constituents and those of

many other members in the north and north-east of Scotland.

Apprenticeships

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): The First Minister will be aware of Alan Milburn's interim report on young people who are not in education, employment or training. Although the report shows that Scotland is performing marginally better than the United Kingdom as a whole, the trend is in the same direction. Crucially, the proportion of young Scots who are not in education, employment or training and are economically inactive has increased from 42 per cent in 2016 to 60 per cent in 2026, with more and more young Scots not looking for work at all. That highlights a growing structural gap between young people's skills and talents and their routes to employment.

Despite that, the number of the Scottish Government's apprenticeship starts has declined every year since 2021 and is down on the number 10 years ago. Does the First Minister agree with the broad analysis in Alan Milburn's report and what will he do to arrest and reverse the downward trend in modern apprenticeship starts?

The First Minister (John Swinney): Although Alan Milburn's report focused on services in England, I recognise that there are lessons to be drawn from its conclusions. Ensuring the maximum participation of young people in the labour market is, obviously, a priority for the Scottish Government.

One important measure that the Government uses to assess our performance in that respect is positive destinations after leaving school. In 2024-25, 95.7 per cent of school leavers were in a positive destination three months after leaving school. That is an encouraging indicator of the pathways in place for young people. However, we must focus on supporting schools and young people to take forward positive pathways. The Government has a commitment to delivering 150,000 modern apprenticeships during this session of Parliament and we will pursue that approach.

I note Mr Johnson's long-standing interest in this issue and if there are areas of common ground where we can work with him, we will be very happy to do so. I want to see the maximum level of economic participation across a range of sectors in which we face challenges in the availability of employees to contribute to our economy, and young people have a vital contribution to make to that.

Private Tenants (Protections)

Q Manivannan (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green): Given that no rent control areas are likely to be designated until the summer of 2027 at the earliest, that rents have increased above inflation in Edinburgh and Lothians East and that the increasing cost of living and high interest rates will further squeeze renters, who are already struggling, what interim protections will the Scottish Government put in place for private tenants, including those on mid-market rents, who are facing unaffordable rent increases while the rent conditions assessment and designation process under the Housing (Scotland) Act 2025 is completed?

The First Minister (John Swinney): That is an important issue. In the legislation that we passed in Parliament before the election, we put in place the rent control arrangements, which are an important part of the safeguards that Q Manivannan is searching for on behalf of constituents. I believe that that framework is appropriate.

The Government will continue to assess the assistance that can be made available through the other housing support that we provide. In the election campaign, I advanced the argument that renters who are in a situation in which the property that they occupy is being put on the market should have the right and first opportunity to purchase it at a sustainable market rate.

The Government has put in place the legislative arrangements to ensure that the objectives that are being sought can be fulfilled. As part of the Government's wider programme, we will take measures to support individuals who are facing cost of living challenges, in recognition of the significance of those to individuals today.

Air Services (Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles)

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): Loganair has announced plans to cut services between Inverness and Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles. It cites a lack of support from Government-owned Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd as a reason for the cuts, which could get even worse if further reassurances are not provided in the coming days. The routes are lifelines for all three communities, and cuts will affect all those who rely on those services, including many hospital patients, which could potentially push up costs for national health service boards.

Will the First Minister instruct HIAL to reach an agreement with Loganair that protects lifeline air services to and from Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles as a matter of urgency?

The First Minister (John Swinney): I want Highland and Islands Airports Ltd and Loganair to work collaboratively to ensure that the services can be sustained. I recognise their importance, particularly given issues in connection with access to healthcare services. The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Tourism and Transport will ensure that appropriate dialogue takes place between Loganair and HIAL to ensure that everything that can be done to safeguard those services is, in fact, put in place.

Motor Neurone Disease

Steven Bonnar (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): My constituent Mark Sommerville was diagnosed with motor neurone disease in 2023. It is a rapidly progressive and cruel illness, which means that Mark and so many others simply do not have time to wait for slow-moving systems and delayed decisions. Our manifesto made welcome commitments on MND, but progress on specialist care and support for clinical research demand that there is meaningful focus as soon as possible.

Will the First Minister outline what he will do to ensure that progress is made? Will he meet the Mark Sommerville Foundation and hear directly about the challenges that are being faced and the promising work that the foundation is already undertaking to support those who are living with motor neurone disease?

The First Minister (John Swinney): I would be very happy to meet the Mark Sommerville Foundation, and the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Care will also take a keen interest in the issue. I very much welcome the points that Steven Bonnar has made. It is vital that, where individuals have a diagnosis as challenging and devastating as that of motor neurone disease, we have in place the support services and the assistance to aid them and their families as quickly as possible.

The Government is trying to ensure that, through the funding that we have put in place through the NHS Research Scotland neuroprogressive and dementia network, we will be able to provide enhanced levels of support. Some of the learning from the Mark Sommerville Foundation will be helpful to us in advancing that, and I look forward to having those discussions with Mr Bonnar.

Transport Strategy (Cycling)

Kate Campbell (Edinburgh Eastern, Musselburgh and Tranent) (SNP): Following thousands of cyclists pedalling on the Parliament on Saturday to ask for safer streets, what assurances can the First Minister give that getting infrastructure right, preventing deaths on our roads and making sure that everyone feels that cycling is accessible to them will be at the heart of the Government's transport strategy?

The First Minister (John Swinney): The national transport strategy prioritises active travel through the sustainable travel hierarchy, placing walking, wheeling and cycling at the top.

This year, the Government is continuing to invest in active travel infrastructure through the Scottish budget, which was passed by the Parliament, including £226 million for sustainable and active travel. The majority of that will deliver high-quality walking and cycling infrastructure in communities, with inclusive design principles embedded, to improve safety and accessibility for more people who want to make more of their journeys by active travel modes.

We are also supporting local authorities, through the £14.5 million road safety improvement fund, to enhance safety and reduce the number of injuries on our road network.

I hope that those measures give Kate Campbell and her constituents the assurance that the Government prioritises active and safe travel routes and the encouragement of cycling, walking and wheeling as part of the active travel hierarchy.

Islands Business Resilience Fund (Ferry Disruption)

Donald MacKinnon (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab): Today, once again, Uist is receiving a significantly reduced ferry service, given that the MV Hebrides is out of action and the MV Lord of the Isles is experiencing ongoing technical problems. Last week, the First Minister told us that the amplification of such issues is damaging to island communities. What is in fact damaging to them is his Government's failure to deliver an adequate ferry service.

A recent survey that was carried out by Visit Outer Hebrides revealed that 96 per cent of the businesses that responded had encountered problems as a result of ferry disruption this year. Those businesses are struggling and need support now. When will the islands business resilience fund open, and will the First Minister consider widening access to all affected island businesses?

The First Minister (John Swinney): I recognise the importance of those issues and, as Donald MacKinnon will know, am pretty well versed in the issues and challenges around the ferry network.

When I answered the question last week, the indicators on the ferry service were very strong. Indeed, when I checked the CalMac Ferries service updates shortly before I came in for question time, I saw that most routes are operating normally today, with the exception of the Uig triangle, which is not operating normally because of the mechanical problems with the MV Hebrides. The MV Lord of the Isles is operating a service to

Uig just now—or, certainly, it was doing so yesterday.

There will be challenges on the ferry network, but we are in a more robust and stronger position than we were. The MV Isle of Lewis has returned to the Barra service, which is a welcome development.

I confirmed to the Parliament last week that the islands fund would happen. The Government will take forward the eligibility criteria. We have delivered funds of that nature in the past, so we know exactly how it has to be constructed. We have to make an assessment of where the patterns of disruption have taken their course. That is the approach that we applied in previous cases. I accept that there is an aspiration for there to be compensation in all circumstances but, as part of the assessment, there has to be a recognition of the scale of disruption. That is what the Government will engage on. We will shortly announce the details of how the fund will be taken forward and distributed.

Domestic Heating Oil (Market Operation)

Alyn Smith (Stirling) (SNP): Like me, the First Minister represents a large area of rural Scotland in which people are dependent on domestic heating oil because they are off-grid. There have been some spectacular rises in the cost of that oil, and I am sure that many of our constituents are deeply worried about that. I have written to the Competition and Markets Authority because I am concerned about the operation of the market in heating oil. Does the First Minister share my concerns as we look towards a cold winter?

The First Minister (John Swinney): I share the concerns that Alyn Smith has set out. Like him, I have many constituents who are reliant on domestic heating oil, and some of the increases have been significant. The Government has established the Scottish emergency heating oil scheme, enabling households to apply for £300 towards their bills.

I am glad to hear that the member has written to the Competition and Markets Authority, because it is currently undertaking a market study into the retail supply of heating oil for domestic use in the United Kingdom, and the Government's officials are engaged in that work.

The issue is one on which we require, and have been encouraging, greater intervention from the UK Government.

Business Rates (Fresh Start Initiative)

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): North-east businesses are struggling due to the Government's punishing business rates regime. Under the fresh start initiative, businesses that move into premises that have been vacant for six months receive rates relief for a year. *The Press and Journal*, *The Courier* and *The Sunday Post* are campaigning for that six-month eligibility period to be scrapped, so that the relief is applied to any business that moves into a vacant unit. The First Minister has expressed support for that campaign. Will he confirm what that support looks like in practice and, thus, when that vital change will take place?

The First Minister (John Swinney): I recognise the challenges on business rates that are coming and that businesses are facing. I have engaged with the excellent initiative by *The Press and Journal*, *The Courier* and *The Sunday Post,* which is raising awareness of business rates issues and seeking an approach that incentivises growth, encourages development and enables businesses to invest for the future and deliver greater economic success. Their approach chimes directly with the approach of my Government and what we want to achieve.

I gave a commitment to those newspapers—as I did to Sir Tom Hunter when I met him to discuss issues on economic development a couple of weeks ago—that I would consider carefully what improvements the Government can make, as quickly as possible, to ensure that businesses are given the support that they need to continue investing, without issues to do with business rates impeding their success and growth in the economy.

Lower Melville Wood Fire

Willie Rennie (Fife North East) (LD): The First Minister will be aware of the huge fire at Lower Melville Wood in my constituency, which burned for two weeks. The conditions were intolerable for local people, especially those with lung conditions. Today, I have written to the Government asking for an independent investigation, because it involves multiple agencies, into what caused the fire, the handling of the fire and the future of the site. Does the First Minister agree that there should be a Government-commissioned independent investigation?

The First Minister (John Swinney): I am very sympathetic to Mr Rennie's point, because I want to ensure that his constituents are satisfied by the examination of the issues. I recognise the level of inconvenience and distress that was caused to the public as a consequence of the fire, but I will have to consider in more detail whether that requires an independent investigation. However, I assure Mr Rennie that we need to have a much better understanding of the circumstances and causes of incidents of this type.

I also consider that some of the investigations into such matters take far too long. That concerns

me, because we must learn the lessons and change practice—should that be necessary—at a much swifter pace than we have done up until now.

I will take away those issues, and the justice secretary will consider the issues on my behalf and provide me with recommendations on how we can properly address Mr Rennie's concerns and those of his constituents.

Peter Mandelson

Alex Kerr (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): The latest release of the Peter Mandelson files has exposed several senior Scottish Labour politicians for maintaining a disturbing and often sycophantic relationship with Peter Mandelson—a man who, it was known, had a close relationship with convicted paedophile Jeffrey Epstein, and who remains a member of the House of Lords.

What assessment has the First Minister made of those alarming relationships that have been exposed, and what discussion has the Scottish Government had with the United Kingdom Labour Government on the latest release of the deeply chilling Peter Mandelson files?

The First Minister (John Swinney): We have not had dialogue with the UK Government on that question. However, before the election, I authorised the permanent secretary to examine all issues relating to engagement between the Scottish Government and Peter Mandelson, in order to satisfy ourselves that there had been no circumstances in which information material to the public interest in Scotland had been in any way jeopardised by those contacts. I was satisfied with the permanent secretary's assessment in that regard.

However, I assure Mr Kerr that, notwithstanding those issues, the Scottish Government will always work to promote Scotland's interests in the international community, with the objective of promoting our cultural interests and securing investment.

Local Authority Funding

Angela Ross (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Reform): Yesterday, parking meters came into force in North Berwick, which is in my region, and local people are worried about what that will mean for the high street, the local community and their livelihoods.

The high street literally went from a bustling hub on Sunday to quite an empty and desolate place on a Monday. It seems that the state runs out of money and then heads straight for the pockets of hard-working people.

Does the First Minister accept that the current funding framework is driving councils to make difficult choices in order to make up shortfalls, and that reform of funding should occur sooner rather than later?

The First Minister (John Swinney): I understand the importance of Angela Ross's point. I visited North Berwick with Mr McLennan during the election campaign; it was very busy on that occasion. From my knowledge of the town, I can see that is a bustling and vibrant community. The concerns that the member raises were spelt out to me directly by a number of local businesses on that occasion, so I recognise the seriousness of those points.

The decision on parking meters was taken by East Lothian Council and it is up to the council to explain to its constituents exactly why it took that decision. When it comes to funding arrangements, we as a Parliament have to ensure that we provide adequate levels of funding on a sustainable basis to a variety of different public organisations, and the needs of local authorities will be central to that judgment. If Parliament wishes to spend more money on local authority services, we have to be prepared to take the decisions that enable that to be the case.

The Government has given an increased local authority settlement to local government and that gets translated into funding for individual local authorities. We will engage with Parliament about the composition of the budget bill as the budget process takes its course through Parliament later this year.

Data Centre (Auchtertool)

Julie MacDougall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform): The First Minister may be aware of a live planning application for a new data centre just outside of Auchtertool. On the back of last week's energy debate, can the First Minister assure my constituents in Auchtertool that the Scottish Government will take our community council's concerns seriously and ensure that decisions on planning applications for data centres across Scotland are not imposed on the community or rushed through without serious consideration of water and energy demands?

The First Minister (John Swinney): Obviously, this is a live planning application, so I cannot comment specifically on the details involved. However, I assure Julie MacDougall that the planning process must take into account the representations that are made by local communities. There will be statutory considerations to take into account as well. Depending on the course of that planning application, there may well be a determination that the Government has to make. I assure Julie MacDougall that, should the Government be in that position, the views, concerns and issues raised by

communities and statutory objectors will be considered in detail by ministers in coming to any determination that the Government has to make.

Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service board is due to make a decision at the end of June which could have far-reaching implications for Scotland's communities, as there are options for closure of some fire stations. The Glasgow Union Street fire, which we have discussed before, is a stark reminder of why the city of Glasgow needs a well-resourced fire service to save lives and protect businesses, with a need for appropriate high-reach appliances.

Will the First Minister support my view that, given the concern that all of us will have about this issue in relation to our constituencies and regions, there should be parliamentary oversight of the decision? Will the Scottish Government be prepared to look at that and, if necessary, reconsider the funding of the Fire and Rescue Service to ensure that Scotland's communities remain safe?

The First Minister (John Swinney): The issues that are connected with the review that has been undertaken by the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service relate to an assessment of fire risk as it applies in Scotland at present. We know that, over the course of the past 40 years or so, fire risk in Scotland has changed quite significantly. Thankfully, there has been a welcome decline in domestic fires because of the increase in protective activity that has taken place, in relation to sprinkler systems and so on. We have also seen a change in the deployment of the Fire and Rescue Service because of the implications of climate change.

Earlier, Katherine Sangster asked about the fire on Arthur's Seat, which is a local example of the changing nature of the fire risk that we are having to deal with. The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service has to make an assessment based on that risk and the resources that the Government is making available. There are statutory obligations on the Fire and Rescue Service in relation to the exercise of its powers, but Parliament can consider issues that arise from the decisions that are taken by the service.

I commit the Government to engaging constructively with members of Parliament on the issue, because I recognise the concerns that will exist in all parts of the chamber about ensuring that the Fire and Rescue Service comes to the right conclusions in the important exercise that is under way.

Dundee and Angus College (Support)

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): Both my party and the First Minister's party are committed to vital support for ambitious capital works at Dundee and Angus College. The college leadership has waited for years for the Government to agree to a solution, and I can now confirm that the deadline to address reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete problems at the Kingsway campus in Dundee has been missed. What can the First Minister say about when we will finally get a decision from the Government?

