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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 25 June 2026

[The Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 13:30]

Oaths and Affirmations

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): Good afternoon. The first item of business is the taking of an oath by our new member. I invite James Alexander Adams to take the oath.

James Adams (North East Scotland) (Con): I, James Alexander Adams, do swear that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to His Majesty King Charles, his heirs and successors, according to law. So help me God.

I, James Adams, depone that I will be leal and haud aefauld allegiance tae His Majesty King Charles, his heirs and aa yon that come efter him. Sae help me God.

The Presiding Officer: James Adams is now the new regional member for North East Scotland.

General Question Time

13:31

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): The next item of business is general question time. Many members wish to ask supplementary questions, so, in order to get in as many members as possible, I prefer short and succinct questions, with answers to match.

Artificial Intelligence Data Centres (Planning Guidance)

1. **Martyn Day (Falkirk East and Linlithgow) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what urgent action it is taking to bring forward planning guidance on AI data centres in order to enable local authorities to fully and properly assess their impact on local communities and the environment. (S7O-00126)

The Minister for Public Finance (Hannah Mary Goodlad): As Mr Day knows, the sector relating to AI data centres is evolving at pace. This morning, I had a round-table meeting with sector and industry representatives to discuss planning. The Scottish Government is clear that, because communities will be affected by such developments, their voices must be central to the considerations. At the same time, it is important that local planning authorities are able to engage in decision making.

The Scottish Government is also clear that any new AI infrastructure should minimise reliance on fossil fuels. We are urgently considering whether more formal guidance is required to help local planning authorities.

Martyn Day: I thank the minister for that helpful and informative answer. Given the scale of live and imminent AI data centre applications, there has been significant focus recently on the environmental impacts. There are encouraging signs that data centres could be district heat ready and that waste heat could be used to warm local homes and businesses. What action is the Scottish Government taking to encourage all applications to include, when appropriate, plans for district heating?

Hannah Mary Goodlad: The extent to which heat can be reused is already a consideration in the determination of data centre planning applications. National planning framework 4 policy 19, on heat and cooling, states:

> "National and major developments that will generate waste or surplus heat and which are located in areas of heat demand, will be supported providing wider considerations, including residential amenity, are"

as Mr Day suggests, taken into account, so that communities are not adversely impacted. It goes

on to state:

"A Heat and Power Plan should demonstrate how energy recovered from the development will be used to produce electricity and heat."

The Presiding Officer: I am looking for shorter answers, to be honest, if we are going to get more people in.

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): Yesterday, I met constituents outside the Parliament who are concerned about the potential impact on local communities and the environment of the energy consumption of proposed AI data centres in Irvine, Bishopbriggs and Hunterston, in my region. At least 24 controversial sites are being considered across Scotland. Does the Scottish Government agree that national guidance would not only assist councils and ensure a consistent approach but ensure that the voices of communities are heard strongly in decision making, as the minister said?

Hannah Mary Goodlad: I am sympathetic to the concerns that Katy Clark has raised. The national mood in this parliamentary session is for decision making to be held and retained locally. I understand that there is a request for national guidance, but that would be a deviation from where we are as a Parliament. However, if the mood of the Parliament is changing, the Government is open to listening, and that is a conversation to be had.

Continuity of Prescribing and Support for Young People with Neurodevelopmental Conditions (Transition to Adult Healthcare)

2. **Steven Bonnar (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to ensure continuity of prescribing, clinical oversight and support for young people with autism and other neurodevelopmental conditions as they transition to adult healthcare services, particularly in relation to the prescribing of treatments and medications initiated in childhood that provide benefit in adulthood, including whether it has issued any guidance to NHS boards. (S7O-00127)

The Minister for Community Care (Alison Thewliss): As is set out in the neurodevelopmental specification for children and young people, a robust transition care plan should be put in place in line with the Scottish Government's transition care planning guidance. Young people should be fully involved in the planning of their transitions to adult services or other services as appropriate to their needs.

In 2018, the Scottish Government published the transition care plan guidance, which describes the standards that are required in the planning of good transitions for young people who are moving from children's services to adult services.

Steven Bonnar: I welcome the work that the Government is undertaking to improve transitions from children's services to adult services. However, one of my constituents has told me that they remain concerned about the continuity of prescriptions, such as those for melatonin, when responsibility transfers between services. Will the minister provide reassurances that national health service boards are being supported to ensure that no young person experiences an interruption to clinically beneficial treatment solely because they have reached adulthood?

Alison Thewliss: I thank Steven Bonnar for his point. Clinical responsibility for prescribing rests with the clinician who is taking on a young person's care, and they must exercise their professional judgment. They should take full account of a young person's prior treatment and clinical history, and they should work collaboratively across services to provide safe and appropriate continuity of care.

I reassure Steven Bonnar that the Scottish Government continues to engage with NHS boards to support the implementation of good transition planning, including joined-up work between children's services and adult services.

Joe Long (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests regarding my former employment at Scottish Autism.

At the 2021 election, one of the key asks of campaigners for new legislation for neurodivergent people was for more systemic accountability through the whole-life journey, including the many life transitions that can create points of need—whether that is from childhood to adulthood, as Steven Bonnar notes, or when people become parents, undergo menopause or reach older age.

The Presiding Officer: Question, please.

Joe Long: There was also an ask for legislation that worked across policy silos. When will the long-promised learning disabilities, autism and neurodivergence bill be introduced, and how will it provide that whole-system accountability?

Alison Thewliss: We are continuing work with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the children and young people's neurodevelopment task force to deliver the actions set out in the implementation review of the national neurodevelopmental specification for children and young people. We have provided more than £2.9 million of additional funding for that.

Alex Kerr (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): I thank Mr Bonnar for asking the question. Does the minister recognise the benefits of a holistic approach to supporting those with neurodevelopmental conditions, such as that of Spark Connections in Larkhall, in my

constituency, which is visiting the Parliament today? It supports young people through learning about animation and film making, and it helps to tackle loneliness and isolation. Does the minister agree that promoting such organisations through social prescription would benefit people across Scotland?

If the Presiding Officer will indulge me, I note that one of the group, TJ, is celebrating his birthday today, so will the minister join me in wishing him a happy birthday?

The Presiding Officer: Happy birthday.

Alison Thewliss: I wish TJ a very happy birthday, and I hope that Alex Kerr is shouting him a cake later on.

A wide range of support and services can appropriately meet the diverse needs of neurodivergent individuals. Effective support is holistic, is needs based and requires a whole-system approach. The third sector plays a hugely important role in that. Organisations such as Spark Connections give young people the opportunity to socialise and explore their interests in a neuro-affirming environment. In recognition of that, we are committed to publishing a national social prescribing framework in order to strengthen social prescribing as a core element of person-centred care.

New Refugee Doctors Project

3. **Q Manivannan (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government what progress has been made in increasing use of its new refugee doctors project, including to support medically qualified refugees from Gaza. (S7O-00128)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Care (Angela Constance): Scotland welcomes refugee doctors and is committed to supporting them in overcoming barriers that prevent them from rebuilding their medical careers. Since 2017, the Scottish Government has provided more than £1.6 million in funding to the bridges refugee doctors programme to support refugee medical professionals in attaining General Medical Council registration. We do not hold information on the country of origin of the refugee doctors supported.

Q Manivannan: I thank the cabinet secretary for that answer, but it will mean little to the family of Mohammed Al-Habil, a paramedic at Al-Shifa hospital, who was killed by an Israeli strike about 10 days ago while filling water containers with his teenage son.

Doctors and paramedics in Gaza are being killed more quickly than any scheme can register them. During the election campaign, the Scottish National Party promised to increase use of the new refugee doctors project, which is meant to help medically trained refugees from Gaza and other places to get registered for work in the national health service. Seven weeks in, is the cabinet secretary able to say how many people that promise has reached? Will the Scottish Government commit to fast tracking it before more of Gaza's medics are killed while waiting?

Angela Constance: I assure the member that the Scottish Government will continue to work with and pressure the United Kingdom Government regarding the role that it has to play in this humanitarian cause.

The bridges project is dear to my heart, given my involvement in earlier iterations of the programme. To date, 60 refugee doctors have obtained GMC registration. I am aware that we could support many more people, so we will continue to work with the programme to understand what more we can do, and we will also increase our expectations of other partners.

Blindwells Housing Development

4. **Paul McLennan (East Lothian Coast and Lammermuirs) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what measures it is taking forward in partnership with East Lothian Council, Taylor Wimpey and Hargreaves, to deliver and expand the housing development at Blindwells, which has been classified as a strategic housing site. (S7O-00129)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice and Housing (Shirley-Anne Somerville): The Scottish Government is committed to working with East Lothian Council and private partners to unlock investment and growth at the strategic site at Blindwells, and we are providing £2.4 million of funding flexibility to support the development of the outline business case.

Developments of this scale, with the potential to deliver more than 10,000 homes, are also central to our work to tackle housing pressures across Scotland. Blindwells could deliver hundreds of much-needed family homes, which could make a significant impact and a positive contribution to meeting local demand and supporting thriving, sustainable communities.

Paul McLennan: The development is of strategic importance to East Lothian and would bring much-needed housing and jobs to the area. What reassurances can investors be given that the Scottish Government will work with them to deliver the project?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: As I mentioned in my original answer, my ministerial colleagues and I recognise the strategic importance of Blindwells not just to housing but to the East Lothian economy. On 25 March, the former Cabinet

Secretary for Housing wrote to the chief executive of East Lothian Council to confirm the Scottish Government's commitment to supporting the outline business case. My officials will continue to prioritise working with the council and others on the project, and we will act in as positive and pragmatic a manner as we can.

Forensic Tagging Spray (Deployment)

5. **David Barratt (Cowdenbeath) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on Police Scotland's review of the deployment of forensic tagging spray, including when it expects a decision on its future operational use. (S7O-00130)

The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Kirsten Oswald): I confirm to David Barratt that forensic tagging sprays can invisibly and harmlessly mark a person, vehicle or property with a unique identification code. The use of such technology is an operational matter for the chief constable, but I confirm that it is being used in different parts of the country, including in the north-east division. He might be aware that it is also to be introduced in the Fife division.

The technology can be used as a deterrent and a forensic aid. Police Scotland has commenced a comprehensive review of its use to consider the potential benefits for prevention, intervention and detection, as well as examining operational issues. The conclusions of that review are expected before the end of the year.

David Barratt: Forensic sprays are just one of the tools available against the scourge of off-road bikes, e-scooters and e-bikes. Those items are already illegal to use anywhere but on private land. However, they are sold openly and without disclaimers. Does the Scottish Government have the power to ban or further regulate the sale of off-road bikes, e-scooters and e-bikes?

Kirsten Oswald: I commend the Cowdenbeath community, who I know are working hard with the police, on their actions. On the point that David Barratt made, the regulation of the sale of those items is reserved. However, we have consistently pressed for greater engagement with the United Kingdom Government, so that we can work together to address this kind of vehicle-related crime. That includes calling for progress on the registration of off-road vehicles. Unfortunately, progress so far has been limited, but we will continue to press for further action.

That complements the work that Police Scotland is doing through its campaigns to improve awareness of where and how such vehicles can be used responsibly, alongside the steps that responsible retailers should be taking.

I assure David Barratt that we will continue to press the UK Government to put the registration of off-road vehicles in place as part of managing safe and responsible use.