The First Minister (John Swinney): As Mr Marra will know, the issues at stake are about long-term financial commitments to support an ambitious development by Dundee and Angus College. For absolute transparency, I place on the record the fact that I represent a constituency adjacent to Dundee and Angus, so there may be implications for my constituents.

The questions that are being wrestled with concern how long-term financial assurance can be given to Dundee and Angus College to enable it to enter into commitments to undertake what I recognise to be a significant regeneration opportunity in Dundee city centre. I assure Mr Marra that those issues have been given active consideration in Government. They are not straightforward, because of the nature of the commitments that are sought, but equally the challenges in the college infrastructure are not straightforward, nor is the situation sustainable, because of the issues that Mr Marra cites. I give him an assurance that ministers are actively taking forward those issues.

Aviation Fuel (Sanctions)

Calum Kerr (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): Unite the union has rightly called out the Labour Westminster Government for easing sanctions on aviation fuel that is produced from Russian oil while allowing Scotland's refinery at Grangemouth to close. Let us be clear: Keir Starmer will reward Putin by bringing in jet fuel that is made from Russian oil. Can the First Minister today reaffirm his Government's solidarity with Ukraine, and will he join me in condemning this betrayal of the Ukrainian people and Scotland's energy workers?

The First Minister (John Swinney): My Government's support for the people of Ukraine is absolute, and it has been a central part of the Parliament's position to support the people of Ukraine in the terror that they face from the Putin regime.

The issue is that one of our biggest vulnerabilities is the production of jet fuel, which is why I find it inexplicable that the United Kingdom

Government, which assured everybody that it would protect the refinery at Grangemouth, has allowed that refinery to close.

I reaffirm my strong support for the people of Ukraine and for the sustainability of our energy industries to ensure that our country's energy needs can be met through the activities that we undertake in Scotland.

Food Price Cap

Michelle Campbell (Renfrewshire North and Cardonald) (SNP): Report after report shows that food prices are continuing to rise and that Government needs to act now.

We know that the Labour United Kingdom Government has been caught out begging supermarkets to lower prices rather than taking action, as the Scottish Government is doing, to ensure that there is a food price cap. Given what we know now, does the First Minister expect that Westminster will try to block our food price cap plan?

The First Minister (John Swinney): The Government is committed to bringing forward legislation to ensure that individuals are able to afford a range of items in our supermarkets at an affordable price. That is my Government's commitment. We are developing the legislation and we will engage with Parliament on it to ensure that we take practical and tangible action to support members of the public who are experiencing such significant pressures as a consequence of the cost of living issues with which they are wrestling.

Energy Strategy

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): Over the weekend, the Scottish National Party's new Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Energy said that the Scottish Government's energy strategy may not be ready until the end of the year. That is a shocking dereliction of duty by the SNP Government. Oil and gas workers are losing their jobs now, and Aberdeen is suffering as a result of damaging anti-oil and net zero policies from Ed Miliband, yet the SNP still has a presumption against oil and gas developments in the north-east.

What on earth will it take for the SNP Government to wake up to the crisis in our oil and gas industry and support drilling now?

The First Minister (John Swinney): As I have explained to Parliament on a number of occasions—I explained it to Malcolm Offord at First Minister's question time last week—the Scottish Government's position is founded in the existing law of the United Kingdom, which is that if we are to take forward new developments, a climate compatibility assessment has to be undertaken to ensure compatibility with net zero. That is the legal framework of the United Kingdom today and, as a Government that operates within the law, that is exactly the position that we take.

I have also said that, because of the very volatile situation that we are experiencing in the middle east, issues of energy security need to be taken into account in the judgments that are formed. I have just answered a question from a member about the issue in relation to jet fuel and the damage that has been done because of the closure of Grangemouth. That extends our energy vulnerability.

Let me say to Rachael Hamilton that the Scottish Government has set out a very clear position in relation to oil and gas, which I have communicated on multiple occasions. *[Interruption].*

The Presiding Officer: Mr Flynn, you are not in Westminster now.

Stephen Flynn (Aberdeen Deeside and North Kincardine) (SNP): I can tell.

The First Minister: At the heart of the question that Rachael Hamilton put to me was decision making by Ed Miliband. I just want to clarify that Ed Miliband is not a member of my Government; he is a member of the hostile United Kingdom Labour Government, which does not deliver for the people of Scotland. It is a good job that the people of Scotland have a Scottish Government to rely on.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes First Minister's question time. I apologise to the huge number of backbenchers who we could not call. There is always next week.

Phone-free Classrooms

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): The next item of business is a statement by Màiri McAllan on phone-free classrooms. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of her statement and there should be no interventions or interruptions.

15:02

The Cabinet Secretary for Education, Culture and Gaelic (Màiri McAllan): My priority is to ensure that our school environments support pupils to thrive and to reach their full potential. There is no doubt that new and evolving technologies can provide opportunities for learning and communication. However, they also bring the risk of a spectrum of harm. We need to recognise the negative impact of mobile phones and screen time and, frankly, to protect our children and young people from that.

That is why now is the time for phone-free learning environments. I am pleased that there is cross-party consensus on the issue and that we can work together on it. We owe it to our pupils and teachers to do so, and to create an environment that is conducive to learning and teaching. This Government has already been clear that any school or education authority that wishes to introduce restrictions on mobile phones in its classrooms or across the school estate will have ministers' full support. That is the position set out in our national guidance, which we introduced in 2024 in response to the 2023 report on behaviour in Scottish schools that highlighted the disruption caused by mobile phones in our classrooms.

Since we introduced that guidance, many schools and education authorities have acted to restrict the use of mobile phones, and I welcome that. However, there is too much variability. We have listened carefully to calls from parents, carers and teachers to ensure greater consistency across the country so as to support children's learning and development.

We continue to hear concerns about classroom disruption where restrictions are absent and about the wider impacts on pupils' wellbeing of excessive screen time, exposure to harmful online content and the effects of online bullying. That is why we will shortly publish a consultation on legislation to make our learning environments phone free, thereby meeting our commitment to do so within the first 100 days of this Government's being in office.

Last week, in one of my first school visits as Cabinet Secretary for Education, Culture and Gaelic, I went to James Gillespie's high school, where I met staff and young people to discuss the school's mobile phone policy. It is clear about allowing no phones during school hours on school grounds, which include the campus, the classrooms, the corridors and the cafeteria. The rules for the school's young people are clear: see it, hear it, lose it.

When I spoke to the staff and the young people, which I did separately, they highlighted the benefits of that policy, including fewer distractions during class, reduced conflict among pupils and between staff and pupils, and more interaction among peers. The young people reflected on how much they welcomed the break from otherwise addictive apps and content.

I want to hear from more pupils through our consultation. Scotland has been a pioneer in the advancement of rights for children and young people, and it is vital that their views be front and centre in the decisions that we take. We also want to understand the range of views from parents and carers, school staff, education authorities and interested organisations, which will help to shape our legislation and allow us to deal with multiple complex issues.

For example, as our current guidance makes clear, there will be occasions when exemptions are required, such as where young people use their phones to monitor medical conditions or where young carers need to maintain contact with home. Schools that have already implemented phone-free policies per our guidance are managing exemptions well. We will fully explore and understand all those issues to inform sensible legislation.

Legislation is the only way in which we can mandate learning environments to be phone free. Until then, existing guidance allows all schools to introduce such a policy now. Therefore, to signal our intent that schools should move to introduce restrictions while we prepare legislation, we are working with education authorities to refresh our current guidance to support and encourage more schools to introduce restrictions ahead of a change in the law.

We are working with the Scottish advisory group on relationships and behaviour in schools so that the updated guidance will be informed by the views of organisations including the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland, the main teaching unions and representatives of parents and carers. As will be crucial, it will also be informed by the views of young people.

The guidance will set out expectations for key areas, including the engagement with the whole school community—pupils, staff and families—that will be required if we are to build support for such policies. I am pleased to inform members that the

updated guidance will be published by the end of this month to support schools in considering their approach from the beginning of the next term.

This issue rests within the wider public health approach to online harm that the Government is committed to taking. We recognise the spectrum of harm that is associated with the significant intensification that we have seen in children's and young people's use of online platforms and smartphones. That spectrum includes—but is not limited to—loss of concentration and the waste of precious childhood years, at one end, and it goes right through to the absorption of harmful and often violent, misogynistic or radicalising content, incitement to self-harm, extreme bullying and, in some cases, grooming.

Taking a public health approach means being clear about such harms and taking a holistic approach to addressing them. Therefore, when considering the impact of mobile phones in schools, we must think not only about distraction in the classroom or bullying during the school day but about the higher risk of depression, anxiety, poor sleep and poor health in adolescence that can arise from smartphone use in general. Taking such an approach means engaging the whole school community so that schools can create the conditions to get things right for school wellbeing, learning outcomes and long-term health.

Schools are only one part of the solution, and I will highlight action that we are taking to support parents and young people to ensure that social media companies are held to account. Although the main policy and legislative levers, such as measures that can be taken under the Online Safety Act 2023, are held by the United Kingdom Government, in Scotland we are taking all available steps to act here and now while we wait for the UK Government to step up.

Let me be clear: we support the UK Government's consultation on the banning of social media for under-16s. However, we do not think that that will solve the problem of online harms. We need more concerted action to force social media and tech giants to do more to protect our children. That is a fight that I will not shy away from.

We have also already taken action to provide guidance for parents of younger children and babies by publishing advice on screen time on our Parent Club website for parents of children aged under 5. That advice is in line with the World Health Organization's guidance. We also continue to fund resources such as the Mind Yer Time website, which gives children and young people advice on social media use, screen time and sleep, and on the impact of all those factors on their body image and mental wellbeing.

We will now build on that work by funding a national public health campaign to make young people and their families aware of how to use social media, screen time and online time in a safe and healthy manner, which might mean not using it at all. We need families to be aware of the harmful consequences and the risks to mental health, sleep and body image of online time, as well as the benefits of spending time with friends and family in real life. Parents must be supported in that effort and never shamed.

We will also use the example of Ireland's successful pause before you post campaign to make parents and carers aware of the potential harms of what is called sharenting—sharing images and details of their children on social media that can be pieced together and so inadvertently create a digital footprint for young people.

We can take that action—and are taking it now—but Scotland does not have the powers to act in areas such as the regulation of internet services. We will take steps to push the UK Government to take more action, including ensuring that Ofcom uses its powers to hold technology companies and social media providers to account. Regulation has fallen substantially behind where it needs to be. We will advocate for a social media levy on companies, to be invested in programmes to support safer online engagement for young people, thereby improving mental health and supporting online literacy.

I was very interested in the comments of the former UK safeguarding minister, who, in her resignation letter to the Prime Minister, said that she knew of solutions that could end the ability of children in the UK to take naked pictures of themselves

"on every phone and device in the country."

If that technology exists, it must be rolled out without delay. The Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise, Siobhian Brown, has written to the new safeguarding minister to ask about that technology, to confirm our support for such a move and to reiterate our desire to work closely with the UK Government on the important issue of safeguarding.

Our children and young people are growing up in an online world that was unimaginable 20 years ago when I was at school. I recall the first smartphones emerging then. The rapid evolution of technology means that our thinking must also adapt. The Government is clear that a public health approach is appropriate to respond to those changes. Creating phone-free learning environments is an important part of that holistic approach. Our schools should be safe and nurturing environments for our children and young

people, where they can learn free from the distractions of mobile phones. Teachers will benefit from that, too.

I look forward to working constructively with members on that issue and the wider issue of freeing our children from intensifying online harm.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): The cabinet secretary will now take questions on the issues that were raised in her statement. I intend to allow about 20 minutes for questions, after which we will move to the next item of business. It would be helpful if members who wish to ask a question were to press their request-to-speak buttons now.

Angela Ross (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Reform): Thank you for your speech, cabinet secretary. We support the ban of mobile phones in schools to help to ensure focus in classrooms and to support teachers in delivering lessons. I appreciate the level of consultation that there has been—I am impressed to see how much work has gone into that, and I think that it is the right approach and the right way forward.

I want to look at how we ensure on an ongoing basis that the policy is delivered effectively. We are having a ban and we are stopping something from occurring, but we need to support the delivery in a way that will allow staff to have autonomy and control in their classrooms and to ensure that the appropriate discipline and consequences are in place. How do we get the balance right between providing support and resources and allowing a level of autonomy in classrooms and schools?

Màiri McAllan: I thank Angela Ross for her question and her support for the policy. I hope that we can continue to garner that support right across the chamber. I also acknowledge her comments about the preparedness and the preparations that have gone into the policy. I give credit to my predecessor in the education portfolio—the Deputy First Minister, Jenny Gilruth—for the very considered manner in which the policy has been adopted and for getting us to this stage.

Angela Ross is right to ask about flexibility. One problem with the current situation, and one reason why we need to change the law, is that some schools have adopted the approach and others have not, and that variability across the country will be letting down some pupils. We cannot have that and we have to correct it, but flexibility will continue to be an important aspect. The guidance as it stands allows for school-appropriate flexibility, including on whether the ban applies in the classroom or to the whole campus, and what exemptions might be made available.

Another thing that is critical to making the policy work practically, which is what Angela Ross's question was about, is the whole-school-community approach to its development. That has to involve the heads of schools and teachers working with parents and carers, and, crucially, with young people. When I visited James Gillespie's high school, I found that it has put a great deal of emphasis on the whole school community's buy-in to the policy, and that was bearing fruit in its implementation.

Katherine Sangster (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab): I thank the cabinet secretary for the advance notice of her statement.

We welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to making progress on mobile phone-free classrooms. Scottish Labour campaigned on the issue for some time and it was found to be hugely popular with parents. Can the cabinet secretary give the Parliament some detail about when the consultation will open, when it will end and when the legislation will be brought forward?

It was positive to hear about the cabinet secretary's visit to James Gillespie's high school and her keenness for schools to roll out the measure now, but what support and guidance will be given to headteachers who wish to remove phones from classrooms when they perhaps face obstacles? How do we ensure that we are sharing best practice?

Màiri McAllan: I would reflect a similar experience to that of Katherine Sangster. She mentioned having spoken with a number of parents who are keen to see this carefully developed policy move to the next stage and to a nationwide position. I, too, have had that experience. Most teachers who I spoke to in a constituency capacity, prior to coming into my current role, reflected that desire for a central position, and that is what the Government is now moving to deliver.

Katherine Sangster is right to ask about timelines. In the first 100 days of this Government, we have committed to opening the consultation on the legislation and publishing the updated guidance, which we are encouraging schools to adopt now, in advance of the change of the law.

Patricia Gibson (Cunninghame South) (SNP): I welcome the cabinet secretary's statement. As a former English teacher of 25 years' experience, I have front-line experience of how destructive and distracting mobile phones in classrooms can be to the teaching and learning process, and of the range of harms that they cause, to which the cabinet secretary has alluded. Many teachers have longed for a statutory ban to be put in place and will also welcome the measures.

What powers and support does the cabinet secretary envisage that schools will be able to access in enforcing a ban on phones in classrooms, especially in view of the fact that there could well be some parental pushback, beyond any exemptions that are in place, as has been reported recently in some parts of the country where schools have tried to enforce such bans?

Màiri McAllan: It is not at all daunting to have one former teacher sitting next to me and one over my shoulder, but that helps to stress how much I hope that we can deliver the change in the law in a way that takes on board the views of the teaching profession, parliamentarians across the chamber, parents and carers and, of course, our teaching unions and local authorities. I recognise that each school will have to seek to overcome different aspects of the issue, whether there is a classroom ban or a campus ban, and I have alluded to some of them already.

Personally, I saw a campus ban working really well at James Gillespie's high school. The teachers and young people reflected to me that that not only helps to remove distractions in the classroom but frees the young people from what we know can be the malign influence of the online world throughout their day. Some of the young people reflected to me that, because their phone had been off in their bag, increasingly, when they were going home, they were not turning it back on as quickly as they might have done before. That is breaking the addictiveness that we know tech companies build into many of their platforms.

In response to Patricia Gibson, I would say that flexibility will be built in and we will consult carefully on what everybody involved thinks needs to be reflected in the eventual law change. However, I am keen to ensure that what we finally pass in the chamber reflects the gravity of the potential harm that could impact our young people and operates as a bit of a line in the sand for how we see the correct use of smartphones in the online world for our young people.