Knife Crime Prevention Strategy

6. **Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government when it plans to renew its strategy on preventing knife crime, particularly among young people. (S7O-00131)

The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Kirsten Oswald): I am grateful to Pauline McNeill for asking that important question. A new strategy to prevent violence is being developed with key stakeholders, including the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit, which will be published later this year. The strategy will aim to preventing violence from happening in the first instance and will focus on reducing further harm in those instances when it occurs.

The principles of the Scottish Government's violence prevention framework remain embedded in our funded activity for 2026-27. We are providing more than £2 million this year to organisations to take forward a range of preventative actions, which means that support for that activity totals more than £8 million since 2023. Members may have heard the Cabinet Secretary for Justice note that he is willing to explore all options in that regard.

Pauline McNeill: This month, three teenagers were convicted of murdering Kayden Moy at Irvine beach last May. That is just one example. In that case, the superintendent, Graeme Gallie, said that

"violent crime among young people is falling"

but that

"weapon carrying is on the rise."

That is the point that the Scottish Government needs to think about in its strategy. The superintendent also said:

"We have through our stop and search activity noticed that weapon-carrying is on the increase, especially amongst teenagers."

Of course, we know that some teenagers carry a weapon because they want to feel safe.

I have had some conversations with the legal profession—

The Presiding Officer: Please ask a question. We are trying to get a lot of people in here, and the idea is to ask questions and get answers.

Pauline McNeill: I am trying to get across a substantial point. I want to give the background—

The Presiding Officer: I do not want the background; I want a question, please.

Pauline McNeill: I have to get a chance to set the context, but, okay, I will ask the question.

Has the Government spoken to the legal profession, which has defended boys, about how we can take a different approach to explain to young people the implications for their lives? I am really asking the Scottish Government whether it might need to think about a refresh of its policy.

Kirsten Oswald: I appreciate the importance that the member is placing on this issue. It is a matter of concern to all of us. We are all equally invested in making sure that the prevention focus that the Government has at the heart of its work is absolutely embedded in everything that we are doing in this place.

I have spoken about the new strategy that is being developed. Obviously, we still have the existing strategy. I add that the vast majority of young people are not engaged in the behaviour that we are concerned about, but we need to have a focus on how we prevent it occurring.

As I indicated earlier, the cabinet secretary has stated in the past week or so that he is willing to look at all options. That would include, if appropriate, a knife amnesty.

Dawn Black (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): Ensuring that Scotland's communities remain safe places to live in is absolutely crucial, which is why we must invest in early intervention to target those who are at risk of engaging in crime. Can the minister advise how that is reflected as a priority in the Scottish Government's approach to tackling knife crime?

Kirsten Oswald: I am grateful to Dawn Black for her focus on the vital importance of our communities being and feeling like safe places to live in. We know that the consequences of knife crime can be devastating. That is why we continue to invest in violence prevention programmes and, in particular, in early intervention programmes that are aimed at children and young people. Education programmes on the danger and unacceptability of carrying a knife, such as YouthLink Scotland's No Knives, Better Lives initiative, have provided information to hundreds of front-line practitioners who are particularly engaged with young people.

Of course, there are consequences when offences are committed, but the final element of our approach is sustained school and community engagement with young people, for instance through Police Scotland's youth volunteers, to ensure that we have a focus on prevention and creating responsible citizens.

Stephen Kerr (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Why have ministers not delivered the level of proactive policing that is needed to disrupt knife carrying before lives are even put at risk instead of relying on investigations after another incident has happened?

Kirsten Oswald: I am grateful to Stephen Kerr for his question, but I point him to some of the previous answers that I have given. There needs to be a holistic approach to this very serious issue, and I have outlined significant elements of the prevention focus that is a crucial part of our approach. Dealing effectively and sustainably with this issue will take prevention as well as detection, consequences and education.

New Railway Stations

7. **David Kirkwood (South Scotland) (Reform):** To ask the Scottish Government, following the First Minister's commitment on 26 May regarding the opening of new railway stations, when it will publish details of the potential locations and their development timetables. (S7O-00132)

The Minister for Business and Fair Work (Tom Arthur): As the First Minister set out, the Scottish Government will invest in essential infrastructure across Scotland, including new train stations and ongoing electrification of our rail network. We will advance consideration of a new railway to Ellon, Peterhead and Fraserburgh, and are currently examining the case for a link from Tweedbank to Carlisle. We will also deliver a station at Winchburgh, as is set out in the 2026-27 budget. We are committed to improving Scotland's rail network, as is clearly demonstrated by our delivery of a publicly owned, modernised rail service with improved reliability and accessibility.

David Kirkwood: Given the 2028 opening of the River Tweed trail—the long-distance path that will start in Moffat, the jewel of the south, and run 113 miles to Berwick-upon-Tweed—and the probable extension of the Clydesdale way into Moffat a few years later, it is likely that more than 300,000 additional cyclists and walkers will visit the town annually, putting a huge strain on its ability to cope with road traffic.

Will the minister work with me to urgently advance the Beattock Station Action Group's plan to reopen what could be one of the busiest small stations on the network?

Tom Arthur: I am aware of the member's particular interest. I am advised that Transport Scotland officials responded to the South West of Scotland Transport Partnership in June 2023 to confirm that the outcome of its review of SWestrans's Beattock and Moffat transport appraisal report was that a robust business case had not been made for a Beattock station to be progressed further in the development process. Although I commend the work done by SWestrans, the action group and the local community.

SWestrans's own transport appraisal report clearly acknowledged, for example, that the option of a rail station at Beattock simply did not "stack up" from an economic perspective. I appreciate the member's point.

Craig Hoy (Dumfriesshire) (Con): Given the fragility of bus services across Dumfriesshire, will the minister commit the cabinet secretary, who is overseas, to a meeting with me, so that I can reinforce the case for a station at Beattock, which is now increasingly vital?

Tom Arthur: I appreciate Mr Hoy inviting me to compel the cabinet secretary, but I would be more than happy to relay the member's request to the cabinet secretary.

Accessible Vehicles and Equipment Scheme

8. **Laura Moodie (South Scotland) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the operation of the accessible vehicles and equipment scheme, including whether any of the changes to the United Kingdom Motability scheme, such as reduced mileage allowances, increased excess mileage charges and changes to lease conditions, will apply to people using the scheme in Scotland and, if so, when. (S7O-00133)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice and Housing (Shirley-Anne Somerville): The Scottish Government has been working closely with Motability since March, and its notification of changes from 1 July in England, Wales and Northern Ireland—the 1 July commencement—is not set to apply in Scotland. Those changes by Motability are a direct consequence of the UK Government's decision to remove tax exemptions for Motability vehicles in the November 2025 budget. Since that announcement, I have raised concerns with UK Government ministers and Motability, particularly for customers living in rural and island communities. Our discussions with Motability have focused on understanding how the removal of those tax exemptions might affect our accessible vehicles and equipment scheme, and customers will be notified about any changes as soon as possible.

Laura Moodie: Does the cabinet secretary recognise the distress that is being caused to constituents, including a disabled veteran in my region, by the continued uncertainty around the scheme? Will the Scottish Government commit to a clear timetable and consultation process so that people in Scotland are not left in limbo about a service that is critical to their independence, access to work and family life?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I recognise that distress, and that is exactly why I raised the issue with United Kingdom Government ministers, who do not appear to have looked at it at all before they made their decision in the most recent budget.

I commend Motability for its willingness to work with the Scottish Government and to not put the measures in place from 1 July. Motability will continue to work with the Scottish Government to see what can be done, because it also recognises the distress and inconvenience that the situation is causing.

I reassure the member that the reason why the changes are not happening on 1 July is that Motability is keen to work with the Scottish Government to ensure that we are doing as much as we can to support those Motability customers. That reassurance is important because, as I said, I very much recognise the distress that has been caused by the UK Government's budget decisions.

Traveller Community Facilities

9. **Kate Nevens (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it will take to provide sanitation facilities for the Traveller community living on land that it owns in Granton, Edinburgh. (S7O-00134)

The Minister for Equalities and International Development (Simita Kumar): We expect local authorities to take the lead in responding to unauthorised encampments, including consideration of welfare needs, such as access to sanitation facilities. The Government is fulfilling its legal obligations as landowner by taking steps to secure the clearance of unauthorised encampments.

We recognise the significant health and safety risks that those on the site and in the local community face. We will continue to engage with partners, including the local authority.

Kate Nevens: Will the Scottish Government also look to address the ongoing issue of fly-tipping on the wider site, which is causing distress to local residents and is being incorrectly attributed to Traveller communities?

Simita Kumar: It is crucial to point out that fly-tipping is a criminal offence and that local authorities have enforcement powers to address it, alongside wider action at national level to reduce illegal dumping and protect local environments. It is a local authority responsibility, but we will continue to work with local authorities to get waste uplifted.

Community Cohesion and Resilience

10. **Colin Beattie (Midlothian North) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the importance of community cohesion and resilience, including the role that local galas play in promoting this. (S7O-00135)

The Minister for Equalities and International Development (Simita Kumar): I thank Colin Beattie for his important and relevant question.

Community cohesion remains a core priority for the Scottish Government, recognising that trust, connection and inclusion underpin resilient communities and a flourishing Scotland for all. Gala days and local celebrations showcase communities at their very best. They bring people together in inclusive and welcoming spaces to build relationships and celebrate our shared identity.

Colin Beattie: Does the minister agree that local galas, many of which have their roots in historic mining communities, continue to play an important role in modern society through preserving cultural traditions, including pipe bands, and by bringing together people of all ages and backgrounds?

Will she join me in celebrating the galas held across my constituency of Midlothian North as excellent examples of communities coming together at a time when community cohesion is more important than ever?

Simita Kumar: I absolutely agree with Colin Beattie. Celebratory events bring local communities together and will always play a vital role in modern Scotland. They are a powerful expression of community spirit, bringing people together to celebrate their local areas and to share a sense of belonging. I absolutely join Colin Beattie in welcoming the gala events in his constituency.

Jenny Young (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Lab): Tomorrow, people in Bo'ness will come together for the most important day in the town's calendar, the Bo'ness fair. There has long been a friendly rivalry between my home town of Linlithgow and neighbouring Bo'ness, so, in that spirit of community cohesion, will the minister join me in wishing queen elect Holly, the full retinue from Grange primary school and the whole town a really successful fair day tomorrow?

Simita Kumar: I thank Jenny Young for her supplementary question. I will not comment on the rivalry between Bo'ness and Linlithgow, but I welcome the celebration in her local community.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you very much, colleagues. That concludes general question time for today.

First Minister's Question Time

Party Leaders

13:59

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): The next item of business is First Minister's question time for party leaders. It will be slightly different this week, because question 1 is from Alex Cole-Hamilton.

Early Release of Prisoners (Reoffending)

1. **Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh North Western) (LD):** I am sure that all members will join me in expressing solidarity with Scotland's Muslim community after the brutal and unprovoked attacks on the streets of Edinburgh last weekend. That community's response to those attacks has not been one of violence or revenge; it has been to make a plea for tolerance and understanding. In a society in which tolerance and understanding feel increasingly rare, we would all do well to listen to them. [*Applause*.]

New figures show that, last year, the number of violent crimes was up by 4,000 incidents and the number of crimes of dishonesty was up by 7,000 incidents—of course, one of those crimes has dominated the front pages this week. Even though, in recent days, everyone has been focused on Scotland's prison population growing by one inmate, I want to ask about those who are leaving our jails. All told, more than 1,400 inmates have been let out of prison since the early release scheme began, and that is because our prisons are bursting at the seams. However, that is not a strategy and it will not protect the public. How many of the inmates who were released early went on to reoffend, and how many of them are already back behind bars?

The First Minister (John Swinney): I associate myself unreservedly Mr Cole-Hamilton's comments about the feelings in the Muslim community. On Monday, I visited the Broomhouse mosque along with Simita Kumar and the Annandale Street mosque in Edinburgh with Ben Macpherson. Of course, the Broomhouse mosque is twinned with the Blackhall mosque, which I think is probably in Mr Cole-Hamilton's constituency—if not, it is very close by.

The feeling of unease in the Muslim community is palpable. As I indicated in my answers on Tuesday, I met the young men who were the victims of last Friday's attacks, and my heart goes out to them for the trauma and physical injury that they have suffered. I reiterate my absolute whole-hearted commitment to give the leadership that is needed in Scotland to ensure that we live in a tolerant and inclusive country at all times.

On the question about the prison population, as members will be aware—the Government has been very transparent with the Parliament over the course of the past two and a half years—the prison population has been rising significantly. With parliamentary consent, the Government has introduced measures that have resulted in the early release of certain prisoners, although there are significant exemptions in place. Later this afternoon, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice will lead a debate on the prison population and our strategy to respond to the sentencing and penal policy commission report that we received before the election.

I do not have the details about reoffending in front of me, but I am happy to write to Mr Cole-Hamilton on that point.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: We can be sure that the number is not zero. For as long as we do not have a proper strategy on prison capacity, rehabilitation and clearing the court backlog, early release will be a revolving door, with people going in, coming out and going back into our prisons. Our justice system is in crisis, so we need a strategy. The Lib Dems will play a part in that, but we also need to use the tools that we have available right now.

Sexual crime is at the highest level since 1971, a rise that Rape Crisis Scotland describes as "shameful" and "sharp". Many of those assaults will have been committed by a partner, yet the domestic abuse protections that the Parliament agreed to five years ago are still not in place. When will the First Minister's Government stop dragging its feet, act on the will of the Parliament and restore the public's faith in our broken justice system?

The First Minister: I am advised that the figures for the proportion of people who returned to custody were 13 per cent in the first tranche of the prisoner release scheme and 5 per cent in the second tranche. That is not quite the same issue that Mr Cole-Hamilton put to me, but I will furnish him with more details about his question.

I share his concern about the reporting and pursuit of sexual crime, because no woman should be subjected to sexual crimes and domestic violence, and the Government has passed legislation to address those issues.

There has been a significant increase in the reporting of sexual crime and domestic violence, and there have been substantial increases in prosecution, which is one of the factors contributing to the high prison population. Although not all the measures that were passed by the Parliament have been commenced, I do not think that it is a fair characterisation to say that the Government has been dragging its heels. I assure Mr Cole-Hamilton that the Government is entirely focused on ensuring that women and girls are protected in our society and that, as the recently retired Lord Advocate demonstrated, we have a front-footed approach to ensuring that sexual crime is pursued. That will always be the case for the Government.

SNP Finances

2. **Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con):** I begin by congratulating Douglas Lumsden on his election as MP for Aberdeen South, and I welcome our new MSP colleague, James Adams, to Holyrood.

Former members of the Scottish National Party's audit and finance committee are also here today. At the height of Peter Murrell's crime spree, Allison Graham and Cynthia Guthrie raised concerns. Nicola Sturgeon ordered them to be quiet and John Swinney assured them that there was no problem. The new Minister for Victims and Community Safety tried to bully those whistleblowers into silence. They back an inquiry because their testimony proves beyond any doubt that John Swinney and others enabled Peter Murrell's crimes. Will he apologise to them for his central role in the SNP scandal?

The First Minister (John Swinney): First, I congratulate Douglas Lumsden on his election to the House of Commons. It will be an exciting moment for him, and I wish him well in his arduous responsibilities, particularly in tabling written parliamentary questions. [*Laughter.*] I extend a warm welcome to James Adams and express my apologies that I was not here, as I should have been, for his swearing in—I was detained on other Government business. I wish him well in his parliamentary engagement on behalf of the people of the north-east of Scotland.

I have apologised to members of the Scottish National Party for the events that have affected the party's finances and I reiterate that apology today. The comments that Russell Findlay makes about me are baseless—utterly and totally baseless—but we have become accustomed to that from Russell Findlay.

Russell Findlay: As expected, there is no apology to the whistleblowers. The truth is that Peter Murrell should never have been free to commit those crimes. Members of the SNP's finance and audit committee blew the whistle, but they were bullied into quitting after being refused access to basic information. Twice, John Swinney went on the BBC to say that his party's finances were completely sound. He was at the heart of the cover-up then and now and that is why he is terrified of an inquiry: John Swinney, the king of the SNP cover-up, is desperate to cover his own back. Is that not the simple truth?

The First Minister: Russell Findlay is going on about the need for an inquiry into all those issues. This particular case must be the first time in living memory that Russell Findlay, who has championed the interests of victims, wants there to be an inquiry into the victim. To give Mr Findlay reassurance about the issues that he is concerned about, I simply say to him that I have addressed the issues with the SNP's finances and the SNP has strong governance in place.

I think that Russell Findlay should pay slightly more attention to some of the things that are being said about him. In the newspapers this morning, a much respected—[*Interruption*.]

The Presiding Officer: Excuse me. Let us hear the answer to Mr Findlay's question.

The First Minister: A much respected former Conservative MSP, Edward Mountain, described Russell Findlay as a "disaster" and his leadership as "catastrophic"—as we have just seen. [*Interruption*.]

The Presiding Officer: Please allow the First Minister to answer. Quieten down.

The First Minister: He called out Russell Findlay's

"robotic delivery and … lack of empathy",

and said that he thought that Mr Findlay would

"consign the party to the wilderness".

On the basis of the Scottish parliamentary elections, Mr Findlay is well on the road to the wilderness of Scotland. [*Interruption*.]

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): Shameful deflection.

The Presiding Officer: Sorry, Mr Carson? Can we allow the next party leader to ask a question? Thank you.

Hyperscale Data Centres

3. **Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Green):** Since we raised the issue of hyperscale data centres with the First Minister last week, more than 6,000 people have written to him to back the Scottish Greens' call for a moratorium. Hundreds of those people gathered outside the Parliament yesterday to make their voices heard.

Communities are rightly worried about the local environmental impacts and the massive strain on our energy system that approving such applications could bring. António Guterres, secretary general of the United Nations, has now joined the call, saying that artificial intelligence data centres are

"hungry for land, water and power"

and calling for every major AI company to

"publicly disclose the full environmental impact of its systems".

Will the First Minister stand with communities across Scotland and the head of the UN in taking on big tech, or will he continue to allow a free-for-all on hyperscale data centres?

The First Minister (John Swinney): As I said last week, I understand the concerns about the environmental impact and the impact on energy resources that have been raised here, which emerge from the proliferation of applications for hyperscale data centres. I totally understand those concerns, as I made clear last week, and I have been reflecting on last week's exchanges and looking further at the issue. I am giving active consideration to whether the Scottish Government should provide planning guidance to balance the rapid expansion of hyperscale data centres with national energy and climate goals, which are vital to our future prosperity.

Gillian Mackay: I am pleased to hear that the First Minister is considering that, because councils are saying that they do not have the necessary guidance to decide on the megaplans. Fife Council has confirmed that the Scottish Government is looking at whether an environmental impact assessment is needed for the Auchtertool application, because that is not clear enough from existing guidance. That comes on top of City of Edinburgh councillors saying that they cannot make a decision on local applications until the Scottish Government comes up with a definition of what exactly a green data centre is. If the First Minister is considering a pause, what will be the timescale for that to ensure that we can take an overview of the applications?

The First Minister: The first thing that I must say is that I have to compartmentalise my comments and not comment on the Auchtertool application, because it is live.

I appreciate the urgency of the general policy elements of the question, because a number of applications are now being considered by planning authorities. My view is that, given the concerns that have been expressed by planning authorities, the Government has to be responsive to the issue. As I rehearsed last week with Mr Greer, a careful balance has to be struck between the extent and specificity of national guidance and the discretion that is available for local decision making. If that balance is not correct, the Government must examine it.

I give a commitment to Gillian Mackay that that will be undertaken as a matter of priority by the Government. Planning authorities will hear what I am saying in the Parliament today and will be able to reflect on my comments.

Gillian Mackay: I appreciate the First Minister's response. Local issues aside, the most significant impact of the data centres is their combined energy use. If all 24 applications are approved, they will use up to one and a half times the peak energy use of the whole of Scotland. If it is the Government's position that councils should be able to make the planning decisions locally, I note that they cannot. How are we supposed to possibly get a handle on the combined energy impacts? How many do we have capacity for? At the moment, we simply do not know.

Councils cannot make those decisions in a co-ordinated and planned way without the Scottish Government stepping in. The Government has the responsibility to provide councils with guidance and communities with certainty, and they need the pause that we are asking for. While the guidance is being considered by the First Minister, will he announce a pause on applications?

The First Minister: Gillian Mackay asks the Government to preside over two very different things. On one hand, she asks me to enable local authorities to take decisions that will be cognisant of and compatible with the country's energy requirements. However, she expects local authorities to do that in a co-ordinated and organised fashion around the whole country. Those two things are not possible at the same time. That is why I must explore whether it is appropriate for such decision making to be undertaken at a local level, given the scale of the developments involved.

For example, when it comes to large-scale renewable energy projects, when an application is at a certain level or scale, it automatically defers—it is not called in—to the Government. What has been raised is a fundamental reshaping of the planning policy of our country and the way in which our decisions are taken. I am prepared to consider that and contemplate it—I am trying to give answers that are as helpful as I possibly can be on the question—because I recognise the public concern. I assure Gillian Mackay that all the issues about local and national decision making and the implications for energy use will be considered fully in the exercise that I am prepared to undertake.

Post-school Education and Skills

4. **Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab):** Before I begin, I join others in condemning the appalling anti-Muslim attack in Edinburgh. No Scot should live in fear and every Scot should live in safety. Our thoughts are with those who were injured and with the wider Muslim community. I put on record my thanks to all the emergency services that responded so quickly and effectively.

We should say loudly and clearly from this Parliament and across the country that an attack on one—whether it is one individual or one community—is an attack on all of us and that hate has no place in our Scotland. [*Applause*.]

This week is armed forces week. I thank all those who have served, and continue to serve, to keep our great country safe.

Today, Audit Scotland published a damning report on the Government's progress with the reform of post-school education and skills. It says that the

"sector faces significant challenges",

that the Government

"lacks a clear plan",

that reforms have

"not been adequately resourced"

and that there is a risk that it

"will not achieve the intended outcomes."

In 2022, Audit Scotland concluded that the Scottish National Party Government had

"not provided the necessary leadership"

on skills reform. Four years on, not much has changed. That has consequences because, every year that passes, more pupils leave school without the opportunities that they deserve. Does John Swinney accept the findings of the new report and can he say how many more cohorts of young people will be let down before the Government finally gets its act together?

The First Minister (John Swinney): I associate myself entirely with the comments that Mr Sarwar made about the Muslim community and the necessity for all of us to stand together in the face of the spreading of hate in our society. In the disputatious world of politics, I am glad—and not in any way surprised—that Mr Sarwar and I are in exactly the same position on that question.

I, too, pay tribute to the members of the armed forces for the service and commitment that they give. We have a parliamentary event on Saturday; that is also the occasion of armed forces day. I commend everyone who will be involved in armed forces day commemorations around the country.