David Kirkwood (South Scotland) (Reform): Deputy Presiding Officer, congratulations on your election, and congratulations to the cabinet secretary on hers.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that given that many teachers are already implementing their own de facto bans on smartphone use in the classroom, many more would appreciate the formalisation of such a ban, thus removing the onus from them?

Màiri McAllan: In my response to Katherine Sangster, I reflected that, anecdotally and in a constituency capacity, parents and teachers have said to me that a national position would be helpful. In developing this policy, we have been clear that we do not have the powers to unilaterally implement a ban across the country, which is why a law change is now required, and that is what we are working towards.

I return to the variability point. That is probably the main thing that we as a Parliament and as a society could not tolerate—the idea that some pupils in our schools learn free from the influence of smartphones, while others do not. There is a lot of consensus in that area. Provided that we can get the framework right, I think that we will, as a Parliament, enjoy quite a lot of public support for the policy.

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): Deputy Presiding Officer, I also welcome you to your role.

As doctors have recently warned that social media can be just as harmful to children as smoking, I welcome the Scottish Government's action to introduce phone-free classrooms and mitigate the impact of phone use on learning. Can the cabinet secretary set out what more can be done in the classroom directly to tackle social media's harms? For example, does she believe that encouraging more outdoor learning can be a helpful tool to mitigate those harms?

Màiri McAllan: I hope that, when the changes come into force, we will find that disruption in the classroom is lessened, that concentration in the classroom is heightened and that teachers find themselves more able to conduct their professional duties without distractions from phones. As I said in response to another question, I also hope that the policy is part of a wider public health approach that challenges the real intensification of children and young people's use of the online world in recent years.

Fulton MacGregor's point on outdoor learning was absolutely right. There is nothing like getting outside, exercising or just spending a bit of time in nature to remind us all that the online world is not the real world. There is a real world out there, and it is to be enjoyed.

Jenny Young (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Lab): I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of her statement today. I am very glad that the Scottish National Party has shifted its position on the issue. As a former French teacher, I know the huge level of disruption and distraction that phones can bring into our classrooms, but I also know that my former colleagues are under immense pressure due to rising violence in schools and an ever-increasing workload. What assurances can the cabinet secretary give that our overworked teachers will be able properly to contribute to the consultation without ever more duties being piled on them?

Màiri McAllan: I thank Jenny Young for her insights, and I will add her as another teacher whose input I look forward to getting in this role. I assure her that teachers' views are central to how we develop the policy. I have listed the range of stakeholders with whom we have been working on the development of the guidance, and with whom we will continue to work as we develop the legislation.

Violence in our classrooms is something that I and the Government are concerned about. On Thursday, I am attending the Educational Institute of Scotland annual general meeting in Dundee, and I expect to discuss the issue with teachers then. I have no doubt that bold policy changes such as this can have a big impact on behaviour in the classroom—again, not only because of the disruptive tendency of phones but because of what we know that our young people absorb, on a really repetitive and addictive basis, when they are online.

If I have time, I will reflect that people have talked to me about starting social media accounts with a completely blank canvas and very quickly finding that the algorithm is sending them countless images of young boys engaging in violence and highly sexualised content of girls. That is what we are dealing with here, and we need to arrest that.

Dawn Black (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): Introducing phone-free classrooms will provide greater consistency across Scotland, but will the cabinet secretary say more on what exemptions might be made to the national ban, particularly for pupils with additional support needs, disabilities, medical conditions or caring responsibilities who need access to technology?

Màiri McAllan: I am pleased to note that the guidance that my colleague the former education secretary developed had exemptions at its heart. The guidance provided a strong statement of intent, but it explicitly included exemptions to take into account instances in which phones will be needed. There are medical exemptions and exemptions for young carers, and there is also an exemption for staff-led learning activity on digital devices. I will discuss the extent to which such exemptions will need to be reflected in the legislation.

The policy that James Gillespie's high school produced was clear and concise, and it explicitly stated that exemptions would be considered on a case-by-case basis.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): I call Kayleigh Kinross-O'Neill, who will be followed by Marie McNair, who will ask the final question.

Kayleigh Kinross-O'Neill (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green): The cabinet secretary has outlined that existing guidance gives schools the power to ban the use of mobile phones, with the Government's support. Although we look forward to reading the proposed bill, we believe that the emphasis should first be on placing trust in teachers and providing them with resources so that they can do what is best for their own classrooms, as well as on ensuring that guidance is implemented as uniformly as possible. How will children and young people from across the country—especially those with additional support needs, who have already been mentioned—be effectively and meaningfully consulted beforehand?

Màiri McAllan: Trust is vital, and we absolutely trust our school leaders and teachers to lead the policy. That is why the Deputy First Minister's guidance put them front and centre and put our support behind them. Support is also vital. As I have reflected, we have heard calls for increased national support, which will now be provided.

Ms Kinross-O'Neill is absolutely right to remind us of the importance of the views of children and young people. That is central to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and our belief in getting it right for every child. Children and young people have already been engaged through the development of the guidance, and I assure her that that approach will be front and centre as we take forward the legislation.

However, it is also worth saying that, as adults in society, we have an obligation to act when we believe that something is harming our children.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): We actually have a bit more time for questions. Marie McNair will be followed by Meghan Gallacher.

Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): I welcome you to your role, Deputy Presiding Officer, and I congratulate the cabinet secretary on her new appointment.

The vast majority of Scotland's pupils are hardworking and well behaved, but we must acknowledge concerns about the antisocial behaviour that occurs in our schools. How will introducing phone-free classrooms contribute to efforts to promote positive relationships and behaviour, supported by the relationships and behaviour in schools national action plan?

Màiri McAllan: I associate myself with Marie McNair's question. Recently, I spoke to a guidance teacher who said that, almost exclusively, she begins her mornings by dealing with the emotional upset or turmoil of one young person, or a number of young people, as a result of something that has

emanated from the online world. It might be communication between pupils or something that someone has seen and cannot get out of their head.

We all need to reflect on the fact that this situation has intensified very quickly. Technology is ever-evolving, and we will have to be nimble as we seek to grapple with it. Our responses to such issues should be clear and always proportionate. We should empower young people, parents and carers, and we should support our teachers and headteachers to implement what is right for their schools.

Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Con): We are all aware of the negative impact that mobile phones can have on young people, from bullying to disruption and violence in our classrooms. The Scottish Conservatives have been calling for a ban on mobile phones in classrooms for quite some time. Does the cabinet secretary accept that teachers, parents and pupils have waited long enough for action? Does she understand that some might feel frustrated that, instead of action now, we have yet another consultation, which could mean that the can is kicked down the road?

Màiri McAllan: I would reflect to Meghan Gallacher that the law in Scotland is as it stands, and the Government's position has long been that we cannot unilaterally implement the policy nationwide without a change in the law. As has been reflected, the development and co-development of guidance that has gotten us to this point has been helpful preparation for the next step that we will take together.

Meghan Gallacher is absolutely right to highlight the difficulties and the potential harms of the online world, as I have done. We also need to remember that navigating the online world can provide communities for certain young people and can be an outlet for their needs in life, but they will not be able to navigate it well and get those benefits unless we help to protect them from the harms, which is exactly what we will do.

Willie Rennie (Fife North East) (LD): Legislation to control the use of mobile phones in schools is certainly a welcome step, but I ask the cabinet secretary to look further at the use of digital devices in schools. A growing body of parents are concerned about their unregulated use, which is not based on the best practice and best evidence. I urge her to consider that and potentially to include that in any proposed legislation.

Màiri McAllan: I would certainly be interested to engage with Willie Rennie on the growing body of concern that he has spoken of regarding the use of digital devices being unregulated. There is a distinction to be made between personal mobile devices and digital devices that are provided by a school, which will often have firewalls and other technologies, meaning that pupils stay squarely focused on the learning outcome of the use of the device.

As part of the consultation on the proposed legislation, I will seek to understand more about those concerns over a lack of regulation. Given that the aim is to help with the learning environment, I am keen to ensure that we are not removing tools that help teachers to further our young people's education.

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): Previous Scottish Government guidance on mobile phones in schools was developed by listening to the voices not just of headteachers and school staff but of our young people. It is crucial that we continue to engage with those affected. Will the cabinet secretary outline any plans to consult our young folk on the changes that she is proposing?

Màiri McAllan: Jackie Dunbar is absolutely right. The principle of meaningful participation is central to the adoption of a children's rights-based approach and is a general guiding principle of the UNCRC. We are developing our approach to engagement with children's organisations to ensure that children's voices are heard as part of the consultation process.

We have rightly focused on children and young people, our pupils and our school environment today, but it bears saying that, as adults, we could probably all benefit from thinking about our social media use, too, and about the distinction between the online world and the real world. I often reflect that I might like it if someone took my phone off me for six hours a day.

We will stick to the remit of the task at hand with our education and learning environments, and perhaps adults can learn a thing or two from young people.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): Thank you, cabinet secretary. My apologies to the members I could not call in the time that we had allotted.

Summer of Sport

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): Our next item of business is a debate on motion S7M-00208, in the name of Maree Todd, on summer of sport.

15:34

The Minister for Mental Wellbeing, Public Health, Sport, Alcohol and Drugs (Maree Todd): Tapadh leibh, Oifigeir Riaghlaidh. I am pleased to open the debate on Scotland's summer of sport. It is my first debate since being reappointed as minister for sport. This is the first time that I have spoken in the chamber since being re-elected, so I thank the people of the Highlands and Islands for electing me. I wish the very best of luck to my successor, David Green, in Caithness, Sutherland and Ross.

Many members will be aware that I have had the privilege of serving in the role of sports minister since 2021. During that time, I have seen at close hand the profound and positive difference that sport and physical activity can make to people's lives across Scotland. Sport improves physical and mental health, strengthens communities, boosts resilience and confidence, enriches lives and opens doors to new opportunities. That is why sport and physical activity play such a central role in our population health framework and our wider ambition to reduce health inequalities across Scotland. Introducing young people to regular, enjoyable physical activity at an early stage significantly increases the likelihood that they will remain active throughout their lives. It is during those formative years that we nurture physical confidence, develop fundamental skills and foster a lifelong appreciation for movement.

That is why we announced significant additional investment of £20 million in the 2026-27 budget to deliver a nationwide summer of sport programme, which is designed to make this a truly transformational summer for children and young people across Scotland. The Deputy First Minister officially launched the summer of sport programme on Monday 25 May at Pollok United football club. It was a glorious, sunny day that was full of energy, with young people being inspired not just by the activities that were on offer but by a visit from Scotland and Hearts goalkeeper Craig Gordon. The event captured exactly what the programme is about—inspiration, opportunity and inclusion—because this will be a landmark summer for Scotland.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): The minister makes an important point about inclusion. In rural areas, kids at school cannot get the bus transport to get to the activities and events, and the pools and other assets. What more can the Scottish Government do to support local authorities to ensure that the facilities and events become inclusive for everyone?

Maree Todd: I will come on to some of the summer of sport activities that are particularly targeted at rural areas. As I represent a rural area, I recognise that challenge. On bus travel, we are piloting the £2 bus fare cap in the Highlands and Islands, which has been transformative. We have seen an increase in the number of bus routes that are participating. Once the scheme is rolled out all over Scotland, it will make a significant difference to the opportunities that young people have. That is one of the good reasons to support it.

This summer, our men's national football team will be competing at the FIFA world cup for the first time in 28 years, and the Commonwealth games will return to Glasgow. Alongside that, Scotland's women's teams, from cricket to hockey, are also competing on the world stage and providing inspiration for the next generation.

We have made a clear choice as a Government that inspiration must not be passive. It must translate into real opportunity—opportunity for every child in Scotland, regardless of their background or circumstance. However, for too many children and young people, we know that the opportunity does not yet exist or is out of reach. We know the barriers that they face: cost, transport, lack of confidence and, in some cases, feeling that sport is just not for them. That is why we have worked collaboratively with sportscotland and partners to design a programme that directly addresses those barriers.

At its heart, the summer of sport programme will deliver free, targeted or low-cost opportunities for children and young people to get active, try something new and stay active. It is a deliberately inclusive programme that is designed to reach those who are currently underrepresented in sport, particularly children who are experiencing poverty, those who live in remote and rural areas, disabled children or those who are not currently engaged in physical activity.

The overarching purpose of the summer of sport fund is twofold. The majority of the funding has been allocated directly to all 32 local authorities. In addition, £1.75 million has been made available to Scottish Government sport bodies, national partners and national organisations that have applied through an open and competitive process. The model ensures both universal reach and targeted impact and recognises that, although national leadership is important, the real strength of Scottish sport lies in our communities and in the partnerships that bring activity to life.

Laura Mitchell (Moray) (SNP): The minister might be aware that many young people across Scotland, including pupils from Hopeman primary school in my constituency, will be taking part in the world cup day of dance next week. That initiative is inspired by the success of the men's world cup team and promotes and celebrates Scottish country dance. Does the minister agree that we should do all that we can to support participation in, and celebration of, Scottish country dance in our schools?

Maree Todd: Absolutely. It was not until I travelled to France as sports minister that I realised that only in Scotland do we learn the country dances that we carry through our lives and use at every opportunity for celebration. That is unique to Scotland and I think it is a fantastic thing and a great way to celebrate. I come from a community that absolutely loves to have an Orcadian strip the willow right along our seafront, which is now a beautiful promenade thanks to Scottish Government funding.

Across the country, local authorities, leisure trusts, active schools networks, clubs and the third sector are working together to develop plans that reflect local need. Those plans include universal discounts on and free access to programmes; activities targeted at priority groups, including children living in property, those with additional support needs, young carers and care-experienced people; increased capacity and subsidised access; festivals, events and multisport opportunities; leadership pathways and employability opportunities for young people; and outreach into communities that are currently underrepresented.

Critically, those plans are not just about delivering activities but about building pathways from positive experience in summer programmes into what we hope will be sustained participation in school, community and club sport. That is because we know that one of the biggest challenges in sport is not about just getting people active but about helping people to stay active.

The role of our national partners and governing bodies is equally important. Across those programmes, some of the plans that we have had sight of so far focus on inclusive access, partnership-based delivery, local place-based approaches, workforce development and long-term sustainability. Those programmes are designed not simply to deliver a one-off experience but to create lasting engagement, confidence and belonging. That is absolutely central to our ambition because the legacy of the programme must extend far beyond this summer.

I now turn to some examples of what that will look like in practice. Although plans are still being developed, we have some details about specific programmes. The Camanachd Association, working in partnership with Scottish Golf, will deliver a joint programme designed to increase participation in shinty and golf among young people in rural Scotland. The programme will provide free or subsidised holiday camps in rural communities, removing barriers such as cost, travel and equipment, and will, I hope, develop our next Scottish golfing star. It will focus on fun, inclusive and beginner-friendly activity while creating clear pathways into club sport and developing a local workforce of young coaches and volunteers. That is a powerful example of what we are trying to achieve: locally delivered and inclusive provision that creates lasting impact.

Miles Briggs (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Con): I welcome some of what the minister has outlined, but does she agree that it is concerning that the percentage of children who engage in one hour of physical activity per day has declined by 8 per cent since 2016? How will those initiatives help to turn that around in the school setting?

Maree Todd: The member will be aware that schools are expected to deliver at least two hours of physical education for all primary school pupils, and at least two 50-minute periods of PE for all pupils from secondary 1 to secondary 4, in each school week. Scotland also developed, and has given to the world, the daily mile programme, which encourages 15 minutes of walking, wheeling or running three times a week.

There is a huge body of evidence to support the impact not just on physical and mental health but on learning ability in schools. I would be more than happy to pick up those issues with Miles Briggs over the course of this session. They are a passion of mine, and I would be more than happy to work with him to ensure that we are delivering for children in schools.

At local authority level, the project that is planned for delivery in Stirling focuses on community provision—on strengthening clubs, developing the workforce and ensuring that activity is available not just during the summer holidays but all year round. In Renfrewshire, there are proposals for a planned focus on co-ordinated local delivery, inclusive programmes, additional support needs provision, the development of young leaders and work to ensure that programmes are shaped by the needs and voices of young people.

What unites all those examples is a clear commitment to inclusion, partnership and sustainability. We hope that the summer of sport will lead to an enhancement of the sporting system in a number of ways. We want more children and young people to access local sport, facilitated by

the wider partnerships that have been developed through the investment, which will support the transition from summer of sport activities into club and community activity. We hope that the programme will result in more inclusive provision that is facilitated by the inclusive training that will be made available to the delivery workforce across Scotland.

I have spoken quite a lot about partnerships, but we expect stronger and more effective partnerships to be formed, leading to better joined-up local delivery.

Ultimately, we hope that more children and young people in poverty will access sport regularly. We want to ensure that no child is left behind, no matter where they live or what barriers they face. Of course, achieving that ambition requires more than funding alone. It also requires leadership, collaboration and the dedication of partners across Scotland, and I take this opportunity to thank everyone who has been or will be involved in designing and delivering the programme, from local authorities, leisure trusts and governing bodies to coaches, volunteers and community organisations.

Work is well under way, with plans continuing to be developed and refined, and I am very much looking forward to seeing the plans in action and visiting projects across the country over the coming months.

As part of the summer of sport, we are also working with the Scottish Football Association to deliver a celebration of football fund that is aligned with the momentous occasion of the FIFA world cup. It will support organisations to use football to drive positive outcomes in communities. We are also delivering a health in the community programme to target those with the lowest activity levels and help them to become and remain active. In Glasgow, the Commonwealth games will be accompanied by a free, family-friendly live site in Kelvingrove park that will bring people together to celebrate sport, watch live action and take part in accessible activities. Together, those activities represent a comprehensive approach that connects inspiration at the elite level with participation at the grass roots.

The summer of sport is about much more than a single summer. It is a strategic investment in Scotland's future. It is about ensuring—

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): Will the minister take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): The minister is in her last few seconds, Mr MacGregor.

Maree Todd: It is about ensuring that the child who attends a session this summer has the opportunity to still be active in a year's time and throughout their life. If we get it right, the impact will be felt long after this summer's event. This has the potential to be a truly transformative summer—a summer when inspiration leads to participation, participation leads to habit, and habit leads to lasting change. The message of this summer is clear: game on.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes Scotland's Summer of Sport programme, which aims to capitalise on the landmark summer of international sport taking place this year, with Scotland's men's football team competing in the 2026 FIFA World Cup and the Commonwealth Games taking place in Glasgow in July; recognises that it will provide opportunities for children and young people to take part in free and low-cost activities across the country; believes that providing positive, inclusive and inspiring sporting experiences for children and young people is one of the best things the people of Scotland can do to support physical, mental, and social health, and hopes that these experiences will encourage lifelong participation in sport, whether through playing, or as future captains, coaches and volunteers across the sporting sector.

15:48

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): Like others in the chamber, I suspect, I remember the world cup campaign in 1998—hard to believe, I know—and the hope, aspiration and sheer joy that is the tartan army. I have to say that, although we have never yet made it into the second round, this could be our year, and the expectation is huge.

Despite reports to the contrary, this is not the first time in nearly 30 years that a Scottish football team has been at the world cup, because Scotland's women were there in 2019. That was all the more impressive, given that the Scottish Football Association banned women from using club facilities for much of the 20th century and took charge of the women's international side only in 1998.

Although it is right that we celebrate the fact that the men's side is competing in this year's tournament, let us also celebrate the way in which football has changed for the better. Football is now the number 1 sport for girls and women in Scotland; there are more than 1,000 grass-roots teams, I think.

However, women's football still has significantly less investment, less coverage and less support than the men's game. I hope that we will change that. The United Kingdom Labour Government has committed some £8 million to Scotland for grass-roots sports facilities, with an emphasis on women's football. I encourage the Scottish

Government to match that, or indeed to go further, so that we can expand the women's game.

In my area, Dumbarton Football Club has started work on a new astroturf pitch, so that the women's team can train locally, and the Vale of Leven football club, which also has a women's team—a very successful one—has ambitious plans to improve the facilities at that long-standing community club.

The debate is about the summer of sport, not just football, although I think that many members—some on the Government benches—hope to attend the tournament. In July, Glasgow will welcome athletes from across the world for the Commonwealth games. That has not happened by chance; thanks to the hard work of all who put Glasgow's plan together, at very short notice, we will be able to cheer on the Scotland team.

Aside from an expected huge medal haul for the Scotland team, what will be the legacy of those games? I think that we would all acknowledge that, despite the fact that the 2014 Commonwealth games were supposed to lead to a more fit and healthy Scotland, healthy life expectancy is going down. Only around six in 10 adults carry out the recommended physical activity to stay healthy. Worryingly, children and young people are spending ever more time in sedentary activities. Not often in government or in life do we get a second chance, so, this time around, the Scottish Government must ensure that the Commonwealth games leave a legacy of more investment in community and grass-roots sports, primary care and preventative health and more opportunities for the athletes of the future.

The Scottish Government made a commitment to free swimming lessons for every primary-school child in Scotland. That has the support of all parties in the chamber, and many included similar commitments in their manifestos. We want the Government to make progress on that, and I press the minister to say how it will be delivered. In my area, we currently have a waiting list for swimming lessons. That backlog is a hangover from Covid; however, there is also a shortage of swimming teachers and facilities. Only 16 per cent of young people from disadvantaged areas take part in swimming lessons. That is a massive inequality. I am therefore genuinely interested to know what steps the minister will take and whether she can tell us when the commitment is likely to be delivered. We lodged our amendment to try to accelerate progress on that, and get an indication of when the Government will do so.

I wish all Scotland's athletes and players the very best of luck for this summer. We will all derive great joy from their competition, and I am sure that those sportsmen and women will do us all proud.

I move amendment S7M-00208.1, to insert at end:

> ", and calls on the Scottish Government to publish a plan and timetable for the provision of free swimming lessons for every primary school child."

15:53

Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Green): We all know the evidence about the benefits of physical activity in helping to prevent and manage conditions such as cardiovascular disease, cancer and diabetes and reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety. The benefits to overall wellbeing, including tackling loneliness and enhancing brain health, are not referred to as often but are just as important. Sport can reinvigorate communities and give people purpose and somewhere to go when other spaces put barriers in their way.

I have previously referenced in the chamber the wonderful work that the community trusts at both Motherwell and Falkirk football clubs in my region do week in, week out. For me, that is an example of the biggest takeaway from the debate: although big, set-piece sporting events should be a catalyst for participation, we need to make sure that promotion and, crucially, funding keep sport accessible for the long term. I am pleased that the minister has recognised that that is essential, and that her examples extend to a diverse range of sports.

The Scottish Greens believe that universal access to sport and physical activity is a right, not a privilege, because it is necessary to support the health of the nation. Unfortunately, however, too many barriers still remain.

Taking part in sport and attending sporting events as a spectator can be prohibitively expensive, whether because of the cost of tickets, uniforms, equipment or membership of clubs. Watching sport can be a gateway to people getting involved in it, whether playing or volunteering. That is why the Scottish Greens want to work with Scottish Professional Football League clubs to introduce a price cap of £25 for tickets for travelling away fans. That would widen access and ensure that fewer people were priced out of Scotland's national game.

A cap has been in place in England for more than a decade that means that travelling fans do not pay more than £30 for a ticket. In March, it was announced that the £30 price cap on away tickets has been extended for a further two seasons, and clubs voted unanimously to keep the cap in place until the end of the 2027-28 season.

In the United States, just two months ago, in order to tackle persistent concerns about sky-high

ticket prices for the 2026 world cup, New York City mayor, Zohran Mamdani, proudly announced a deal that would allow residents in New York to buy 1,000 world cup tickets for $50 each.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): I am a football supporter—a Kilmarnock sufferer—so I support the £25 cap on tickets. In England, television money dwarfs admission money, and clubs get much more revenue from that. In Scotland, clubs rely on the money that is coming through the door. So, how would the price cap work in practice? I am for the measure, but I am worried that some clubs would suffer financially.

Gillian Mackay: We need to do more work at the national level to promote Scottish football, particularly in the Scottish Professional Football League, outside Scotland, in order to generate more money from TV rights.

Falkirk is already selling away tickets for £25. Other clubs could look at its model and consider adopting that approach themselves.

A £25 away ticket price could also serve as a starting point for the conversation. There is potential to reach a level that clubs are comfortable with, while, crucially, ensuring that fans are not priced out of the game. However, we should work with clubs and supporters' organisations to drive that forward.

The First Minister said in January that he would be happy to consider the issue. Now that the minister for sport is back in place, I hope that she will join me in making calls to cap away ticket prices.

The summer of sport is an opportunity to break down some of the barriers to sport and physical activity. I am pleased that the motion mentions the provision of

"opportunities for children and young people to take part in free and low-cost activities".

We should be using those opportunities for young people to get parents, grandparents or whichever adults accompany those young people back into sport, too.

However, to secure the legacy of the Commonwealth games, we must get the basics right. Across my region, a number of publicly owned sport and leisure venues are under threat of closure or are coming towards the end of their lifespan.

I have backed calls from constituents who are rightly concerned about the proposals to close Aquatec Motherwell. That leisure facility has been a vital part of the community for decades. It is one of the only accessible venues with good public transport connections and has been a lifeline for residents seeking a place to exercise, socialise and enjoy a healthy lifestyle.

Venues such as the Aquatec, and many similar facilities across Scotland, are important not just for fitness but for community cohesion. If we want to improve the mental and physical health of the nation, we must invest in local facilities where friendships are built and people come together to support one another.

We need to ensure that the next generation of elite athletes, coaches and lifelong sports enthusiasts have local and accessible places to go to.

We must also make sure that people can walk, wheel and cycle in their local areas and that having access to a car is not necessary for them to take part in sport. We rightly provide exercise referrals to allow people to improve their health with cheap or free access to exercise. Those people are less likely to drive, so local facilities are vital. That is not to say that regional or national facilities are not important, but, realistically, a velodrome will not be accessed by as many people as a green space that is suitable for cycling.

The summer of sport has to be the catalyst to get people involved, but the investment must keep up to ensure that the summer of sport lasts longer than a Scottish summer usually does.

We believe that sport should be about the joy of taking part in physical activity and not about huge profits for industries that harm our health and extract wealth from sporting achievements. That is why we want sport to take place in an environment that promotes health and is free from sponsorship by industries that would harm it. It is disappointing, therefore, that two of the partners involved in the Commonwealth games are Coca-Cola and Jubel Beer. I cannot see how that is not at odds with an event that is meant to be about promoting healthy lifestyles through sport and physical activity. I would be grateful if the minister could advise members what conversations she has had with organisers about alcohol sponsorship of the games and what message that sends, particularly given that there is a focus on the participation of children and young people.

The summer of sport is an opportunity to spread the joy of taking part in sport to people all over Scotland. It is a truly worthwhile investment that has the potential to improve Scotland's health and wellbeing immeasurably. On behalf of the Scottish Greens, I wish all those taking part the very best, and I hope that the next debate that we have on sport is about celebrating their success.

I move amendment S7M-00208.3, to insert at end:

"and believes that to maintain participation in the long

term, measures such as a £25 ticket cap for away football fans and support for local authorities to keep local sports venues open, including Aquatec Motherwell, are essential."

16:00

Miles Briggs (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Con): This is my first contribution since being returned to serve as a member for the Edinburgh and Lothians East region, so I will start by paying tribute to a number of colleagues who have not been returned. In particular, I thank my former Lothian MSP colleague Sue Webber for her service to my region over the past five years. I also pay tribute to my former colleagues Ash Regan, Martin Whitfield and Angus Robertson for their service to my community.

As is the case at the start of every parliamentary session, it has been refreshing and positive to hear new members make their first speeches, and I look forward to hearing more of those this afternoon. I think that it takes new members about six months of being in this building before they start to become cynical, but it is good to hear the positive energy that they bring to our debates. I distinctly remember our former colleague Bruce Crawford saying to me, when I was elected 10 years ago, that my five years would fly by and I should ensure that I used my voice in this place to make a difference. I did not believe that those five years would fly by, but they certainly did. Therefore, my advice to any new members who will take it is to make sure that, in this session, they do what they want to do as MSPs for their communities, because that is what we are here for. I wish them all well in that.

This debate offers a great opportunity to highlight the cross-party support that exists for the summer of sport that we are all about to enjoy, and how it could make a real difference. I hope that it will inspire our nation, especially given the pressure that is being placed on Scotland's men's football team as it competes in the 2016 FIFA world cup, as well as on our athletes who will compete in the Commonwealth games here at home in July.

I am sorry and disappointed that, to date, the Parliament has had little or no opportunity to host an event relating to the Commonwealth games ahead of our summer recess. I hope that that can be urgently corrected and that such an event can be hosted for our athletes, to inform MSPs and our communities about the games and to ensure that, ahead of the opening ceremony, our Parliament has welcomed them here. Glasgow 2026 presents Scotland's opportunity to turn a landmark summer of international sport into lasting participation, pride and opportunity for communities across our country.

It is telling and important that all the amendments to the motion, including my own, recognise that sport should be accessible to all people in Scotland, irrespective of their backgrounds or personal circumstances, and also recognise the commitments made to ensure that physical education is supported in schools—specifically, as Jackie Baillie outlined, in relation to the manifesto commitments that we all made on swimming. It is important that we see a timetable for how that policy, which has cross-party support, can be implemented.

As is always the case when countries host major sporting events, there is concern about overpromising, about legacy, and about how sporting events can deliver a positive impact on the health of a nation. However, I have been impressed by Glasgow 2026's organisers and the realistic goals that they have set to date.

For example, the Glasgow 2026 schools programme invites every school and youth organisation in Scotland to get inspired, to get active and to get involved as the city prepares to welcome athletes from 74 Commonwealth nations. The programme is designed to be inclusive and accessible, with flexible activities that can be delivered in classrooms, assemblies, playgrounds and youth settings. School and youth leaders can draw on free, ready-to-use learning resources covering different subjects around curriculum areas, from early years to upper secondary. Organisers of the schools baton relay invited children and young people to design batons and then relay them between classes or schools to enable them to take part ahead of the games themselves.

I hope that, after the games, we will be able to look back at how the sporting stars who will soon become household names across the country inspired our young people, helping to turn a summer of elite sport into opportunities for participation, learning, confidence and wider engagement.

The work that is being done to make these games some of the most para inclusive on record is welcome. Glasgow 2026 will feature 47 para sport medal events, making it the largest integrated para sports programme in Commonwealth games history. Para sport will be fully integrated across six of the 10 sports in the 2026 games, which is a really welcome step forward. They will include para athletics, swimming, track cycling, bowls and power lifting, and also wheelchair basketball.

Finally, I take the opportunity—as the minister did—to pay tribute to, and to thank, the more than 3,000 volunteers who are known as the Glasgow 2026 legends. I met many of them when the

games were last held in Scotland, when we hosted the diving here in Edinburgh. They really helped to make those games a success—that was so welcome, and I know that they will do the same again.

This summer has the potential to truly inspire us all. Scottish Conservatives send our best wishes to all Scotland's athletes who are competing.

I move amendment S7M-00208.2, to insert at end:

"; recognises that sport should be accessible to all people in Scotland, irrespective of background or personal circumstances; recognises the commitments made to ensure physical education is supported in schools, including swimming lessons, and considers that sport in school and in extracurricular activities is the best way to ensure access for all young people; believes that physical education should reflect the sporting opportunities in local communities and local clubs, and considers that investment in sport should reflect the positive impact that it can have in the health of the nation and attainment in Scotland's schools."

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): I call Victor Currie to make their first speech.

16:06

Victor Currie (Highlands and Islands) (Reform): Thank you for calling me, Deputy Presiding Officer. I welcome you to your new place, and I congratulate the minister on her reappointment.

It is a privilege to make my maiden speech in the chamber; I am deeply honoured to stand before members today as a newly elected Reform member for the Highlands and Islands electoral region. I offer my thanks to all those who made our successful electoral campaign possible, including our party director, our leader and the regional chair; all the candidates, activists and volunteers; and, of course, the voters who have put their faith in my party.