I welcome the report from Audit Scotland, because it is important that those vital issues are the subject of active debate. Since the report from several years ago was published, the Government has presided over the passage of legislation to rationalise that area of activity. Work is under way to transfer the responsibility for the funding of further education student support from the Scottish Funding Council to the Student Awards Agency Scotland. There has also been strong progress in skills planning, with the introduction of a new model for skills planning in Scotland and the

Scottish Government moving into a leadership role. That was proposed by James Withers and came out of the legislation. We have also begun work on the post-school education and skills reform programme, which commenced in January 2026, to address many of the issues raised by Audit Scotland.

One of the key outcomes is about the destinations for young people when they leave school. On the most recent figures available, 93.5 per cent of young people were in a positive destination, which is an increase from 93.1 per cent in the previous year and is the joint highest figure since records began. Although there are issues in the Audit Scotland report that must be addressed, the Government is pleased that the general position of our young people on leaving school and going on to a positive destination—which is, surely, the most important measure of the exercise—is a strong one.

Anas Sarwar: It is important that we measure where our young people are not weeks or months after they leave school but years afterwards, because that is what impacts on their life outcomes. Our young people are the future of our country, so they must be supported to achieve their ambitions. That means no one right path after school—whether it be university, college, an apprenticeship or work.

However, that is not the reality under the SNP Government. Shockingly, Scotland has one of the highest rates of young people not being in work, education or training. It is as many as one in six. That is not helped by the SNP Government's having cut 20 per cent in real terms from college budgets in the past five years and having failed to meet its promises on apprenticeship numbers. The data for 2025-26 shows that apprenticeship starts fell below 25,000, which is the lowest number for more than a decade, excluding the period of the pandemic.

If we are serious about ensuring that every young person has a chance to succeed, the system has to change. Will John Swinney commit today that every young person who is qualified for an apprenticeship will have a guarantee of being able to access one?

The First Minister: Mr Sarwar raised a couple of points. In the budget that has just been put into practice, the Government increased core college funding by 10 per cent, to £764 million. We have recognised some of the financial challenges that exist in our college sector.

On apprenticeships, we are providing £198 million a year to support 25,500 new modern apprenticeships, 5,000 new foundation apprenticeships and more than 1,200 new graduate apprenticeships. That funding also supports more than 39,000 modern apprentices who are already in training. In our manifesto, we committed to increasing the number of apprenticeships to 150,000 over the parliamentary session.

I am a huge supporter of apprenticeship programmes. With foundation apprenticeships and graduate apprenticeships, the Government has brought forward important reforms that create new and successful pathways for young people. I am determined to make sure that every young person has that desirable pathway for their future.

Anas Sarwar: The measure of success is whether young people get the opportunities that they deserve and whether our businesses and the economy have the skills supply chains that they need. According to the Open University, more than half of Scotland's employers say that they have a skills shortage. Many of those businesses will pay the apprenticeship levy. The proceeds of that go to the Scottish Government; however, the SNP does not currently ring fence it to spend on skills.

That must change. That money could be spent on funding new apprenticeships for key sectors and on creating a clearing system for colleges and apprenticeships to help young people to find opportunities. In what is armed forces week, it could be used to match the United Kingdom Labour Government's commitment to fund and create two defence technical excellence colleges in Scotland.

The First Minister could make those commitments right now. We need to get serious about delivering a modern skills system that meets the needs of Scotland's young people. Will the SNP Government not hide behind process but, instead, focus on delivery? It is time that we had a Government that matched young people's ambition with some ambition of its own.

The First Minister: This is one of the issues that I had in mind, in becoming First Minister after the election, when I said that there was an opportunity for us to make progress across the parliamentary chamber. A lot of the points that Mr Sarwar has made today about ideas, and his suggestions, are completely reasonable. We should embark on conversations about how we can take things forward.

As Mr Sarwar knows—I have rehearsed it frequently in the Parliament—the Government does not have a majority. We need wider parliamentary support for our programme. I am delighted that, on such a number of occasions, we are attracting support from other parties for the propositions that we are putting to the Parliament. This is one area in which we can do exactly that.

I am afraid that I am not quite up to speed with the deployment of the spokespeople in Mr Sarwar's team, but I am very happy for Ms McAllan, who is Cabinet Secretary for Education, Culture and Gaelic, and Stephen Flynn, who is Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Tourism and Transport, to meet their counterparts in the Labour Party to see how we can take forward that series of ideas, because, as Mr Sarwar will not be surprised to hear, I am interested in delivering for the people of Scotland. The Scottish Government is hearing that loud and clear from the First Minister, and I am delighted to repeat it in the Parliament today.

Transgender Prisoners (Legal Ruling)

5. **Malcolm Offord (West Scotland) (Reform):** Does the First Minister welcome the recent landmark legal ruling by Lady Ross on the case brought by that excellent organisation For Women Scotland? Will he ensure that it is implemented in full, in letter and in spirit as soon as possible? Will he further ensure that the principles of that ruling are rolled out across the entire public sector, including the national health service, immediately, which would avoid the need for any further waste of taxpayers' money on defending the indefensible in court?

Furthermore, will he ensure that information materials that are published by activist organisations and are contrary to the letter and spirit of Lady Ross's ruling are withdrawn from all public organisations and institutions and that cessation of their production and distribution becomes a condition of any further public funding for those activist groups?

Finally, does he share my relief that Isla Bryson—who is apparently known in prison as Isla Man—will now be detained in a male jail and, upon release, should not be allowed access to women's toilets, whether here in Holyrood or anywhere in Scotland?

The First Minister (John Swinney): I lead a Government that believes in and follows the rule of law. So, when issues are of a legally contested nature, we do the proper thing, which is to allow the legally contested debate to take place and then, at the conclusion of that debate, to follow the legal ruling. Lady Ross's ruling is crystal clear. It has already been implemented in full in relation to the Scottish Prison Service, and the necessary amendments to custody have taken place. I do not intend to talk about individual cases, because it is inappropriate for me to do that.

In relation to the circulation of guidance materials, those must be compatible with the law as it stands, and that is exactly why the Scottish Prison Service withdrew its guidance at the earliest opportunity. The development of further guidance will be undertaken in a manner consistent with the ruling by Lady Ross.

Malcolm Offord: I thank the First Minister for his answer, which was more comprehensive than I expected. I was dreading him coming back with a long-winded, "No comment," which begs the question of whether saying, "No comment," is ever an acceptable response to a sequence of serious questions.

He will be aware that all that illegal gender policy was implemented by his predecessor, Ms No Comment, who has now fled to London in search of fame, fortune and lower taxes. Is it true that the second edition of Ms Sturgeon's memoir will be entitled "Frankly, I Don't Give a Damn"? Meanwhile, we have heard that Ms No Comment is to star in a TV show playing the role of the Deputy Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. Frankly, you could not make that up. Is it part of John Swinney's cunning plan?

Does the First Minister agree with me that the "No comment" saga must be part of the forthcoming inquiry into Murrellgate?

The Presiding Officer: First Minister, do you want to have a go at that?

The First Minister: Until now, the only person who has ever accused me of being long-winded is my 15-year-old son, who regularly tells me to shorten my answers in Parliament. In the interest of currying favour with the Presiding Officer, I will keep this answer short. Mr Offord's contribution—

Thomas Kerr (Glasgow) (Reform): No comment.

The First Minister: Oh, it is all very funny to Mr Kerr. He is always laughing at things. Mr Kerr was laughing at the substantial points made by Daniel Johnson in the debate in which Mr Kerr trivialised the attacks on Muslim members of our community, which is an absolute disgrace.

If anyone who voted Reform was watching Mr Offord's question to me just now, I think they would think what a waste of time it was to vote for Reform, because that was an insulting lot of drivel from Malcolm Offord.

Malcolm Offord: It is the last day of term, so, on the same theme, I will say that the items bought by Peter Murrell with money stolen from the Scottish National Party are now part of Scotland's political history and that the saga will be taught to future generations of Scotland's children. Will the First Minister arrange for as many items as can be found to be gathered together and displayed as the Murrell collection?

Will he also arrange for some items to be gifted to Scotland's museums and galleries as permanent exhibits and a tribute to SNP

governance? Can I suggest that the fountain pen that Nicola Sturgeon used to sign her resignation letter should go to the People's Palace to become the people's pen? Similarly, the two toilet seats could go to Perth to sit alongside the stone of destiny, and the £3,000 coffee machine could sit beside the declaration of Arbroath to show how political priorities have changed. Will the First Minister encourage the people of Scotland to write to us with their proposals? We cannot allow these items to be auctioned to the highest bidder, who will take them into private collections abroad. Does he agree that this part of Scotland's history must not be lost?

The First Minister: No. I am going to get on with delivering for the people of Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes First Minister's question time. I will allow a two-minute break for a change of places.

Prison Population

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): The next item of business is a debate on motion S7M-00469, in the name of Neil Gray, on achieving a sustainable prison population. I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak button now.

14:32

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Neil Gray): On the day after my appointment as justice secretary, I visited HMP Edinburgh to see the level of pressure that the Scottish Prison Service is facing due to an increasing prison population. It is clear that staff want to focus on rehabilitation and reducing reoffending but that it is increasingly difficult for them to do so. I put on the record my thanks to the dedicated prison officers and staff across the prison estate, who are working tirelessly to maintain a safe and supportive environment for those in their care.

Although recorded crime in Scotland has fallen overall, over the longer term there has been a marked increase in the reporting, investigation and prosecution of serious offences including sexual crime and serious organised crime. I welcome the fact that, through the police and the courts, our justice system is ensuring that justice is done. Victims show enormous bravery and trust in our legal system in reporting crime, and I want that to continue. We are strengthening confidence in the justice system and ensuring that police, prosecutors and the courts have the powers that they need to bring perpetrators to justice.

I am, of course, concerned by the rise in sexual and domestic abuse crimes. Although I welcome the fact that victims have the confidence to come forward, including on historical crimes, we must remain focused on tackling such horrendous crimes and, importantly, prevent them from happening.

Sexual and domestic abuse crimes are overwhelmingly perpetrated by men against women and, ultimately, men must change their behaviour. The Scottish Government-funded Caledonian system is a good example of a community-based programme that aims to address the behaviour of men who have been convicted of domestic abuse, alongside providing support to affected women and children. My priority is to prevent crimes, but, when they happen, prisons must be a safe and effective place where such offending behaviour can be challenged and addressed through programmes and other rehabilitative work.

More individuals now remain in prison for longer, which creates a cumulative demand on capacity

across the estate and also means that the population is increasingly more complex to manage, including dealing with health and social care needs.

I make no apology for saying that serious crimes should merit serious sentences. Scotland shows a clear and persistent trend of increasing the length of average custodial sentences, including a 37 per cent rise between 2014-15 and 2023-24. Those figures should not be interpreted as being solely attributable to sentence inflation, because other factors, such as the mix of offences in cases heard in court, continue to apply.

The remand population also remains high, with complicated and detailed cases taking longer to conclude. Scotland is not unique in experiencing prison population pressures, with many comparable countries recording increases in their prison populations. However, the fact that we have one of the highest such populations in western Europe must be addressed.

Stephen Kerr (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for giving way. He made a point about the remand population. He is quite right that one in four members of our prison population is on remand. The reality is, though, that there is a slow throughput of individuals held on remand, and that is because of the backlog of court cases, especially those heard in the High Court. What specific measures will the cabinet secretary introduce to speed up the appearance of such individuals in the High Court to face justice?

Neil Gray: Stephen Kerr is correct. We have discussed that matter before, and I believe that the work that has been done on summary case management, which has sped up the process for summary cases, can and should be extended. We are working on that and, based on my discussions with the Lord President, the Lord Advocate and others, I am confident that we will get through the High Court backlog.

However, reducing the remand population presents an additional challenge, of which Stephen Kerr is aware, because a significant proportion of those currently on remand for serious offences can be expected to become part of the sentenced population. Therefore, regardless of whether individuals are on remand or otherwise, we must take action now.

Scotland has taken a number of steps to alleviate the pressures. A reconfiguration of the estate realised about 400 additional places, and two new prisons will deliver 460 spaces. I expect HMP Highland to be completed in spring 2027—which is later than planned, due to construction issues—and HMP Glasgow, which I visited last week, is due to be completed in 2028.

We have extended the eligibility for home detention curfew and have expanded the use of alternatives to remand, with bail supervision numbers in 2024 at the highest they have been in 10 years.

We implemented the emergency early release scheme between November 2025 and April this year, which saw 614 individuals released early, 60 per cent of whom were released within three months of their original release date.

We also incrementally changed the point of a sentence that certain short-term prisoners are required to serve in custody to 30 per cent, which resulted in an estimated sustained reduction of about 550 prisoners. That is equivalent to the total design capacity of HMP Grampian.

I am engaging directly across the justice system to identify areas where action can be taken quickly to help reduce the pressure further. We are embedding multidisciplinary teams in courts to ensure that critical and relevant information is available to judges ahead of decisions on custody, which is helping to reduce avoidable periods of short remand that are necessitated for further information.

We are undertaking analysis to understand the complex reasons why individuals fail to comply with community payback orders and bail conditions. CPOs are delivering strong outcomes, with 71 per cent successfully completed—most of them without breaches—during 2024-25. I believe that we can do better to address the reasons for breaches and improve that success rate, and I am working to identify what interventions and support will drive improvements in compliance and thus reduce avoidable, short-term custodial sentences.

Despite those measures, today's prison population stands at 8,549, having recently peaked at 8,603, which is about 800 places above the estate's designed capacity. That poses an unacceptable level of risk to those living and working in Scottish prisons and to the wider justice system.

Additionally, reasonable worst-case long-term projections indicate that without action demand for prison places will rise to about 9,500 within the next decade. Therefore, further action is necessary now to put our prisons on a sustainable footing and ensure that our justice system can focus on rehabilitation and reducing reoffending without compromising public safety.

Stephen Kerr: Will the cabinet secretary take this opportunity to accept, with some degree of humility, that the prison capacity situation is a direct result of the neglect of his predecessors in the office that he holds to deal with the issue as it came along? There was a lot of warning and

expectation about the level of the prison population, but very little was done to deal with it proactively. Will the cabinet secretary accept that this is a moment for him, with humility, to say sorry for that lack of planning and action?

Neil Gray: I have already referenced that we are building two new prisons and that we are expanding capacity. We already have one of the highest levels of custody per head of population in western Europe; we need to tackle that issue alongside the capacity issues that I will go on to discuss.

Attainment of a sustainable prison population will require fundamental change. The independent Scottish Sentencing and Penal Policy Commission's evidence-based report recognised the need for a greater focus on community interventions to reduce reoffending and for rehabilitative work in prison to support the effective reintegration of individuals into the community. The commission was clear that prevention is the most effective route to a sustained reduction in the prison population.

My first priority is to prevent crime before it happens and, as a consequence, to reduce the number of victims. Therefore, the Government will continue to intervene early to steer people away from crime and focus on areas such as substance dependency, health, poverty, homelessness and employability, which are all significant contributing factors to offending.

I will be clear, as the Government has always been, that, for those people who pose the highest risk, the removal of liberty is an important and integral part of our justice system and that prisons will continue to be necessary. However, we want to see less crime so that we have fewer victims, which is why support is needed even after an offence has been committed if we are to minimise the risk of an individual reoffending and returning to prison following release. That is why my priority is the prevention of crime and further reoffending behaviour.

That approach makes financial sense: every prison place costs us more than £52,000 a year; this financial year, we are spending nearly £510 million in resource funding for the Scottish Prison Service to run our jails. However, evidence shows that community sentencing in areas such as non-violent crimes is more effective, with the reconviction rate for those people who were given community payback orders in 2022-23 at 28.6 per cent, compared with 53.2 per cent for those people who completed custodial sentences of one year or less. That approach is also significantly cheaper to the taxpayer, with an estimated cost of a CPO per unit between £1,251 and £6,778, depending on its requirements and complexity.

Today, I am proposing bold reform that will strike the right balance across custodial sentences, community sentencing and the need to robustly protect victims and the public. Other countries have achieved reductions by changing their approach, and we can, too. I will outline those plans in more detail.

First, I have instructed the Scottish Prison Service to exhaust all options for further maximisation of the existing estate and to set out an approach to further increasing the number of places, which will include the affordability and deliverability of additional capacity, with consideration of temporary modular accommodation and further housing blocks at existing prisons. I expect to receive business cases on those proposals soon.

Alongside more places, a smarter approach to custody is needed, and I remain committed to using all levers at our disposal, including continuing to expand the use of home detention curfew, which supports reintegration of individuals by providing for their structured return to the community. We have already made GPS technology available, and I want to expand that: we will now introduce a geographical pilot of GPS with bail, building on action that we have already taken to allow radio-frequency monitoring of bail curfews.

I also want to make full use of community-based alternatives where it is safe, proportionate and effective to do so, because we know that short custodial sentences can increase the likelihood of reoffending, whereas community sentences are more effective at supporting lasting rehabilitation. A statutory review of the national strategy for community justice, which sets out the long-term aims and priority actions that strengthen alternatives to custody, has been published today and will give stakeholders the opportunity to have their say on the direction of community justice.

I am also publishing several proposed changes to make a sustained change in our prison population, with a focus on rehabilitation and reducing reoffending, which will be the subject of an eight-week public consultation period. The consultation will seek views on amending the definition of a short-term prisoner from

"those serving less than four years"

to

"those serving less than five years"

to better reflect the existing sentencing powers of the courts and to bring Scotland into alignment with the Council of Europe's position that sentences of five years or more constitute long-term imprisonment.

The consultation will also seek views on how we can deliver a more effective approach to custody, including—as the Scottish Sentencing and Penal Policy Commission recommended—extending the presumption against short sentences from a threshold of 12 months to one of 24 months, enhancing community payback orders to increase confidence in their effectiveness and support their wider use, and strengthening the bail test to reduce the number of people remanded with no real prospect of a custodial sentence of less than 24 months.

The Scottish Sentencing and Penal Policy Commission noted that the current arrangement for long-term prisoners, whereby some are released into the community on non-parole licence six months before the end of their sentence, does not allow for effective reintegration, and it recommended that those individuals should have more time under supervision in the community on licence. The vast majority of long-term prisoners will, ultimately, be released from custody. The question is, therefore, not whether those prisoners will return to the community, but how safely that return can be managed.

I agree with the commission that an extended period of supervision could benefit the management of risk and, ultimately, reduce reoffending. Therefore, the consultation will also seek views on release arrangements for long-term prisoners, including amending the point of release on non-parole licence for some long-term prisoners to two thirds of their sentence, with the remainder of their sentence being served in the community under strict supervision and licence conditions. That is the position that we had in place before 2016, and prisoners convicted before that date still have that in place. The consultation will also seek views on extending those changes to those on extended sentences.

It is imperative that we find the right balance among punishment, rehabilitation, risk management and reintegration. The proposal would enable a more proportionate approach, in which an individual still serves their sentence but with a greater proportion served in the community, under supervision, and therefore a greater likelihood of their successful reintegration into society, which will reduce the risk that they reoffend. Robust safeguards are in place to manage long-term prisoners in the community who are subject to individualised risk assessment and licence conditions. They must abide by all conditions on their licence and can be recalled to prison. Individuals convicted of sexual offences and some violent offences will also be subject to multi-agency public protection arrangements.

I recognise that the proposed changes are bold, and I hope that they can contribute to a thoughtful debate today on the consequences of not addressing the rise in our prison population. The outcomes of any sentence for a crime committed should be that justice is served and no further reoffending happens. Change is needed, and the consultation provides an opportunity to hear the views of victims, partners and the wider public on all those measures. I assure colleagues that my officials and I will continue to work with victim support organisations throughout that process.

I believe that the proposals outlined today will help us to strike the right balance between recognising the concerns of victims and survivors and charting a clear course towards a sustainable prison population in the long term. They will ensure that prevention is at the heart of our system, with prisons housing those who pose the greatest risk, rehabilitating them to effectively support successful reintegration into society and, ultimately, reducing crime and protecting the public. Less crime and fewer victims are the outcomes that we all wish to see.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises the scale and complexity of the current prison population, which is above the design and operational capacity of the estate and causes significant associated operational and safety risks for prison staff; notes that Scotland has one of the highest prison populations in western Europe; acknowledges the underlying drivers, including the growing number of individuals convicted of serious violent and sexual offences who receive longer sentences, reflecting progress in how the justice system supports victims and holds offenders to account; notes that the cost per prisoner per year to the public purse is £52,000; recognises the importance of effective rehabilitation to reduce re-offending and to benefit the communities that individuals return to; agrees that public safety is paramount and that it is vital that victims are supported and have confidence in the justice system, and agrees, therefore, that a balanced package of measures to increase capacity in the prison estate, expand effective community sentencing, and enact preventative measures to stop people entering or re-entering the prison system, are necessary to achieve a sustainable prison population now and in the future.

14:48

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): Scottish Labour welcomes the opportunity to have an early discussion on the state of the Scottish prison system. There is a lot in the amendments from the other parties with which we agree. We have just heard a considerable announcement. I will address some of it, albeit briefly. I hope that the Presiding Officer will consider that we all heard the announcement only an hour ago and have to try to respond to it.

I reiterate what I have said before: it is a national disgrace that we are nowhere near solving the problem of an overcrowded prison system that is making it extremely difficult for staff to manage

prisons, and is making things extremely difficult for prisoners themselves. As we have heard from HM Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland, we are breaching international standards and human rights. I have consistently raised my concerns about prisoners not being guaranteed time out of their cells, and a number of prisoners have written to me, as a criminal justice spokesperson, because they cannot get access to the rehabilitation programmes that it is vital for them to do in order to be considered for release back into the community.

We must be clear about the severe state of the Scottish prison system. I do not believe that that was inevitable—Stephen Kerr alluded to that in his intervention—and the reality is that, in 20 years of Scottish National Party Government, ministers did not even consider that there might be an increase in the prison population. Henry McLeish warned of that in 2008, and he was not the only person to do so. There have been warnings that it could happen, yet here we are.

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice has just taken up his post, and I respect the fact that he is at least attempting to put some bold proposals out there. I will address some of them briefly. Changing the definition of long-term sentences from more than four years to more than five years has serious implications. In my understanding, that means that there are prisoners who have committed serious offences who would be eligible for release under the rules of the short-term prisoner regime. Those who have followed the debate will know that that is early release at 30 per cent of the sentence served, and the definition of short-term sentence would increase to sentences of less than five years.

I have some preliminary concerns about that. On the release of long-term prisoners at 60 per cent or two thirds of their sentence, when I was not in Parliament, one of the big issues around the release of long-term prisoners was that the public thought that a prisoner's sentence would be served in jail, and nobody could really follow the number of years that they would spend there. There should be transparency in sentencing, and the public should understand the sentence that is given by the courts—I hope that the cabinet secretary will take that on board in the consultation, because, for Scottish Labour, that is fundamental.