I also offer my thanks to all the staff and volunteers across Scotland who took on the role of tellers, for their admirable display of concentration and stamina for hours and hours as they counted votes one by one. They are an often-overlooked group at elections, but their contribution makes our precious democracy possible.

Like other members, I take this opportunity to congratulate our national football team on their qualification for the world cup—we offer them our best wishes for the campaign. I notice that the First Minister is not in the chamber. I wonder if he is sitting by the phone, hoping for a call-up from Steve Clarke for a place in the squad, perhaps in the position of striker—after all, his independence strategy has given him plenty of practice at kicking the can down the road.

In keeping with parliamentary tradition, I pay tribute to all my regional predecessors, regardless of their parties, who have served the region diligently. Although members here will inevitably hold different political views, we can all respect the hard work, dedication and long service that those former members have given to the people of the Highlands and Islands. I step into my role with a commitment to build on their efforts and to advocate for the needs of those communities, and I look forward to spending the next years travelling to every corner of the area to do just that. One thing is for sure: my camper van will not be spending much time on the driveway.

The Highlands and Islands is a region of unmatched breathtaking beauty—from the bustling streets of Inverness and the shores of Argyll to the furthest reaches of our island communities, it is a vast and diverse region. It gives Scotland so much: Ben Nevis, the UK's highest peak; Orkney's rich Viking history and fertile farmlands; the wool industry of Shetland and the Harris tweed of the Western Isles; the best whisky in the world—it is home to four of the five Scottish whisky regions; an encyclopaedia of tartans; and Highland dress itself. The Highlands and Islands give us not only world-class industry and tourist destinations, contributing much to our economy, but much of what we regard as our Scottish culture.

I am delighted to be in the chamber for my first debate, which addresses the Government's motion on sport. I submit that discussion of that area is often overlooked in the ebb and flow of political discourse. Human beings have evolved to be active creatures, and our modern sedentary lifestyles have pulled us away from our natural state. As we have heard, an active lifestyle is an important tool in both the prevention and the management of mental health conditions and long-term physical conditions such as diabetes, obesity and cardiac problems, with all the costs that they bring to the taxpayer, the national health service and patients with lived experience. In the promotion of an active and healthy lifestyle, sport has a huge advantage over other elements of health strategy such as diet changes and habit cessation.

It is really good fun so long as individuals have equal and regular access to a wide range of different sporting activities to try, so that they can find out what works for them and what they enjoy most. It does not work if we simply force everyone to do one sport, or offer only a few; people need accessible infrastructure and opportunities to figure out for themselves where their passion lies

so that they can see the benefits, keep up consistency and improve health outcomes.

I welcome much of what the minister said today—certainly in terms of her intention—and I salute her aspiration and ambition. However, my party's main criticisms of Scotland's 2026 summer of sport revolve around the risk of missing the most vulnerable low-income families due to hidden costs, and the economic instability of creating a one-off funding spike following years of stagnation.

Although we have heard the £20 million of investment being championed as a major milestone, sporting bodies, local councils and anti-poverty campaigners have raised critical concerns about structure. The programme mandates that councils prioritise families who face socioeconomic disadvantage, but critics argue that offering free or low-cost sessions is not enough to guarantee equal access, because there is a worry about hidden cost barriers. Even if a sports session is entirely free, low-income families still face steep secondary barriers, including the high costs of specialised sportswear or equipment if they want to take it on in the long term, and having to use expensive, unreliable public transport to get children to venues. Rural isolation also presents a disadvantage, which means that rural and remote low-income families are systematically sidelined. Although all local authorities have received funding, as we have heard, where localised extended overnight camps take place in, for example, Inverness or Oban, they will be functionally inaccessible to island families or isolated communities if transport links such as ferries or roads are not properly funded and maintained.

There is also a worry about nutritional shortfall. Although some regional programmes, such as that in Dumfries and Galloway, have attempted to integrate free food provision, there is no standardised nationwide mandate to ensure that all children are fed.

There are also criticisms of the long-term funding aspect. National sporting bodies have welcomed the funding injection, but point out that it highlights severe systemic funding flaws. Reform agrees that the initiative merely papers over the cracks presented by years of standstill budgets. Prior to this sudden overall cash boost, sports organisations in Scotland endured five consecutive years of standstill funding. The running on empty campaign led by sports governing bodies highlighted that years of inflation and flatlining budgets have left grass-roots sports facilities critically weak. Reform argues that this package provides a temporary Band-Aid rather than a sustainable financial model.

We face a cliff edge. The funding for the summer of sport is explicitly structured as a fixed, finite pool that is scheduled to run out by spring 2027. Club operators argue that wilfully spiking public interest via major events such as the FIFA world cup and the Commonwealth games will create a massive wave of youth demand that local clubs will lack the long-term infrastructure, staff or funding to support once the campaign ends.

Then we have the issue of volunteer burnout. The rush to roll out a massive, short-term, regionally focused programme relies heavily on volunteer labour and youth leaders. Sports analysts warn that, without sustained long-term funding to recruit and retain paid qualified coaches, this sudden pressure on local volunteer systems will make them unsustainable and it will risk the rapid burnout of those volunteers.

For those reasons, Reform UK has well-founded reservations about this initiative. It involves money that should be used to fund and expand our existing infrastructure and to promote grass-roots engagement and mass participation in order to achieve a wealthier, healthier Scotland. That is the vision of Reform UK, and it is an ambition that should be shared by all members across the chamber. There is a real danger that, in the way that it is currently structured, the initiative will look a lot like fee-free university tuition, and like the help-to-buy scheme that has just been announced, in that it will disproportionately benefit middle-class families at the expense of working-class taxpayers.

I am looking at my remaining allotment of time. Unless the Deputy Presiding Officer is willing to award me a generous, Celtic football club level of added injury time, I should probably come to a close. I will finish by saying this: as a Reform member for the Highlands and Islands region, I will strive to be a robust champion for our communities, always advocating the union as the bedrock of our peace and prosperity, now and in the future.

Let me be clear: if anyone from the SNP—be they a member, a minister, a cabinet secretary or a First Minister—comes to this chamber with fanciful, poorly thought through bills or motions, Reform UK will be here to scrutinise them, challenge them and send them homeward to think again.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): Liam McArthur will make the final opening speech before the open debate.

16:14

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I congratulate Mr Currie on his first speech, and I welcome the minister back to her position, which I

know that she is absolutely passionate about. I also strongly associate myself with Miles Briggs's wise advice at the beginning of his speech.

At the risk of potentially traumatising Jackie Baillie, I vividly recall being in the Nezahualcóyotl stadium on the outskirts of Mexico City to watch Scotland crash out of the 1986 world cup—the last time the competition was played in Mexico. A drab 0-0 draw against 10 doughty Uruguayans heralded our most recent ignominious exit and left me and the tartan army, resplendent in our kilts and sombreros, crying into our Coronas.

I certainly share the mounting excitement of the nation, despite the best efforts of Trump and FIFA to suck every last drop of joy out of the experience. I am alive to the pain and despair that may inevitably be just around the corner, but that mounting excitement points to the potential legacy that the Scotland men's team's success could have. For those of us who are old enough to be guilty of taking world cup qualification for granted, we are now witnessing the joy and disbelief of all those who are under 30 for whom this is wholly uncharted territory.

The Glasgow Commonwealth games later this summer may not have the same novelty factor but, as we have previously seen, it too can inspire future generations to get active in sport. By active in sport, I do not just mean participating as athletes or footballers. Yes, to build a genuine legacy, we need facilities and equipment to be available and accessible, but we need coaches, officials and volunteers, too. It is they who open up opportunities, nurture talent and facilitate involvement.

I saw that at first hand last summer, when Orkney hosted the international island games—the largest multisport event anywhere in the UK in 2025. It was an outstanding success that showcased Orkney at its best with regard to the hospitality, organisation and overall quality of experience for all who were involved—including the splendid Orkney 2025 ties. It raised the bar for sport in Orkney and, no doubt, in Shetland and the Western Isles, too. It highlighted what can be achieved if we provide athletes, coaches and volunteers with the tools and support that they need.

However, it is not just about the elite level; it is about encouraging and inspiring people of all ages and abilities to get involved in sport or physical activity of any kind—for the physical and mental health benefits, the friendships and social opportunities and even just for the chance to shut out the never-ending news cycle for a bit.

Orkney 2025 was positive in so many ways, but seeing Orcadians feel such pride and joy in sharing their home with 3,000 fellow islanders was something that will live with me forever. It demonstrated the true power of sport.

While the island games takes a year off before landing in Faroe next year, there is plenty to look forward to in Orkney for the summer of sport, starting with the junior inter county this weekend. Orkney's young footballers, netballers, athletes, swimmers and hockey players will seek to retain the Stuart cup for a fourth year against their Shetland counterparts, who will be desperate to turn the tables. While competition is always fierce, this unique contest has created lifelong friendships and bonds between our island communities over the past 80 years.

The same can be said of the North Isles sports, now in its 76th year, which will take place in Stronsay later this month. Westray will again be the team to beat—that pains me to say as a Sanday man—though the host, Stronsay, is the reigning champion in the blue-ribbon event, which is the tug of war.

The junior inter county and North Isles sports may not grab the same headlines as world cups or Commonwealth games, but entry is free, travel costs are reasonable and there is little prospect of being left crying into your Corona.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): We move to the open debate. Members who wish to speak should press their request-to-speak button.

16:19

Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): Thank you, Deputy Presiding Officer. I welcome you and your colleagues to your posts. I also congratulate my colleagues Siobhian Brown and Maree Todd on their re-elections, and I welcome Maree Todd back to her sports portfolio—I know how much she loves it.

Ms Todd and I have a common goal, which is to increase the amount of Gaelic that is spoken in the Parliament. I am on my sixth year of Duolingo and, on Friday, this phrase popped up on my screen:

"Is lugha orm poilitigs … is fheàrr leam iomain".

That means, "I dislike politics … I prefer shinty". That is not entirely true. However, those two subjects are linked not only in Duolingo, but in my life. Shinty could be described as the beating heart of sport in Argyll and Bute. It was only after being elected that I experienced the excitement of a shinty match—from the joy of seeing the young players tournament at the Dalmally show to attending the Macaulay cup final in Oban last year—and I look forward to the Camanachd cup and the Macaulay cup in Oban this September. The passion, the camaraderie, the rivalry, the pride of winning, the pain of losing and the togetherness

are all part of life's skills, whether one is playing or spectating.

I am so pleased to hear the minister's fantastic announcement about the joint working between the Camanachd Association and Scottish Golf. My constituent Bob MacIntyre is a great example of shifting from one discipline to the other, having played with Oban Camanachd and now playing on the greens of golf courses across the world.

As I have just said, togetherness and life skills are what we see on a shinty field. That is one of the many reasons why the summer of sport is so important and why I believe that ensuring that there are opportunities for participation in sport, regardless of where you live, is absolutely key. Sport teaches not only life skills, but a healthy way to thrive. The Atlantis Leisure centre in Oban and Lorn and Oban Healthy Options promote exactly that, through their fitness, prehab and rehab sessions. I have heard from young and old about the difference that a focus on swimming, exercise and sport has made to their health and recovery, and it is inspirational. The Happy Wee Health Club in Oban also finds colourful ways to engage young people in sport and fitness.

As the minister said, the summer of sport links clearly with the population health framework. As the minister and Gillian Mackay have noted, physical activity provides opportunities to connect and come together in activities that inspire and motivate.

Sport in Argyll and Bute is inextricably linked to its landscape and seascape. I disagree with what Donald MacKinnon said in his opening speech—my apologies—but Argyll and Bute is Scotland's most beautiful constituency, not just because of the landscape and the seascape but because of the people. I thank them for returning me as their MSP. To serve the people of Argyll and Bute is the biggest privilege of my life.

Two weeks ago, I attended a Surfers Against Sewage event, or, as the schoolkids in Tighnabruaich say, a jobbie-free sea event. I spoke to many people who emphasised how much they valued having the wonderful sea resource on their doorstep, especially as it gives them the ability to exercise and enjoy sport. We have to ensure that we keep our seas as clean as they can be, so that people can take part in paddling at Tighnabruaich, wild swimming in Seil, surfing in Tiree, stone skimming in Easdale, yachting around the nooks and crannies of the coastline of Argyll and its isles, or the international clipper race that is sailing into Oban in July. Those are all fantastic opportunities for us to showcase Scotland, and Argyll and Bute, on the international stage, as well as for us to keep active. We need to continue to invest to ensure that our coastline and waterways are at the highest standard.

I welcome, too, the investment that has been provided for every primary school child to learn to swim. That policy will make a real difference, not only in supporting swimming facilities in our communities but in building skills that will undoubtedly save lives.

For the length and breadth of Argyll and Bute, communities continue to work together to ensure that sport and exercise are accessible. The fabulous Adventure Oban is a community-led outdoor activity charity that supports equal access for all to Oban's natural playground. This weekend, its big bike weekend is returning with lots of fun for all the family. Tayinloan has just confirmed that it will be building a biking pump track—a fantastic example of a village community working together, thinking big and using sport and exercise as the focus of their community cohesion and so invigorating their community.

I will briefly touch on ferries. The ferry timetable can be a barrier to participation in sport for island children. That was raised with me by a group of parents on the fantastic new Isle of Islay ferry. I met Caledonian MacBrayne this morning and pressed home to it that I hope that it, along with Transport Scotland, will ensure that the community voice is heard in future timetable discussions.

I am drawing to a close, Presiding Officer. I started with a Gaelic phrase and I will end with one. It is the final line of the poem "Iomain", written by our Gaelic makar, Peter Mackay, which he penned for the opening of the Shinty museum in Inverness. I think that it rings true for all sports, and especially for the summer of sport.

"Seo e a-nis: nach tig sibh a dh'iomain?"

Okay, then, won't you come and join me in shinty?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): I remind colleagues that there should be no interventions or interruptions on a first speech. I call Colm Merrick to make a first speech.

16:24

Colm Merrick (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): Thank you, Presiding Officer, and congratulations on your election to your new office.

Generations ago, a young man named Patrick left Sligo and crossed the sea to Glasgow. Patrick drove the city's trams, carrying people through the bustling streets of a rising powerhouse. In Glasgow, he met Annie from South Uist—two communities, two traditions bound by love and shared resilience. Patrick and Annie married and raised five children in the heart of the city. One of those children was John. In their house, alongside

faith, education was held in the highest regard. For them, learning was the ultimate deliverer.

John took that lesson to heart and became a teacher—a dominie, in the truest sense of the word. History has a way of moving in circles. John eventually crossed back over the sea to Ireland and fell in love with an Irish lass named Una. Returning to John's Scotland, they began their married life, renting a small attic room in Anniesland in Glasgow. But the pull of home was strong, and Una longed to be nearer her family, so they boarded the literal boat back to Ireland, where for decades John raised the educational bar for generations of young people.

Yet the song of my family remains the same, and its chorus always involves a sea to be crossed. So it was that, one day, Una drove one of her sons to Belfast and on to Larne to catch the boat to Scotland, and I arrived in Glasgow, where I met Catriona from the Isle of Lewis. We fell in love and now, gathered round us, we have our own crew.

That is an abridged version of how I came to be standing here in our Scottish Parliament—a story of chance encounters, packed suitcases and quiet sacrifices across generations and of a long, winding road that has led me to the immense privilege of representing the people who sent me here. They are the constituents and residents of Glasgow Anniesland, whose trust I will work every day to repay.

It enhances the privilege to follow in the footsteps of someone who served Glasgow Anniesland with such distinction. My much-loved predecessor also earned international recognition for his work on nuclear disarmament, including being named in a Nobel peace prize nomination through his leadership of Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament. He was and remains the indefatigable Bill Kidd. [*Applause*.]

Turning to today's debate, this summer represents a unique opportunity. Scotland hosts the Commonwealth games while our men's national football team returns to the world cup stage—just in case anybody missed that. The games will bring together around 3,000 athletes from 74 Commonwealth nations and territories. I have already been in contact with the organisers and look forward to meeting them next week to ensure that the games are a huge success and deliver a lasting legacy for the city and beyond. However, it will not only be the lifting of the world cup or medals at the games that mark success; it will be the legacy that is created.