Questions remain about the potential changes. What investment is the Scottish Government prepared to make to commit in the longer term to robust alternatives, such as GPS monitoring, which is referred to in the Scottish Labour amendment, to ensure that communities are safe?

I do not mind saying that I have had this conversation with many previous cabinet secretaries. Scottish Labour has said that we are in favour of robust alternatives to custody, but, over a very long period of time, there has not been any serious approach to that.

Community sentencing cannot be a tick-box exercise.

Neil Gray: I recognise Pauline McNeill's long-standing commitment to looking at community alternatives to custody. Does she welcome what I am setting out to do in providing an expansion in GPS technology for bail management and home detention curfew, in order to give reassurance around the community management of offenders?

Pauline McNeill: Yes, I do. I would like an early indication of additional investment in GPS technology. Considering all that we would need to do to provide safety for communities, I think that investment in GPS technology would need to be front ended.

Karyn McCluskey, head of Community Justice Scotland, pointed out that good, structured, unpaid work helps to repair the harm that people have caused and gives them purpose. We know that. There is power in seeing the results of our labour, but we need such sentences to be more robust, and we need sheriffs presiding over them in order for us to have confidence in them.

Another reason for our overcrowded prisons is extremely high reoffending rates, particularly for those serving short-term prison sentences. There has been a revolving door. We already know about that, and there is evidence to show that there is less reoffending with community sentencing. The rate is far lower if people are given a community payback order—just one quarter of people on those are reconvicted within a year.

Willie Rennie (Fife North East) (LD): Will the member take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): The member cannot take an intervention, as she is already in additional time.

Pauline McNeill: I will conclude with a specific point on deaths in custody, which the Criminal Justice Committee had a brief chat about on Wednesday morning. There was a promise in the recommendations that families would get unfettered access to the prison system to understand what happened. That is an example of a recommendation that has not been implemented. My plea is that, in this parliamentary session, there should be more implementation of things that had already been recommended in the first place; otherwise, the public will further lose confidence in the justice system.

I move amendment S7M-00469.2, to insert at end:

"; is concerned that the current prison population crisis is chronically hampering effective rehabilitation; calls on the Scottish Government to increase its investment in GPS technology and speed up its roll out, and notes that the current approach to rehabilitation, community justice and early release is failing to address the prison population crisis."

14:54

Amanda Bland (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Reform): I thank the cabinet secretary and Pauline McNeill.

I am interested in your proposals. We agree that the Scottish Prison Service continues to operate in crisis management mode. Sadly, under the Scottish National Party Government, prison governors have become experts in crisis management.

The public, victims, prison staff and the agencies that are involved in managing prisoners' release deserve a prison service that functions safely, effectively and sustainably. You clearly said that. Since 2020, the number of long-term prisoners has risen significantly and serious offences, including organised crime and sexual offences, are on the increase. In addition, there is a high remand population of prisoners who are awaiting trial or sentencing, which puts additional pressure on capacity.

Since late 2025, the prison population has surged. I have the figure 8,400, but I think that you said that it was 8,500.

Neil Gray: I should correct the statistic that I gave. It is 8,459 not 8,549. There was a typo in the speech.

Amanda Bland: So, we are looking at 106 per cent overcapacity. That is one of the highest levels ever recorded. We are all in agreement that that is unsustainable, is unsafe and represents an ineffective Scottish Prison Service.

After 19 years in government, the SNP has failed to expand prison capacity quickly enough and avert the crisis with an effective approach to reducing reoffending. The delayed replacement and construction project for HMP Glasgow has worsened the situation. You mentioned HMP Highland, which is also delayed further. HMP Glasgow has escalating costs, which are eye watering. They were originally estimated to be between £100 million and £400 million but rose to £1 billion, with a prisoner capacity of 1,344.

The question is whether the Scottish Government is satisfied that that is a sustainable approach in terms of cost, prisoner capacity and satisfying the public about value for money. I hear that you are planning some pods on existing prison estates. I presume that that is to increase capacity at a quicker pace. Barlinnie prison, which was originally designed to hold 987 prisoners, now frequently holds 1,400 depending on the daily intake and transfers.

However, I understand that the SNP Government is pinning all its hopes on early prisoner release rather than long-term planning to establish a prison estate that is fit for purpose with sustainable funding models. You have added some information on that already. That approach puts the public, victims and prison staff at risk.

The message is clear: the Scottish Government is failing our prison service and is soft on crime. There is overcrowding and crisis management, using desperate early release measures, designed to mitigate years of Government failures. That is a high-risk strategy for victims and the public, who deserve to be and feel safe.

The Prisoners (Early Release) (Scotland) Act 2025 allowed prisoners sentenced to less than four years to be released after 40 per cent of their sentence had been served. That was the original figure, but my understanding is that it is now 30 per cent and that that four-year threshold will be changed. In cases of domestic abuse and sexual offences, prisoners can be released after serving only 50 per cent of their sentence. The public are rightly dismayed at that piece of legislation and need to know how the Scottish Government will ensure their safety, especially that of victims of crime.

I am happy to hear that you are discussing domestic abuse and sexual crimes in particular. It sounds like that is one of the Government's priorities. Perpetrators of domestic abuse and sexual offences should be given a clear message: your crimes are completely unacceptable and you pose a real and persistent danger, especially to women and children. Domestic abuse has become normalised in our society. That must stop.

As a former police officer, I completely understand how devastating those crimes are for victims and their families. Police Scotland recorded 64,967 incidents of domestic abuse in 2024-25. The scale of the problem is immense, and I appreciate your acknowledging that, cabinet secretary.

Does the Scottish Government think that having someone serve only 50 per cent of a prison sentence for that type of crime is acceptable? I accept that some prisoners may be eligible for early release, but, after 19 years of governing, the Scottish Government needs to come up with a better plan than just relying on mass early release. What we have heard sounds like a desperate, knee-jerk plan, but I appreciate what you have

said, cabinet secretary, and look forward to discussing with you the measures around the rehabilitation and management of offenders in the community.

On rehabilitation, we need a fresh pair of eyes on the whole system. The measures that are used to tackle drug addiction, community sentences, electronic monitoring, treatment and addiction recovery programmes that are designed to rehabilitate offenders and protect victims too often fail.

The data on prison population that was published in 2025 showed that 63 per cent of current prisoners have been incarcerated before, which highlights the revolving door of the prison population. I appreciate the cabinet secretary's acknowledgment that that needs to be addressed. We are not only failing victims and the public; we are failing the offenders, who are stuck in an eternal cycle of reoffending. Prison staff are at their wits' end trying to manage the unmanageable.

The Scottish Government has created and presided over that shambolic set of affairs, which puts criminals first and victims last. It cannot go on.

I move amendment S7M-00469.1, to leave out from "acknowledges" to end, and insert:

"notes that data on prison population published in 2025 show that 63% of current prisoners have been incarcerated before, highlighting the highly cyclical nature of the prison population; expresses concern that the Scottish Government has sought to attribute the unsustainable prison population to external factors, while not fully acknowledging the extent to which failings in both its rehabilitation programme and its approach to tackling the longer term issues have a comparatively much bigger impact; agrees that these failings, combined with the use of early release, put the public at increased risk, and resolves that more intensive support is required to support individuals out of a life of crime and offending, alongside the introduction of minimum sentences for crimes as a stronger deterrent."

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): I remind all members that they should always speak through the chair.

15:01

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): Our prison system is not working. Like so many other institutions, including our national health service and our schools, prisons reflect the society that they serve. That society is deeply unfair and profoundly unequal. Schools struggle to help young people to learn and thrive, as too many children arrive in the classroom hungry. Hospitals struggle to treat people with physical and mental health conditions that stem from the massive health inequalities that we still have not tackled. It is the same with our prisons.

Our prisons are beyond capacity. That is because our imprisonment rate is significantly above the European average and is even above the rates of a string of non-democratic countries such as China and Saudi Arabia. It is not because crime is out of control in Scotland. Overall levels of crime are about half what they were in 1991. However, we have left prisons, just like our schools and NHS, to pick up the pieces of failures elsewhere in society. That does not serve prisoners well, it does not serve prison staff well and it does not serve the communities that will receive those prisoners after their incarceration well at all.

As we have all accepted with the Promise, our care system is failing, and that shows up in our prisons, where about 30 per cent of prisoners have had previous experience of the care system. Nobody disputes that we have a major drugs crisis in our country, and it is no coincidence that most prisoners enter prison with drug challenges. Many prisoners will leave with a drug problem, too, prison having done little to help them.

Far too often, we take people who have already been failed by society and place them in institutions that fail them again—institutions that are increasingly unable to guarantee basic standards of welfare, dignity and human rights. Just yesterday, the Criminal Justice Committee heard that the United Nations' Nelson Mandela rules, which lay out the bare minimum standards that are expected, are not being consistently upheld in Scottish prisons.

We have also had instances of foreign courts refusing to extradite prisoners to Scotland because basic conditions are so poor. If our prisons cannot guarantee basic standards of safety, dignity and human rights, what confidence can we possibly have that they are doing the far more demanding work of rehabilitation?

It is no surprise, then, that prisons often perform worse than alternatives when it comes to reducing reoffending and preventing future harm. Short sentences for non-violent crimes, in particular, for which there are the clearest alternatives, result in some of the highest rates of prisoners leaving prison and coming into conflict with the law again. However, 73 per cent of the custodial sentences that were received in 2023-24 were for one year or less, and sentences of three to six months have been the most common over the past decade, making up 30 per cent of all custodial sentences in 2023-24.

For those who have committed less serious crimes and are serving shorter sentences, it makes no sense at all to spend, as the motion states, £52,000 per year on prison, given that we know that, in many cases, prison will not help them

to stop reoffending. We cannot build our way out of this challenge, because building more prison places does not address why our prison population is so high in the first place.

Therefore, we need to totally rethink what prisons should look like and what they are there to do. Scottish Greens believe that we need a justice system that relies far less than it does today on imprisonment and far more on prevention, restoration and rehabilitation. With greater use of effective alternatives to custody, and sentencing that follows the evidence, we will need fewer but better resourced prisons that can genuinely support rehabilitation and reintegration.

That approach is working right now in other countries. As is the case in Scotland, crime in the Netherlands has fallen over recent decades, but, unlike here, that has resulted in significant falls in the prison population. Between 2005 and 2010, there was a 44 per cent fall in the population of Dutch prisons, and the Netherlands closed 20 prisons. That is because they are making greater use of community sentencing and focusing on prevention rather than imprisonment.

Mark Simpson (North East Scotland) (Reform): Will the member take an intervention?

Maggie Chapman: No, not just now.

Prison reform should allow us to do the upstream work that we know will help people to avoid prison in the first place. The Scottish Government's penal policy advisers have cited evidence from the Edinburgh study of youth transitions and crime that shows that poverty, poor housing, unemployment and weak community infrastructure increase the risks of social exclusion and fuel distrust and disaffection, which ultimately increases the risk of conflict with the law. The same advisers have said that, when people do fall foul of the law, we need much more focus on early intervention pathways, because formal prosecution often escalates problems, increases stigma and limits opportunities for change.

Some people pose a significant risk of harm to society. We must have ways of preventing such harm. Indeed, harm reduction must be a cornerstone of our justice system. However, for many people—I would argue that this applies to the vast majority of those who are currently incarcerated, including women, neurodiverse people and people with mental health issues—the evidence overwhelmingly shows that prisons not only do not work but actually make things worse.