The offer of free inclusive sporting opportunities for children and young people is particularly welcome. For many families, the cost of participation can be a significant barrier. By removing those barriers, we open doors for more young people to discover a sport that they love, to build confidence, to make friends and to enjoy the many benefits that participating in physical activity can bring. We now know that participation in sport can improve mental wellbeing, reduce social isolation, strengthen community connections and create a sense of belonging. Whether it is a child learning to swim for the first time, a local football club welcoming new members or community volunteers supporting activities throughout the summer, those experiences help build stronger and healthier communities.

I am especially encouraged by the universal learn-to-swim offer for primary school children. Swimming is not only a sporting activity but an essential life skill that can save lives. That is particularly true when we think of the many tragic water-related deaths in the recent UK heatwave. Our thoughts and wishes go out to the families and friends who are affected by those terrible tragedies.

If such initiatives are to create a lasting legacy, we must ensure that today's investment delivers long-term opportunities. I am keen to learn more about how success will be measured, how we will assess whether young people remain active and how we will measure the impact on health outcomes, community engagement and the reduction of barriers to participation. In Anniesland, that legacy will see the new world-class athletics track at Scotstoun stadium being gifted to the city of Glasgow, which will ensure that local clubs and athletes have continued access to a state-of-the-art sporting facility. The stadium is also home to the hugely successful Glasgow Warriors rugby team, which will kick off Scotland's summer of sport this Saturday when they play in the semi-finals of the BKT United rugby championship at Murrayfield. I wish them every success.

The greatest success of Scotland's summer of sport will be seen not in the excitement of a single summer but in healthier, more connected communities for years to come.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): To make a first speech, I call Irshad Ahmed, who has five minutes.

16:31

Irshad Ahmed (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab): In my first speech in this Parliament, I thank the voters of Edinburgh and Lothians East for their trust in me. The Scottish Labour Party has given me a political home. I thank and acknowledge the support of Anas Sarwar, Jackie Baillie and Kate Watson, and the members who supported me.

When I came to Edinburgh 32 years ago, my first job was as a dishwasher in a restaurant. A few years later, my wife and I opened our own shop in Musselburgh. We worked hard. The shop was open all hours. In those early days, it was only us who were running it, often with our young children in a pram behind the counter. The business flourished, and it is now managed by my sons. Running a shop is never dull. You experience the highs and lows of life. We met the most wonderful people in the community, and they are now our good friends. I learned so much from them.

Across the diverse area I represent, there are thousands of stories like mine. The great city of Edinburgh has given me so much. It is the place where I have lived, worked and brought up my family over the past three decades. Our children went on to study information technology, science and law. I want to ensure that all Scottish children have access to the best possible education, which will help them develop into confident and skilled citizens.

Although the Edinburgh and Lothians East region is a fantastic place to live, it also has serious challenges. We should never forget that many people are experiencing very hard times. I know the pressure that many people in the area face. I will do my utmost to speak for them and represent them. I have experienced the pain of seeing loved ones stuck for years on a national health service waiting list. In this Parliament, I will speak up for patients and for their right to get the treatment that they need. I will also campaign for better public health.

That brings me to sport. There is no better way to stay healthy than regular exercise. For me, it is playing badminton twice a week—sadly, my days as a fast bowler are over. However, sport is special because it brings communities and nations together. Scottish Labour wants to promote the health and community benefits of sport across the country and for people from all backgrounds.

This summer, we can celebrate the very best of sport. Like everyone in Scotland, I will be cheering on Steve Clarke, Andy Robertson and the tartan army. We all wish the Scotland team well in the world cup.

Then, this summer, the Commonwealth games will be returning to Glasgow, and the city's sporting bodies are to be congratulated on making that happen. However, Edinburgh will be represented, too, and has hit gold before, famously through Sir Chris Hoy and Allan Wells. I wish all our athletes the very best of luck.

While we cheer on our elite sportspeople, let us not forget the community sports that take place every day. The 2014 games were supposed to leave a legacy, but, sadly, that was not delivered. I hope that the Scottish Government will not miss the opportunity again. The Commonwealth games should be the start of a new focus on promoting sport in Scotland. There should be investment in our community sports halls, swimming pools and pitches, and there should be investment in schools so that every child can live up to their potential. That should be the legacy of the 2026 Commonwealth games: a healthier and happier Scotland where everyone can thrive.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): I call Alyn Smith to make a first speech.

16:36

Alyn Smith (Stirling) (SNP): It is a pleasure to see you in your place, Deputy Presiding Officer.

I am delighted to make my first formal contribution in this chamber in this summer of sport debate. As we heard from our excellent minister, who clearly loves her job, it is about being upbeat and aspirational, celebrating excellence, supporting others and being part of something bigger than ourselves. Maybe there is something in that for all of us to think about with regard to how we do our politics in this Parliament.

If members will forgive a brief indulgence, I note that I am deeply proud to be making my third first speech, because this is not my first Parliament. I was first elected to the European Parliament in 2004—and no, thank you, I do not want to know how old some members were in 2004. I proudly represented Scotland there until 2019, when I was elected to the House of Commons to represent Stirling, my home. I served there for five years during a turbulent period.

I now find myself representing Stirling in this chamber—our national Parliament. I am deeply proud and grateful that the people of Stirling and Stirlingshire kept faith with the SNP and with me, and I am deeply grateful to my campaign team and everyone who supported me.

The only other person to have served in all three Parliaments was Winnie Ewing, the late, great and much-missed original Madame Écosse, so I am an obscure pub quiz question, if nothing else.

I mention that in order to stress to colleagues that, although I am new here, I have 20 years of front-line parliamentary experience. I am used to working across borders and party lines to cut through the chaff—the day-to-day urgent trivia—and get stuff done for the people whom we all serve. The election is over. We are all representatives of the people, and we all have a job to do.

The summer of sport is really important because, goodness me, people need something to

look forward to. I am sure that, like me, colleagues knocked on a lot of doors over the past few months, and the national mood, however we define it, is not good. I have not seen anything like it since the 2009 European campaign at the height of the MP expenses scandal.

There is, at best, a disconnect—let us call it that—between politics and politicians of all colours and the people whom we serve. I do not think that it is a temporary scunner factor; I think that it is a symptom or factor of a much deeper malaise. There is real anxiety out there among the people whom we serve. In a rich country such as Scotland, we can do better than that. In a rich country such as the UK, we can do better than that.

People feel disempowered and fearful about the future. They feel powerless in the face of big macro stuff such as climate change, technological changes and demographic changes. Too many people feel that the system does not work. Too many people feel that the system does not work for them, and I think that we can do better.

The election was a remarkable, resounding, landslide victory for my party, but SNP members know that the job is not over; it is just beginning. We need to rebuild that trust, and we all need to work hard to do so.

For members who would say that the SNP has been in power for 19 years, I say: of course we have, and we take our share of the responsibility for that disconnect. Surely, however, in a spirit of intellectual honesty, we must also admit that we in the SNP have been in power in a devolved context, with partial, limited powers. We have been able to do a lot of stuff, but we have not been able to do everything. That is why we on the SNP benches, along with our friends the Greens—in the biggest pro-independence majority that the Parliament has seen—believe that we need to complete the powers of the Parliament with independence in Europe. The change that people need, yearn for and deserve will not be delivered by the Westminster parties; it can be delivered only by independence in Europe, taking the full powers of the Parliament to serve the people we all serve.

I believe that the people of Scotland have outgrown the devolution settlement that was endorsed in the 1997 referendum. The things that people are most worried about—the cost of living, energy costs, a sluggish economy, our place in the European Union and our voice in the wider world—are all objectively reserved matters, which can only be touched round the sides by this Parliament. We want to complete the powers of this Parliament and ensure that we can act on the issues that people care most about. I say to the Opposition parties that, if they cannot work with us on that, they should work with us in relation to the fact that change is coming, change is here and change is necessary. I did not come into politics to administer the status quo; I came into politics, as did everyone in the SNP, to change the face of Scotland. We all know that change is necessary. Let us all work on that together. Any member of any group who brings forward real proposals in good faith will have a willing partner and a willing colleague in me.

We have a lot to look forward to. As time is against me, I will say simply that Stirling is a place where we take sport really seriously. I represent a lot of people who are looking forward to this summer of sport. Sport is bigger than ourselves; it unites us. There is something for us all to look forward to in that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): I call Steven Bonnar to make a first speech.

16:41

Steven Bonnar (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): Allow me to welcome you to your new place, Presiding Officer.

It is an incredible honour to rise to speak for the first time as the MSP for Uddingston and Bellshill, my home town, in Scotland's national Parliament.

Before I begin, I acknowledge my predecessor, Stephanie Callaghan, and I thank her and her office team for their service to the people of the constituency and indeed to the Parliament. I also thank every person who put their trust in me and the SNP at the recent election. Whether they voted for me, campaigned for me, challenged me on the doorstep or simply shared their frustrations or hope for a better future, I thank them.

Although I have the privilege of sitting here in this magnificent chamber, this seat does not belong to me; it belongs to the communities and the people I represent. From Viewpark to Whitehill, from Uddingston to Bothwell, from Bellshill to Mossend, from Holytown to Carfin and from Newarthill to New Stevenston, these are proud communities, shaped by hard work, determination and solidarity. For generations, we were the beating heart of industrial Scotland. These days, the pits are closed, the miners' rows are gone and the steelworks, the brickworks and the Caterpillar factory no longer dominate the skyline, but the people remain, the families remain, and so, too, do the values that were so prevalent in those lost industries.

Those are the communities that helped build modern Scotland, from the invention of the Wilkie iron plough in Uddingston, which transformed agriculture across the world in the 1800s, to the achievements of two Nobel prize winners, Sir James Black of Uddingston and David MacMillan

of Bellshill. Their contribution to our national story is immense.

From factory floors to the biggest stages in the world, our communities have never been short of talent, endeavour or success. Those values and that success are perhaps nowhere more abundant than in sporting circles. In a debate titled “summer of sport”, I can say with considerable confidence that Uddingston and Bellshill ranks alone as Scotland’s great sporting hotbed. My constituency has produced double Paralympian Michael Kerr, world champion boxer Lawrence Murphy, youth world boxing champion Michael McGurk and many more whose achievements continue to inspire through the generations. We have had European champion runners such as the Bellshill bullet, Tom McKean—who remembers him?—while footballing gods such as Sir Matt Busby, Billy McNeill, Jimmy Johnstone and John Robertson have all held aloft the European cup. Sporting greatness is indeed a forte of Uddingston and Bellshill.

During the election campaign, I spent many months on the doorsteps talking to voters about their priorities. I spoke to workers finishing long, gruelling shifts, pensioners worried about making ends meet, young people wondering what opportunities their future would hold, and shattered parents doing everything that they possibly could to stretch that pound a wee bit further. Although every conversation was different, there was one thing that I heard time and time again—that people felt disconnected from politics and from their politicians.

Too many people feel that decisions are made about them, not with them, and certainly not for them. That must change, and we must be that change, because when this Parliament works well, it improves people’s lives. For me, that is what representing Uddingston and Bellshill will always be about—being accessible, answering the call and helping people to navigate a system that, far too often, feels as though it is stacked against them. It is about standing up for those people who need a voice.

If we in this Parliament are serious about representing people, we must also be serious about listening to them and the democratic choices that they make, because democracy did not end in 2014. For many people—people like me—it simply began then. I cast my first-ever vote in the 2014 referendum at 33 years of age, and I have cast a vote in every election since.

People can support independence or they can oppose independence. In a democracy, both those positions are legitimate. What matters is that people continue to have a voice and that the democratic choices of the people of Scotland are respected. Those very people have just elected the biggest pro-independence Parliament ever. It is time that they were respected.

I am proud of the values that have shaped me and of the heritage that has made me, which were forged in the steel and the coal that powered these nations for generations. I am proud of where I come from and deeply honoured to represent its people in our national Parliament. As Scotland looks forward to a summer of sport and lifting the world cup, there will be moments when millions of us will come together for one cause—in hope and belief in our team, daring to dream about what might just be possible.

That spirit should not be confined to sport. The story of our communities has never been one of limitation; it has always been one of determination, resilience and hope. I believe in the potential of the people I represent, and I believe in the potential of Scotland, too. Every day that I have the privilege to sit here in this Parliament, I will seek to ensure that the people of Uddingston and Bellshill have a voice that is heard, a corner that is fought for and a future that is believed in.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): I call Jack Middleton. You have 10—apologies; five—minutes.

16:47

Jack Middleton (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): I hope it is not 10 minutes.

Thank you, Presiding Officer. I am grateful for the opportunity to address the chamber on an issue that I care deeply about. Those who know me know how passionate I am about sport. I have been a keen runner for years. I had a short-lived career as an amateur rower in Stirling and, although I would strongly question the accuracy of its reporting, a few months ago, the *Daily Record* described me as a gym lover, which led to much hilarity in my friend group.

However, my real love has always been football. I have so many memories tied to the sport. Today, members have retold stories of McTominay’s aerial acrobatics last year, but, for me, 2025 was all about standing next to my dad, watching my local club, Aberdeen, lift the Scottish cup. I remember, as a boy, winning champion street, which was an annual summer youth football tournament in the city. I also remember the heartbreak of losing a schools Scottish cup semi-final. Next month, my old Sunday amateur team, Paisley Saints, will mark the terribly sad passing of our team-mate and friend Richie Fleming with the second charity memorial cup in his honour.

I share those memories and stories to demonstrate that sport—in my instance, football—

builds in young people skills that they will carry for the rest of their lives. Those skills include loyalty, dedication and teamwork, although there are many more to pick from. However, the sad reality is that too many kids will not have the opportunities that I had.

I was not raised in hardship—I did not want for anything—although I was raised by a single mother in a small house. She did not have much, but every year she would get together the annual fees that had to be paid to enable me to play for my local boys club. I will always remember that that cost more than £300 and that carrying the money in an envelope to hand to the coach felt like a big responsibility, because I knew that it was a massive sum for my mum at the time. That was 20 years ago, and the fees for football pitch bookings, referees and tracksuits will have grown exponentially, not to mention the cost of new boots, new goalie gloves or the new football top that every kid wants every season.

The reality for those below the poverty line is that those fees and that kit are unaffordable for one child, never mind for those from households with three or four children. I worry that anything other than the very basic essentials will have to come to an end for the growing number of folk who are living on the margins and struggling to make ends meet.

Although I believe in the importance of organised sport, I appreciate that the beauty of football worldwide is that, at the most basic level, all you need is a ball. That is simply not the case for other sports. At the Paris Olympics, winning Olympians from these islands were five times more likely to have been privately educated than those from the general population. That figure can be even higher at the winter Olympics, because the cost of access to many of those sports is simply eye-watering and I would argue that, in many cases, people need wealth and privilege to have that access.

I therefore whole-heartedly welcome the SNP Government's £40 million investment, which will ensure that this exciting Scottish summer of sport will provide more opportunity for kids. I especially welcome universal free swimming lessons, because swimming is one of the sports that can be most inaccessible to those from deprived backgrounds.

We know that sport can have a positive impact on young people's lives, but those living in disadvantaged communities and in the poorest households still face many barriers to participation. I want to see us go further over the course of this Parliament. I want to see us supporting families with sports membership fees and more help to afford sports equipment. I want us to provide greater funding to drive down the price of booking facilities for youth teams and to work with clubs to improve access for kids to watch their sporting heroes in the flesh. If we do those things, we will secure a healthier and more confident future for the next generation of Scots.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): We move to closing speeches and I call Adam Harley, who is making his first speech.

16:52

Adam Harley (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (LD): As this is my first speech, I pay tribute to my predecessor, Rona Mackay, who served the people of Strathkelvin and Bearsden for a decade. I thank her for her efforts in the community over that time.

This is the first time that the Lib Dems have won this Scottish Parliament seat, but I recognise the excellent local work done over the years by Jo Swinson and my current Westminster colleague, Susan Murray. From Bearsden in the west, through Bishopbriggs, Lennoxtown, Campsie and Torrance to Lenzie, Kirkintilloch and Twechar in the east, each part of Strathkelvin and Bearsden is brimming with history, natural beauty and, most importantly, the very best people. Over the past year, I have had the pleasure of meeting thousands of them. As I said to many of them on the doorstep, I cannot promise to fix everything or to be perfect, but I do promise to work hard, to be centred on service and to bring their voices loudly and clearly to this Parliament. Being elected as the MSP for the area where I grew up and where I am raising my family is an honour and responsibility that I do not take lightly, and I will use the incredible opportunity that I have been given to push for positive change.