We cannot keep doing the same thing over and over again and expect different results—there is a word for that. However, we do not have to do so, because other countries have shown us the way. We must understand the socioeconomic causes of crime and tackle them accordingly. When people commit crime, we must exhaust the whole suite of approaches that work better to punish appropriately and rehabilitate before considering prisons, which most often do neither. When incarceration becomes necessary, those places must have the resources that they need to rehabilitate and genuinely help people to do better in the future. Only then can incarceration genuinely be the last resort, rather than a place where we warehouse the problems that society has chosen not to solve.

I move amendment S7M-00469.3, to leave out from second "operational" to end and insert:

"human rights and safety risks for staff and prisoners; further recognises the importance of prioritising harm reduction across the justice system; believes that incarceration should always be the last resort, once all other alternatives have been exhausted; notes that Scotland has one of the highest prison populations in western Europe, including a disproportionate remand population; acknowledges the underlying drivers, including poverty, inequality, homelessness and experience of the care system; notes that the cost per prisoner per year to the public purse is £52,200; recognises the need for effective rehabilitation to reduce offending and re-offending and to benefit the communities that individuals return to; agrees that public safety is paramount and that it is vital that victims and survivors should be at the heart of the justice system, and must be supported and have confidence in it, and agrees, therefore, that a balanced package of measures to expand effective community sentencing and other alternatives to prison, such as restorative justice, bail supervision and supported accommodation, and to enact preventative measures to stop people entering or re-entering the prison system, including sustained investment in housing, mental health services, youth work, addiction services and community support, as part of a transformative justice approach, are necessary to achieve a sustainable prison population now and in the future."

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): I remind members that there should be no interruptions or interventions during a first speech. To make his first speech, and to move and speak to amendment S7M-00469.5, I call James Adams.

15:08

James Adams (North East Scotland) (Con): I am proud and honoured to have been elected to represent the north-east of Scotland, the area where I was born, grew up and still proudly call home. I am deeply grateful for the trust that voters have placed in me, and I thank everyone who supported me and helped me throughout my journey to get here—in particular, my wife, Melissa, and my parents.

I stand here as a proud Brocher, wi a wee bit of Belger, Cottoner, Quitie and Auld Deer thrown in for gweed measure. My election also means that there are now two former pupils of Fraserburgh academy serving in the Scottish Parliament—the other being Holly Bruce. To my knowledge, this is

the first time in our school's history that this has happened. I know that our school and our town will take great pride in that achievement, just as I do. Come awa the Burry! [*Applause.*]

I pay tribute to my colleague Douglas Lumsden MP, who worked tirelessly on behalf of the people of the north-east, first as a councillor, then as an MSP and now as an MP. His dedication to public service has been an example to many.

I stood for election to be a strong voice for the communities and industries that are the backbone of the north-east. Our fishing industry is woven into the identity of many coastal communities across the region. It would be remiss of me not to mention my late great-grandfather, Gilbert Buchan, known to folk at home as Seven and a half's Gib, who was a fisherman, a local councillor and a founding member of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation. He remains a great inspiration to me and is one of the many reasons why I now stand in this chamber.

The fishing industry is one built on hard work, skills and generations of tradition, and I am proud to say that I have family members and close friends who still go out to sea and risk their lives on a regular basis to put food on our plates. Those who work in the sector deserve to know that their concerns will be heard and that their contribution to Scotland's food security will be recognised, and I will do just that.

Our farmers and agricultural workers also play a vital role in the life of the north-east, but many face increasing pressures, from rising costs and labour shortages to uncertainty about future support. Farming is not just an industry; it is a way of life that sustains communities across our region.

The oil and gas industry has been a cornerstone of economic success in the north-east and across Scotland. However, in recent years, many workers and families have faced uncertainty as jobs have been lost and investment has declined. The impact of those changes has been felt throughout communities across the region, and the result in the Aberdeen South by-election last week shows that people are fed up with the attitude of the Scottish Government and the UK Labour Government towards the oil and gas sector.

For the past four-plus years, I have had the privilege of working for NHS Grampian while also representing Fraserburgh and District on Aberdeenshire Council. In both roles, I have seen at first hand what the gross underfunding of both organisations has done to local services in my area, and I am committed to keeping pressure on the SNP Government and fighting for a fair share of funding for the north-east of Scotland.

I want everyone across the north-east of Scotland, whether they voted for me or not, to know that I will work tirelessly on their behalf. I will be a strong voice for our communities, fight for the industries that strengthen and sustain our region and ensure that the people of the north-east are heard loud and clear in this Parliament.

Scotland's prisons have deteriorated under the SNP, and capacity has been pushed to the limit. The early release schemes have been the SNP's only answer to the overcrowding crisis, which it is responsible for. Victims deserve to have confidence that dangerous offenders will be held to account for their actions. In my region, Peterhead prison—HMP Grampian, as it now is—has had a long and significant place in Scotland's justice system. The dedicated prison staff who work in challenging environments there, or in any other prison in Scotland, should not have to deal with overcrowding, but criminals must serve their sentences and not be released early to cover the failings of the Government. The Scottish Government must solve this issue in a way that reinstalls the confidence that has been lost in our justice system.

We must also recognise the damage that the SNP has done to public confidence through its mishandling of the transgender prisoner policy. The Isla Bryson case exposed serious failings and raised legitimate concerns about placing biological males in women's prisons. Public safety, the dignity of female prisoners and the confidence of victims must always come before ideology.

The public expect violent criminals to serve their sentences in full. This is common sense, it protects our communities and it is a principle that I and the Scottish Conservatives will always defend.

I move amendment S7M-00469.5, to leave out from "acknowledges the underlying drivers" to end and insert:

"recognises that the current pressures on Scotland's prison estate were repeatedly highlighted by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons and were described as 'not unexpected'; notes that prison overcrowding did not emerge suddenly but follows years of warnings regarding prison capacity, rehabilitation, safety and prisoner welfare; rejects any suggestion that the current situation is unavoidable; notes with concern that more than a quarter of Scotland's prison population is comprised of remand prisoners awaiting the conclusion of court proceedings; believes that persistent court backlogs and delays across the justice system are significant contributors to prison overcrowding and are preventing victims, witnesses and accused individuals from obtaining timely justice; notes that over 1,300 foreign national offenders are currently held within Scotland's prison estate and believes that greater use should be made of appropriate repatriation arrangements; expresses alarm at the record number of deaths in custody, including a record number of suicides; recognises the impact that overcrowding is having on rehabilitation, purposeful activity and public protection; agrees that public safety, justice for victims and confidence

in the rule of law must remain paramount; believes that Scottish Ministers must set out the reasons why repeated warnings regarding overcrowding, remand levels, deaths in custody and prison conditions were not acted upon sooner; further believes that achieving a sustainable prison population requires action to reduce court delays, address the high remand population, improve access to rehabilitation and offender programmes, increase the effective repatriation of foreign national offenders where appropriate, and provide sufficient prison capacity to meet operational demand, and believes that the long-term sustainability of Scotland's prison population depends upon addressing the underlying causes of overcrowding rather than relying on the early release of prisoners as a substitute for effective management of the justice system."

15:14

Yi-pei Chou Turvey (North East Scotland) (LD): I remind members of my entry in the register of members' interests, which states that I am still a sitting councillor on Aberdeenshire Council.

On the whole, the motion that the Scottish Government has proposed today is fair, and we welcome the Government's decision to launch a consultation. Our prison population is too high and costs too much to the public purse. Victim support is paramount and we must work together to rehabilitate offenders. Like much of what the Scottish Government promises, the motion is forward-thinking, liberal and just. However, for the moment, those are still only words on a piece of paper and that have been spoken aloud in this chamber, far from the reality of what people across Scotland face every day.

Scotland's prisons are again operating at or near critical capacity. Some people are bunked together in, and confined for 23 hours a day in, tiny rooms that were made for one person, in a prison estate that was better suited to previous centuries. That is a serious problem for prison staff, rehabilitation, public confidence and, ultimately, public safety. However, let us be clear: the crux of the matter is that the crisis did not happen overnight, and we need to nail this dragging issue together.

I am a newly elected member—I share that characteristic with more than 60 other members across the Parliament, including some members in the Government. We have come here with fresh ideas, renewed enthusiasm and close ties to the communities that we represent. I share progressive liberal values on this issue as well as on many others with many members across the Parliament, regardless of party affiliation. Therefore, I ask those members to listen and be bold enough to agree.

I say again that the crisis did not appear overnight; the Scottish Government has known for years that prison numbers were rising. Although we welcome action, we are left wondering why that action is, yet again, reactive instead of proactive. The Scottish Government knew that courts were recovering from the pandemic backlog and that more serious cases were progressing through the justice system. It knows that remand numbers remain stubbornly high and that major prison replacement projects are slipping behind schedule.

We welcome the consultation and we are grateful that the Government is providing listening ears to concerns. However, we want to press the Government on the timing of this debate. Instead of planning ahead for decades, these are, once again, emergency measures.

The issue is simple: dangerous offenders should be in prison, victims deserve protection and communities deserve safety. Prison is a punishment, but it should also serve to rehabilitate. We have the tools that are needed to exist in a just society. We have a record high prison population, but we need only look at some of our Scandinavian neighbours for an example of how things can be done differently. However, instead of providing the investment that is needed, we are left patching with Band-Aids while the wraparound care that is needed to make sure that people have support when they are back home is thin, which increases the risk of reoffending.

I call on the Scottish Government to invest, plan strategically and more strategically face the facts—in all areas, but especially concerning our prisons. We need the court backlog to be cleared, we need to fix the root cause of offending and we need remand to be reduced where it is safe and appropriate to do so. We need credible and properly enforced community sentences, we need investment in rehabilitation that cuts reoffending and we need to plan ahead rather than barely cope as we move from one crisis to the next.

My critique today comes not from a place of values but from a place of delivery. I say to my fellow new members across the Parliament: please do not let the next five years be about us sharing values and disagreeing on delivery. We should hold our parties to account and take the actions that Scotland needs.

I move amendment S7M-00469.4, to insert at end:

"; further notes the persistently high remand population and the contribution that court delays and wider pressures within the justice system have on overcrowding in the prison estate; believes that public protection, rehabilitation, alternatives to custody and a reduction in reoffending must be pursued together rather than in competition with one another; further believes that investment in addiction treatment, mental health services, supported housing and effective community justice are essential to reducing offending and easing the pressure on prisons, and calls on the Scottish Government to publish a long-term strategy for achieving a sustainable prison population that commands

public confidence and adequately supports victims and their rights to information, protection and safety."

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): We move to the open debate.

15:18

Alyn Smith (Stirling) (SNP): I warmly commend the cabinet secretary on his speech, which was a brave one. He proposed some bold action and made the biggest admission in modern politics, which is that what we are doing needs to change. That, in and of itself, is a significant step, and it is a step that the cabinet secretary has taken today.

I welcome these measures. There is a context to this situation; as Yi-pei Chou Turvey said, it did not happen overnight. The prison population is changing as society changes. Let us remember that the level of recorded crime is down 49 per cent from 1991. We are living in a safer, happier and more contented society; it just sometimes does not feel like that.

Stephen Kerr: Alyn Smith started his speech by talking about an admission—we did not quite hear that, but I take his point. He made a comment that we have a safer society, but violent crime is up and sexual crime is at its highest since 1971. For many people, it is not a safer society. Does he not accept that the focus of our attention should be on violent crimes, sexual crimes and organised crimes, which are on the rise?