It is all about opportunity. Providing young people with the right opportunities at the right time is a big part of why I got involved in politics, and sport often provides a gateway for those opportunities. As we have heard, it has an important part to play in mental and physical health, providing challenge and community. It is important that the summer of sport that lies ahead helps to provide those opportunities at grass-roots level so that all people, from all backgrounds, can access them. To allow that to happen, we must ensure that local authorities are properly funded. The chronic underfunding of local councils has forced them to make cuts for years, with leisure and sporting facilities often the first to be impacted.

Key facilities such as the only diving school in the west of Scotland are under threat of closure right now. Thirteen-year-old Heather Graham from Bearsden, in my constituency, has won a gold medal for diving but will have to give up the sport

entirely if her diving school in Ayr closes. I hope to hear a positive response on that from the minister in her closing remarks.

As we look ahead to the world cup, let us follow the lead of our national team. It was their grit, audacity and teamwork that got them to the world cup in the first place, and I think we could use some of that here, too.

I plan to be really robust in holding the Government to account and in holding power to account. However, in doing that, I will always be focused squarely on what truly matters to the people I represent. They want us to work together to find solutions—they are just not interested in party politics or the political bubble. So many of them are really struggling and have lost faith in politics. They have lost faith in this place improving their lives. They are tired of a political culture that rewards division with attention and punishes collaboration—and I am tired of it, too. We do not have time for all of that any more. We have to focus on fixing things and on getting things done. I know that members across the chamber want to make things better for their constituents, and we should all work together to make that happen.

I will end with a wee story. My late grandfather was raised on a farm on the remote west coast of Ireland. He used to walk to school in bare feet every day. He came to Scotland as a young man and worked hard to build a future for his family. I am sure that it is the same story for many of our grandparents. He bought me the suit that I am wearing when I was just 13 years old. [*Laughter*.] He said that it was far too big at the time—and it was—but that I would grow into it one day. I think that he would have got a real kick out of seeing me wearing it here, in the chamber, today. I dedicate this first speech to him and to my wee three-year-old boy. I hope that I have, in some way, started to grow into this jacket.

Now it is time to crack on with providing a better future for those who will come after us. At the end of the day, that is what all of this is really all about.

16:57

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): This summer is certainly going to be exciting. I hope that it will be non-political and that we can all enjoy it. Even if some people in the chamber do not like football, I am sure that everybody will wish the participants, the volunteers and the spectators well.

I will touch on a couple of the maiden speeches. Irshad Ahmed's speech was excellent. I very much relate to his being a family man but running a business as well and bringing his young children into work. It is lovely to see that we have people in the Parliament who have run businesses and understand the challenges of running a business.

I also pay tribute to Adam Harley. I do not know him, but it is clear that he still fits his suit, because Alex Cole-Hamilton, whom he worked for, kept him very busy running around. Mr Harley made an excellent speech, and he is absolutely right about removing party politics from the topic that we are talking about this afternoon. I was also really touched by what he said about the individual who has such talent but is worried about losing facilities. That stems from the real issue that we see here.

I congratulate everybody who made their maiden speech today.

I was really proud of being a netball coach and umpire at Earlston high school. We had 45 kids in the group, and we used to take them to matches. We went to the Scottish schools cup and played Gordonstoun, which is a renowned private school. Earlston—a state school—came second in the Scottish schools cup. Liam McArthur is absolutely right that the roles of umpire and coach are really important and we should support them.

I pay tribute to Borders wheelchair racer Samantha Kinghorn. She is originally from Gordon, in my constituency, and many of you will know who she is. She is a key participant in the 2026 Commonwealth games in Glasgow. Rather than competing, this time—because she is expecting a baby—she is serving as an official athlete ambassador, having stepped back from racing to start her family, which is fantastic.

Sammi was one of the first athletes to be selected for team Scotland in 2014, and she made her Commonwealth games debut in front of a home crowd. After finishing fifth in the T54 1500m final in Glasgow and improving on that result by finishing fourth at Gold Coast 2018, she secured her long-awaited podium moment at Birmingham 2022, where a nail-biting finish saw her clinch the bronze medal.

My colleague Miles Briggs noted that, to date, the Scottish Parliament has not held a function or event to mark the Commonwealth games. We should recognise them. I realise that it is a new parliamentary session, but we really need to get behind the teams and support the athletes. I hope that the parliamentary staff will consider having a parliamentary event before we go into recess, which is not that long away.

The health benefits of sport have been articulated—Gillian Mackay talked about them.

Although the support for grass-roots sport is welcome, Scottish local authorities are under huge financial pressure and face challenges that are hampering progress towards the goals that are set

out in Maree Todd's motion. The words that she uses in that motion, such as

"inclusive"

and

"physical, mental, and social health"

should not be used without meaning—Maree Todd will know exactly what I mean by that. We should strive to achieve those goals. If we are to seek short-term, medium-term and long-term solutions, we must also ensure that local authorities have financial sustainability.

I see the time, Presiding Officer. I had only four minutes and I am not used to that. We used to be a very effective Opposition—perhaps we still are, because I note that, yet again, Reform has not even lodged an amendment.

If there is a division, the Scottish Conservatives will support every amendment today, and we will support the Scottish Government's motion, as amended, at decision time.

17:02

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): I congratulate all members who have been returned to the Parliament. I thank a number of members who have given their first speeches in the debate. I say to Adam Harley that that suit fits him very well, and I congratulate him.

Alyn Smith is right. We have just been through a really hard election, particularly in Stirling, and we all look forward to some downtime this summer. A summer of sport sounds pretty good to me. For hard-pressed families, the free activities will help to fill those long summer holidays. For some young people, a new sporting dream and ambition will be ignited, or maybe they will learn how to dance the Orcadian strip the willow. Lots of opportunities will be available to get active and to be part of communities.

First, however, we have 15 June. Clearly, all eyes will be on our men's team. It is 28 years since John Collins thumped that goal into the back of the Brazilian net, and 40 years since a teenaged—I think—Liam McArthur sweated his way around Mexico with the tartan army. [*Laughter*.]

Liam McArthur: [*Made a request to intervene*.]

Mark Ruskell: He is exasperated. I give way to Mr McArthur.

Liam McArthur: For the record, while I was in the Nezahualcóyotl stadium, I was exasperated, but I do not think that I was sweating overly.

Mark Ruskell: That is a feat in itself, to be honest.

I return to my speech. The national holiday on 15 June is welcome, but I note that only one council in Scotland is giving staff the day off, and I really pity the teachers and students who will be forced into class having been up the entire night before.

These are important collective national memories, whether someone watches them on TV or they are in the stadium or by the track side. They should be accessible—fans should not be priced out by exorbitant ticket prices or pay per view.

I am really pleased that my colleague Gillian Mackay helped to secure the commitment for free-to-view matches for our national football teams and that she is, today, taking the campaign to the next stage, calling for a price cap on stadium tickets. It is good to see, stateside, the mayor of New York following Gillian Mackay's lead. I am sure that more conversations will take place about exactly how a cap could be introduced.

I welcome what I think will be Government support for the Green amendment today—with backing even from our colleagues in the Conservative Party, too.

Clubs, at their best, are all about community—where no one is left behind, regardless of who they are and what they can afford. Jack Middleton made a very moving speech about his personal experience and the importance of that accessibility.

I pay tribute to the volunteers who power grass-roots sport. They are the people who turn up week in, week out—setting up pitches and tracks, providing taster sessions for four-year-olds through to performance pathways for promising teams, and fundraising for better facilities. They are always there, in all weathers—offering friendly advice, marshalling, providing first aid, and washing the kit. It is the grass-roots scenes, across so many sports, that nurture talent and build that sense of community.

I really enjoyed listening to Liam McArthur talk about the island games. I wish that I had been in Orkney in 2025—I can imagine the excitement and the community building that come from such an event. It would be as exciting as the Olympics.

For my part, I have just spent another slightly terrifying weekend living in a field with my son, supporting him race in the SDA Scottish downhill mountain bike series. The camaraderie and support for people of all ages and abilities at these events make them a wonderful experience to be part of.

For some, there is a part to play, whether that is on a bigger stage or as a future career, in their sport. Across sports, we are seeing an elite

pathway alongside inclusion at the grass-roots level.

The legacy of the Commonwealth games, the world cup and—let us not forget—the Tour de France next year needs to be one in which grass-roots participation is grown through better facilities and more confident volunteers.

As the minister mentioned, we need partnerships to deliver long-term growth. We need to throw open the doors, so that everyone is invited to join the party and get involved in whatever way they feel inspired to.

We also need women's sport to be visible, inspiring and supported, not an afterthought. Jackie Baillie raised an important point about the past 100 years, in which women have been largely denied access to pitches and SFA facilities.

Amanda Lindsay (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Reform): Will the member take an intervention?

Mark Ruskell: I need to move on a little bit.

Nobody should be left behind.

I share concerns with other members, including Jackie Baillie, about the long-term funding issue. We should not need the Commonwealth games to provide the impetus to teach swimming in schools. Alongside Bikeability Scotland training, it should be part of the experience and life development of every primary 6 and 7 child.

Miles Briggs raised an important point. There is cross-party commitment to have swimming lessons in every school. We should get behind and deliver on that.

Steven Bonnar talked about the talent, the endeavour and the success in our communities and how that is epitomised by sport. That is the summer of sport that I am looking forward to. Yes, there is a scunner factor out there, but let us get the positivity back. Let us have a great summer of sport and let us inspire communities and get everybody active.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): I call Jenny Young to make her first speech.

17:08

Jenny Young (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Lab): It is a privilege to make my first speech in Parliament as a representative of the people of Central Scotland and Lothians West.

My sporting career—if I could call it that—began in the early 2000s at Linlithgow Athletic Club, the Irene Langlands Stenhouse school of dance and the Linlithgow tennis club, peaking in the lower reaches of the University of Cambridge tennis leagues. It is safe to say that sporting blues were certainly never on the horizon and, Deputy Presiding Officer, I have stuck with the reds ever since.

I share my region's pride in our historic achievements as the beating heart of Scotland's industries, from shale oil, collieries, the Carron ironworks, fire bricks at High Bonnybridge and Whitecross to the Grangemouth oil refinery and, of course, the Ravenscraig steelworks.

Our brass bands, our gala days—so many of our towns and villages' proud traditions have their origins in the industries that made Central Scotland the industrial powerhouse of our nation through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but our area is more than its past, and I have come here to fight for a better future.

My own working life has mostly been spent teaching French and Spanish in West Lothian secondary schools. Any teaching career, it is safe to say, is the sum of the joys and woes of the young people we spend our days with and our nights worrying about. There was the boy in my French class who could barely read a word of English. He was a native speaker of English, with seven years of primary education in this country, and he was functionally illiterate. Some days, there was a support assistant with him, but with support stretched ever thinner across the school, that became less frequent as the months went on—a boy's life chances diminished by a school system that was going backwards and by the growing gaps in support that saw him falling through the cracks.

It is clear to me that the choices and opportunities on offer to our young people today are narrowed and diminished below what any of us knew and I refuse to accept that this is as good as it gets. I refuse to tolerate blaming these choices on other people in other places. I refuse to endure the constitutional bickering that elevates subjective identity politics above the objective fact that kids in Scotland are a year behind kids in England in maths—why is that?—because that boy and all those children deserve a much better future.

A future can be won where our schools are improving, not sliding down international league tables; where kids struggling with their mental health do not wait years for an appointment; where our colleges are adequately resourced and appropriately joined up with business and the needs of our economy—a future where sporting facilities are enhanced and growing, rather than shuttered by local authorities that are starved of funds by central Government. It is pretty hard to take advantage of a free swimming lesson when there is no swimming pool where you live.

It is never guaranteed that the future will be better than the past. The people of Central Scotland know that all too well. Too many in our region feel left behind by those in politics, those with power and those who know only privilege, but I believe in that better future for all our children and I have come here to fight for them. Thank you.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): I call Jamie Langan to make his first speech.

17:12

Jamie Langan (South Scotland) (Reform): Thank you, Deputy Presiding Officer, and I congratulate you on your new role, as well as the minister on her reappointment and all those speaking in the chamber for the first time today.

It is a true honour to be elected to represent South Scotland in the seventh session of the Scottish Parliament. I know that every member is likely to claim that their area is the best part of our fine country but, from its dramatic North Sea coast to the rolling hills of the Borders and the dairy pastures of Galloway, I would make a strong case that there is nowhere quite like the south of Scotland.

While the wonderful parliamentary staff were providing our induction talks for the new cohort of MSPs, I was struck by just how few people have ever had the privilege of serving in this chamber. Since 1999, only 415 individuals have sat on these seats and debated in this chamber. It truly is a rare privilege that we all have to be here. That rare privilege places an enormous responsibility on each and every one of us. A common theme that many members, new and old alike, have mentioned in their remarks so far in this session of Parliament is the deep sense of frustration and unhappiness that they encounter at the doorstep right across Scotland. That sense of frustration that is felt by hard-working Scots was apparent across the weeks and months of campaigning in the Borders and across South Scotland. People feel that their lives have materially deteriorated in recent years despite their individual hard work; that their communities feel increasingly strained despite the care that they show for them; and that they are governed by a political class that increasingly cannot or will not address those challenges.

I truly hope that, despite our many political differences across the chamber, we can work together to improve the lives of millions of hard-working Scots who have placed their faith in us to just that and that, in the years to come, we can look back on a Parliament that made a meaningful difference—a Parliament of prosperity.

Sport is one of the great defining features of Scottish society. If we were to ask any man or woman in the street who the greatest Scot is, they would almost certainly respond with a sportsperson: Sir Kenny Dalglish; Katie Archibald; the late, great, Doddie Weir. Those people show us the very best of what it means to be Scottish: hard work, dedication, a brilliant mercurial streak and bravery in the face of adversity.

What a great year it has been so far for Scottish sport, with a thrilling Scottish premiership title race, famous six nations victories and now our return to the biggest stage in world football. After 28 long years, Scotland is going back to the men's world cup, thanks to the hard work of Steve Clarke and his squad. That is a truly once-in-a-generation achievement; indeed, it is perhaps a useful reminder to some members in the chamber of what once in a generation really looks like.

Of all the sports that are enjoyed across all four corners of Scotland, football is truly our national pastime, with hundreds of thousands of Scots from all backgrounds and walks of life, including many in the chamber, regularly playing and watching football. Of all the 55 UEFA members, Scotland consistently ranks as the best-supported nation per capita in Europe. From Annan Athletic in the south to Ross County in the north, and everywhere in between, Scots across the country passionately follow their clubs through thick and thin, in a unique bond of love for their community.

However, that passionate support has not always been reciprocated by Parliament and the Scottish Government. From 2012 to 2018, football fans were subject to the onerous Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Act 2012—a clear and targeted assault on the civil liberties of match-going fans. Although the repeal of the 2012 act was very much welcome, it was superseded, at a society-wide level, by legislation in the previous session of Parliament that significantly curtailed freedom of expression across Scotland.

In that draconian environment, law-abiding match-going fans are also currently unable to enjoy alcoholic beverages in Scottish football stadia—unless, of course, they have the privilege of being in a hospitality area. Those two-tier restrictions are not applied to other sports or events, they do little to target genuine troublemakers and they punish regular fans and deprive smaller clubs of a vital source of revenue. I hope that we can work together in the current session of Parliament to reform that area and provide a better match-day experience for those hundreds of thousands of Scots who cheer on their club on a Saturday afternoon after a long week of work.

It is incredibly important to remember that it is not just team or ball sports that make up an

important part of Scottish society. Traditional and country sports are inextricably linked to the cultural identity of rural Scotland, and that is nowhere more apparent than in South Scotland. Whether it be angling in the River Tweed, race meets at Ayr or driven shooting in the Nith valley, country and traditional sports have been enjoyed across South Scotland by generations of families and throughout entire communities.

Towards the end of the previous session of Parliament, a ban on greyhound racing was brought into effect, despite the last greyhound racing track in Scotland having already closed. That suggests an ideological aversion to traditional and country sports rather than an evidence-based and pragmatic approach, focused on continued sustainability, that ensures the highest levels of conservation and welfare. Instead, it is those who interact with Scotland's animals and natural environment daily, and who care for it most, who feel that they may be targeted with similar draconian legislation. I know that many of my constituents in South Scotland and those in rural communities across the country feel that this session of Parliament may see the targeting of their beloved sports, which form the bedrock of their community identity and often play an invaluable role in local economies as an important source of local employment and prosperity that would be very hard to replace.

On the back of what has been such a successful year of sport for Scotland to date, I ask the Parliament to carry on a positive attitude towards the fantastic institutions and traditions of Scottish sport and those who support it. Whether it be match-going football fans or those who enjoy country sports in our rural areas, the many people who make up the fabric of Scottish society should be allowed to get on with their pursuits with fewer interventions from this chamber, and should instead be celebrated for their rich contribution to our identity.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): I call Siobhian Brown to wind up the debate on behalf of the Scottish Government and to take us through to decision time.

17:19

The Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise (Siobhian Brown): Thank you, Deputy Presiding Officer—I congratulate you on your new role.

I thank all members for their contributions today; it has been lovely to hear members speak about the upcoming summer of sports and the opportunities and outcomes that we hope that it will deliver. I welcome the amendments to the motion that have been lodged by colleagues across the chamber, which further emphasise the collective value and importance that we all place in the transformative power of sport in our communities.

I am happy to confirm that the Scottish Government will support all the amendments. However, in relation to the Green amendment, we should be clear that local governments are responsible for funding local facilities such as Aquatec Motherwell, which is mentioned in the Green amendment.

I know that there have been discussions—no doubt there will also be further discussions—regarding the ticketing cap. We absolutely recognise that sport should be affordable and accessible.

Football is the country's most popular sport, and our leagues are the best attended in Europe per head of population. We will continue to work with local football authorities to maintain and grow those levels of attendance and to make football more affordable and enjoyable for fans. The summer of sport is an ambitious and inspiring programme that sits at the intersection of many of my responsibilities as Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise.

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Reform): I am sure that, like me, the minister has really enjoyed this debate about sport. However, I picked up on only two members who actually admitted to currently taking part in any sport: badminton ace Irshad Ahmed and top footballer Jack Middleton. I may have missed some. Nonetheless, will the minister join me in encouraging all members, in this summer of sport, to take part in at least one over the next few months?

Siobhian Brown: I absolutely support that suggestion.

The summer of sport connects to children's rights and services and outdoor play, and to my work supporting looked-after children and young people and those with learning disabilities, autism and neurodivergence. This is not just a sports programme; it is a children's rights programme and a wellbeing programme. Fundamentally, it is about equity, belonging and opportunity.

As we look ahead to what promises to be a truly exciting summer, we recognise that sport has a unique ability to unite people and to inspire the nation, and we are determined to harness that power.

David Barratt (Cowdenbeath) (SNP): As chieftain of Inverkeithing highland games, I want to ensure that the role of highland games is not forgotten in the debate on the motion. Does the minister recognise the cultural importance of

highland games to Scotland's summer of sport? I also extend an invite to everyone across the chamber to attend Inverkeithing highland games on 8 August.

Siobhian Brown: Yes, absolutely. We also need to recognise the importance of highland games; they are not to be left out.

Crucially, activities within this programme will be free, targeted or low cost. That matters because, in the midst of a cost of living crisis, cost remains one of the biggest barriers to participation for too many children and young people. At a local level, we will see commitment in action, with funding distributed across all 32 local authorities, ensuring that every community in Scotland can benefit.

From my perspective as minister, what matters the most is who the programme is designed for. Yes, it is universal and open to all children and young people, but it is also deliberately targeted. The summer of sport will prioritise children who too often face structural barriers to participation: children living in poverty, children with additional support needs, care-experienced young people, young carers and those in rural and isolated communities. That is absolutely the right approach.

When we talk about children's rights, we are talking not only about access in theory but about meaningful, equitable access in practice. That means recognising that some children need more support than others to participate. Inclusion is not simply an add-on in this programme—it is central to it. Although local authorities and national partners still have a few weeks to finalise plans, what we have seen so far has been extremely encouraging.

Across local authorities, national governing bodies and partner organisations, there is a strong and consistent focus on reaching underrepresented groups, creating accessible and welcoming environments, and removing barriers, whether they are financial, physical or psychological. Many of these plans are rooted in communities, delivered in familiar, trusted community spaces and supported by trained and inclusive workforces. That is particularly important for children with learning disabilities and neurodivergence.

Through community-based delivery and partnership with a third sector organisation, delivery will help to create spaces where children can take part, feel included and build relationships. For example, work in Glasgow will include an alternative engagement programme, class to clubs, which is designed as a targeted intervention for identified pupils who are currently disengaged and will use a progressive engagement model that begins with small-group support. The programme will focus on those who are least likely to participate in physical activity, helping to build confidence and create pathways for pupils into school-based and community sport.

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): I am interested in the points that the minister made about the importance of there being facilities in our more deprived communities that people and, particularly, children are familiar with. In the previous session, we in the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee published a report on the use of school facilities, which I know that everybody across the Parliament is keen for us to pursue. Has the minister worked with people on that? It can be expensive to rent some school facilities because of the cost that is involved.

Siobhian Brown: I will take the member's point on board. The detail of the programme is still being developed, but once it has been, I will be happy to share that with the member.

Alongside that, Glasgow Life will deliver a broad programme with a strong focus on removing barriers for care-experienced young people. That targeted support will sit alongside universal provision, ensuring that those who have the greatest need will receive tailored opportunities to engage and thrive. Similarly, in Aberdeen, care-experienced young people will be prioritised by expanding access to free or subsidised opportunities.

The summer of sport will not just deliver activity for young people; it will create opportunities for them to shape and lead it. For example, Youth Scotland is developing proposals to support young people who are facing barriers such as poverty, rural isolation, disability or low confidence. Through its network of more than 600 youth organisations, it will deliver inclusive, informal and locally tailored activities in trusted settings, shaped by young people and with opportunities for leadership and peer mentoring roles. The emphasis on young voices is a strength of the programme.

Because much of the delivery will take place outside, the wider summer of sport programme is also significant from an outdoor play perspective. We know that outdoor activity brings distinct benefits, from mental health to supporting risk taking and resilience and fostering a connection to a place and community.

What I find particularly powerful about the programme is its place-based, partnership-driven delivery approach. Across Scotland, local authorities will work alongside active schools networks, leisure trusts, clubs, community organisations and the third sector to design the programme; it is not a one-size-fits-all model. Local plans will be shaped by local needs.

We are beginning to see proposals that offer universal discounts and free access to existing programmes, targeted outreach into communities and leadership and employability pathways for young people. All that reflects a system that is working together to maximise reach and impact. Importantly, those programmes are being designed with pathways in mind—it will not just be a single-summer experience but a bridge into long-term participation. The investment in workforce and capacity building is vital to that. That matters because the legacy of the programme will not just be for this summer; it will be for the stronger systems and workforce that remain afterwards.

I will touch on a few speeches that were made during the debate. I recognise the first-time speeches and contributions from Victor Currie, Colm Merrick, Irshad Ahmed, Alyn Smith, Steven Bonnar, Adam Harley, Jenny Young and Jamie Langan.

I will also touch on a few points that Jackie Baillie made in her amendment. I acknowledge that there are some concerns regarding the roll-out of national swimming lessons, but we all agree that it is vital for our youngsters to learn to swim—it is a core skill that can save lives. That point was also made by Jack Middleton and Colm Merrick.

A school swimming working group has been set up with the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, which will consider how swimming lessons will be rolled out across Scotland. I know that the Minister for Mental Wellbeing, Public Health, Sport, Alcohol and Drugs will be happy to meet with Ms Baillie to discuss that further.

In her speech, Gillian Mackay raised the issue of sponsorship. We recognise that the Commonwealth games was required to secure sponsorship because it was not given any Scottish Government funding. However, we are working with the organising committee and Team Scotland to ensure that healthy products are promoted wherever possible.

I thank Miles Briggs for his wise words for all the new members. Rachael Hamilton's suggestion about having an event at Holyrood is a good idea; I do not know how it could be organised in the next couple of weeks, but maybe it could be organised after recess.

Colm Merrick asked about the evaluation and monitoring of the programme. An evaluation and monitoring plan has been agreed with partners and it will be arranged through sportscotland. Sportscotland is also contracting an independent evaluation of the fund to evidence the impact of the additional public investment.

Adam Harley mentioned the potential closure of Ayr Diving Club, which is at the only facility that offers diving on the west coast of Scotland. I recently met a constituent who was concerned about that local closure. She told me about her son, who did not have much confidence. She said that when he is on the diving boards, she sees him turn into a different boy—he is on top of the world, and he has all the confidence in the world. That really echoed with me. That decision is for the local authority, South Ayrshire Council, but I know that conversations are ongoing there.

That brings me to my final point. This programme is not about a moment—it is about a legacy. It is about making this summer a summer to remember, but more importantly, it is about creating habits that last, building confidence that stays with young people and embedding participation in communities for the longer term. We want a child who attends a free session this summer to still be active 10 years from now. We want those children to join clubs, become coaches, volunteer in their community club or simply carry a love of movement through their lives.

When I look at the summer of sport, I see a lasting commitment. I see a commitment to children's rights, to equity, to inclusion and also to opportunity. I see a commitment that no child—regardless of background, circumstances or need—should be excluded from the joy, the benefits and the belonging that sport and physical activity can bring. I see a country coming together, across Government, communities and partners, with a shared purpose to make this not just a great summer but a transformative one.

Decision Time

17:32

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): There are four questions to be put as a result of today's business.

The first question is, that amendment S7M-00208.1, in the name of Jackie Baillie, which seeks to amend motion S7M-00208, in the name of Maree Todd, on summer of sport, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S7M-00208.3, in the name of Gillian Mackay, which seeks to amend motion S7M-00208, in the name of Maree Todd, on summer of sport, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: We are not agreed—I knew that this summer of love could not continue for much longer—and will therefore move to a division.

We will suspend for a moment or two to allow access to the digital voting system.

17:33

Meeting suspended.

17:36

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: One or two members are still having difficulties with the voting app, but those members can make a point of order. Everyone else, please vote now.

The vote is closed.

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government (Jenny Gilruth): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app would not connect. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Your vote is recorded. Thank you.

Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I had a problem with my app, too. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Your vote is recorded.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I would have abstained.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. Your vote is recorded.

Sanne Dijkstra-Downie (Edinburgh Northern) (LD): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app would not connect. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. Your vote is recorded.

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I would have abstained.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. That is recorded.

Yi-pei Chou Turvey (North East Scotland) (LD): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
Anderson, Heather (Dundee City West) (SNP)
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire West and Levern Valley) (SNP)
Barratt, David (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
Baxter, Andrew (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (LD)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North) (SNP)
Black, Dawn (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
Bonnar, Steven (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
Bouse, Gary (Falkirk West) (SNP)
Briggs, Miles (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Con)
Brown, Alan (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
Bruce, Holly (Glasgow Southside) (Green)
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Campbell, Kate (Edinburgh Eastern, Musselburgh and Tranent) (SNP)
Campbell, Michelle (Renfrewshire North and Cardonald) (SNP)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
Chou Turvey, Yi-pei (North East Scotland) (LD)
Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh North Western) (LD)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Day, Martyn (Falkirk East and Linlithgow) (SNP)
Dijkstra-Downie, Sanne (Edinburgh Northern) (LD)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Kelvin and Maryhill) (SNP)
Duane, Iris (Glasgow) (Green)
Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
Flynn, Stephen (Aberdeen Deeside and North Kincardine) (SNP)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Con)
Gethins, Stephen (Dundee City East) (SNP)
Ghani, Zen (Glasgow Cathcart and Pollok) (SNP)
Gibson, Patricia (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
Goodlad, Hannah Mary (Shetland Islands) (SNP)
Gray, Neil (Airdrie) (SNP)
Green, David (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (LD)
Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
Hagmann, Katie (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Harley, Adam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (LD)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)

Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen and Cambuslang) (SNP)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Hoy, Craig (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
Kerr, Alex (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
Kerr, Calum (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
Kerr, Stephen (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Kinross-O'Neill, Kayleigh (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Kumar, Simita (Edinburgh South Western) (SNP)
Leask, Kristopher (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Linden, David (Glasgow Baillieston and Shettleston) (SNP)
Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
MacCallum, Morven-May (Highlands and Islands) (LD)
MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
Mackay, Gillian (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Green)
Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh North Eastern and Leith) (SNP)
Manivannan, Q (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
McKee, Cara (West Scotland) (Green)
McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Easterhouse and Springburn) (SNP)
McLennan, Paul (East Lothian Coast and Lammermuirs) (SNP)
McMillan, Stuart (Inverclyde) (SNP)
McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
Melville, Lloyd (Angus South) (SNP)
Merrick, Colm (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
Middleton, Jack (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
Mitchell, Laura (Moray) (SNP)
Moodie, Laura (South Scotland) (Green)
Nevens, Kate (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Oswald, Kirsten (Eastwood) (SNP)
Rennie, Willie (Fife North East) (LD)
Roddick, Emma (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Slater, Lorna (Edinburgh Central) (Green)
Smith, Alyn (Stirling) (SNP)
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
Stafford, Pauline (Bathgate) (SNP)
Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thewliss, Alison (Glasgow Central) (SNP)
Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)

Against

Bannerman, Max (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Beresford, Senga (South Scotland) (Reform)
Bland, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Currie, Victor (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Kerr, Thomas (Glasgow) (Reform)
Kirkwood, David (South Scotland) (Reform)
Langan, Jamie (South Scotland) (Reform)
Lindsay, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
MacDougall, Julie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
Massey, Duncan (North East Scotland) (Reform)
McDade, Helen (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
Offord, Malcolm (West Scotland) (Reform)
Ross, Angela (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Reform)
Schmulian, Kim (Glasgow) (Reform)
Simpson, Graham (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Simpson, Mark (North East Scotland) (Reform)
Smith, David (West Scotland) (Reform)

Abstentions

Ahmed, Irshad (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
Fagan, Joe (South Scotland) (Lab)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)
Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
Long, Joe (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
MacKinnon, Donald (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab)
Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
Sangster, Katherine (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
Young, Jenny (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S7M-00208.3, in the name of Gillian Mackay, is: For 88, Against 17, Abstentions 16.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S7M-00208.2, in the name of Miles Briggs, which seeks to amend motion S7M-00208, in the name of Maree Todd, on summer of sport, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S7M-00208, in the name of Maree Todd, on summer of sport, as amended, be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament welcomes Scotland's Summer of Sport programme, which aims to capitalise on the landmark summer of international sport taking place this year, with Scotland's men's football team competing in the 2026 FIFA World Cup and the Commonwealth Games taking place in Glasgow in July; recognises that it will provide opportunities for children and young people to take part in free and low-cost activities across the country; believes that providing positive, inclusive and inspiring sporting experiences for children and young people is one of the best things the people of Scotland can do to support physical, mental, and social health; hopes that these experiences will encourage lifelong participation in sport, whether through playing, or as future captains, coaches and volunteers across the sporting sector; calls on the Scottish Government to publish a plan and timetable for the provision of free swimming lessons for every primary school child; believes that to maintain participation in the long term, measures such as a £25 ticket cap for away football fans and support for local authorities to keep local sports venues open, including Aquatec Motherwell, are essential; recognises that sport should be accessible to all people in Scotland, irrespective of background or personal circumstances; recognises the commitments made to ensure physical education is supported in schools, including swimming lessons, and considers that sport in school and in extracurricular activities is the best way to ensure access for all young people; believes that physical education should reflect the sporting opportunities in local communities and local clubs,

and considers that investment in sport should reflect the positive impact that it can have in the health of the nation and attainment in Scotland's schools.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Meeting closed at 17:39.

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The deadline for corrections to this edition is 20 working days after the date of publication.

Published in Edinburgh by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

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