Alyn Smith: Overall, recorded crime is down by 41 per cent on 1991. I said that it sometimes does not feel like it—the member can read the *Official Report*. The rest of my speech will be of great interest to my colleague, I dare say.

The length of custodial sentences in Scotland is up by 37 per cent since 2015, so there is a change in sentencing as organised crime in particular is having an effect on those numbers. However, there is an issue in the prison population that we need to deal with right now. As colleagues have said, prisons deal with the end of the process and the end of the chain, but I am drawn to much more aggressive upstream measures to reduce offending in the round and reduce the number of people who end up in the court service. There are too many people in prisons who are on remand, which is one of the most significant changes that could be made quickly in the prison population. I warmly welcome the greater use of GPS and a greater focus on home detention curfew, which is a productive area for us to look at, because it will effect change in the prison population quickly.

We also have to admit that we have too many people in prison. Even if we reduce the population to capacity, we will still have one of the highest prison populations of any western European country. Too many people are in jail when, surely, we need to be looking at rehabilitation and reducing reoffending, as well as stopping offences in the first place.

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): I am interested in the point about upstream measures, and I am particularly interested in women, because we know that they should not always enter the criminal justice system and prisons in particular. Perhaps there is more that the cabinet secretary could do in that area, because there is a lot of research on it.

Alyn Smith: I strongly agree with the member's point and thank her for it. We need to look at the issue in a much wider context than just that of reducing the prison population. We need to look at why the prison population is as high as it is and at why people are ending up in prison, because we could be taking other measures to help people, particularly women, to not get into that circumstance at all.

I commend to the cabinet secretary the idea that we need a strategy for the older prison population. I think that we could take a different approach in that area. A number of older people have been convicted of terrible crimes, but their risk to the general population is much lower than it used to be because of their age and circumstances. That was not in the cabinet secretary's speech, but I suggest that it would be useful for us to look into that issue.

The wider picture has to be looked at. It is not just about the prison population. Prisons are at the end of the story and they are dealing with the symptoms of society's failure. I am not interested in pointing fingers at any particular party; we all need to look at this, and early interventions have to be the focus. I am very drawn to the Lib Dems' amendment, which I think is constructive and has many good ideas. I certainly hope that the Government will be in favour of it.

For a number of years, I was a director of Turning Point Scotland, which is Scotland's biggest social welfare charity, although I am not any more. Fifteen years ago, we commenced an initiative called housing first, which is primarily a way of dealing with homelessness. It is also about dealing with people who are in and out of the justice system in one form or another. It gives people secure accommodation with, essentially, assisted or supported living and mentoring. The reduction in reoffending rates was spectacular. That approach also deals with addiction and substance misuse and ensures that homelessness is not a problem. There are things that we can do and things that Scotland is very good at.

Amanda Bland: What you say about Turning Point sounds very interesting. I do not understand

why that interesting idea was not put in place for 19 years under the SNP Government. [*Interruption*.] Oh, it was—sorry.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): The chamber has been designed so that members speak through the chair, which also means that the microphones will work. If you face me, your microphone should work.

Alyn Smith: I am grateful to Amanda Bland for her comment. She is a good colleague on the Criminal Justice Committee, and, as ever, that was a sensible question. Turning Point Scotland is a charity. It is independent of Government and that was not a Government initiative. However, it happened 15 years ago under an SNP Administration with SNP support, and it is an example of what we could be doing if we looked at the bigger picture.

We are in danger of missing a trick, colleagues, if we just look at the prison population itself, because there is a wider agenda that we need to take good note of. I welcome the fact that we are taking steps to reduce the prison population, but there needs to be a wider discussion—I think that we are all agreed on that.

Community justice must be expanded. On community payback orders and reoffending, the statistics are clear that 42 per cent of those who have had a custodial sentence reoffend within a year, whereas 28.6 per cent of those who have had a community payback order reoffend. Alternatives to custody deliver better reoffending rates. That percentage is still too high, but it is still something for us to look at.

I welcome today's debate, and I welcome the measures—I look forward to participating on them with the Criminal Justice Committee. There is an issue to be dealt with now, and it is good that we are taking steps towards that, but we need to have a wider discussion. I was very drawn to Maggie Chapman's contribution on examples from other countries. Norway, the Netherlands and Estonia have taken dramatic steps to not just reduce their prison populations but look at the wider picture, and the Criminal Justice Committee will certainly look at those examples in very detailed ways.

15:26

Kate Campbell (Edinburgh Eastern, Musselburgh and Tranent) (SNP): Last night, when I was looking at the amendments, I thought, "We all pretty much want the same thing." On hearing the contributions today, I am even more convinced that there is much more that unites us than divides us on this topic.

We all want fewer crimes to be committed. We all want our communities to be safe. We want victims and survivors to be respected, protected and heard. We want fewer people in prison because fewer crimes are committed, fewer people are held on remand and fewer people reoffend. We want more people to get community sentences. We want less-crowded prisons that are safer for inmates and prison officers and that create space for successful rehabilitation. We want less money to be spent on incarceration so that we can spend more money on things such as prevention and rehabilitation.

To that end, I hope that colleagues from across the chamber welcome the £1 billion from the Scottish Government that will be invested in Scottish prisons this year, as well as the very positive proposals that the Cabinet Secretary for Justice has set out.

Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con): Will Kate Campbell give way?

Kate Campbell: I will make progress.

Although money for, investment in and a focus on those priorities are very welcome, we need to be realistic about what is driving crime and offending—and the evidence exists. In the 2024 Scottish prison survey, 42 per cent of respondents stated that

"a Social Worker was involved in their lives while they were growing up".

Forty-two per cent—that is a massive overrepresentation compared with the general population.

In 2018, the Scottish Government published a paper on childhood trauma links to adult criminal behaviour, and the publication noted that 45 per cent of the

"Adult prisoner survey respondents reported that they had been physically abused in their home as a child".

Forty-five per cent—again, that is a massive overrepresentation compared with the general population.

Scottish Prison Service statistics show that individuals from

"the 10% most deprived areas … accounted for 31% of all arrivals to prison in 2022-23".

That is a massive, disproportionate overrepresentation. We know that people who end up in prison are much more likely to have faced disadvantage, trauma and poverty. If we tackle inequality, we are literally tackling one of the main root causes of crime.

What is so sad is that, often, the circumstance of one family member being in prison perpetuates disadvantage for other members of that family. Families Outside estimates that, each year in Scotland, more than 27,000 children and young

people experience a parent's imprisonment. Having a family member in prison creates, sustains and entrenches poverty for the families who are left behind.

Stephen Kerr: Kate Campbell made a point a moment ago about poverty. Does she agree that the last thing that we should be doing in this Parliament is agreeing to budgets that involve cuts to the college sector, putting higher education into financial difficulty or threatening the number of apprenticeships? We should be growing all those sectors, because they are the golden tickets that take people out of poverty and prevent the social outcomes that she is describing. Does she agree?

Kate Campbell: There are many things that we need to do to tackle poverty and inequality. If Stephen Kerr agrees that poverty is an underlying factor, I hope that he will agree that, for example, the Scottish child payment is transformational. If he listens to the rest of my speech, he will hear about that.

On average, families of people in custody spend £180 a month on supporting that person. Only yesterday, we found out that one in five families are left with just £12 a week after outgoings—those are the families living with the highest levels of poverty. Those families are disproportionately more likely to be impacted by incarceration and are also more likely to be unable to afford to visit and support incarcerated family members. We have to break that cycle.

Prison still very much has a place. We need our communities to be safe. However, when prison is not necessary, and when a community sentence or home detention can be used instead, the benefits are huge. It keeps families together, keeps people rooted in their communities and makes it much less likely that the person will reoffend—because, at the end of their sentence, they are not ejected back into society without a life to return to. I am glad that, this year, the Scottish Government is investing £169 million in community justice. That is how we break the cycle.

A huge part has to be about how we prevent young people from getting caught up in the criminal justice system. That includes using peer mentoring projects, such as the turn your life around project, to help young people who may not have the role models that they need in their lives; restorative justice, which empowers victims and survivors while helping offenders to understand the impact of their crimes on other people; or trauma-informed community custody units such as the Bella centre and the Lilias centre, where women on low supervision can rebuild their lives.

We also need to take a whole-life, whole-society approach. When we consider investment in social justice, the Scottish child payment, social housing, mental health services, youth work, keeping the Promise and any other measure that reduces inequality and makes our society fairer, we must also consider that to be tackling the root causes of crime, bringing down our prison population and making our communities safer. Those are the outcomes that we all want to achieve—I hope that we can agree on that.

15:32

Katherine Sangster (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab): There is no doubt that Scotland's prisons are under immense pressure. Once again, our prison population has reached a record level and, as we have heard, it is circa 800 over capacity and heading upwards. That should concern us because of the impact on prison staff, who are working under increasingly difficult circumstances, and because of the impact on prisoners, many of whom are not getting the support and rehabilitation that they need. Most of all, it should concern us because of what it says about the ability of our justice system to deliver effectively for the people of Scotland and to keep them safe.

Public confidence in our justice system matters, yet the evidence suggests that confidence remains stubbornly low. Many Scots do not believe that the sentence fits the crime or that cases are dealt with quickly enough and, despite years of reform and investment, public attitudes towards the justice system have changed little in the past decade. Three quarters of Scots say that they know only a little or nothing about how our criminal justice system operates, and only about a third believe that the system delivers sentences that fit the crime. At the same time, people can see that our prisons are overcrowded. They see the headlines about emergency measures and early release schemes—they see a system that appears to be under strain. If the public are not confident that those who should be in prison are in prison and are serving the sentences handed down by the courts, it becomes much harder to build confidence in the wider justice system.

That matters because public confidence is essential if we are to secure support for the changes that many experts believe are necessary and which most of us here agree should be made. As others have said, community justice has an important role to play. It is often far more effective in reducing reoffending and, in many cases, it delivers better outcomes than short-term imprisonment. In conversations that I have had with local police, they have referred to something that my colleague Pauline McNeill spoke about: a revolving door of people going to prison, getting out and reoffending. We have to break that cycle.

However, those arguments will carry weight only if the public have confidence that alternatives to

custody are robust, effective and properly enforced and funded. I welcome the fact that the Government's motion recognises the complexity of the changes and makes a commitment to community justice. However, as Scottish Labour's amendment makes clear, we need greater urgency; we need a clearer understanding of why existing efforts to reduce reoffending and support rehabilitation are not delivering; and we need to look at how we can make progress.

We need a credible plan to address overcrowding in a way that protects public safety and restores confidence in the system. It is clear from the debate that the status quo is not working. For too long, confidence in our justice system has remained stagnant, while pressures in our prisons have continued to grow. The question is about not simply prisoner numbers but public safety, public confidence and public trust. If we are serious about strengthening Scotland's justice system, the Government must do more, with greater urgency.

15:35

David Linden (Glasgow Baillieston and Shettleston) (SNP): The first time that I was in Barlinnie, in 2008, as a case worker, I never imagined that, years on, I would be the local member of the Scottish Parliament, representing Barlinnie and overlooking justice policy. I have thoroughly enjoyed the first few weeks of Parliament, looking specifically at criminal justice and understanding better the context to how we have got to where we are.

In Scotland, we have roughly 177 prisoners per 100,000 of the population. Comparing that with our European neighbours—for example, the Netherlands, which has around 54 prisoners per 100,000—gives us an idea that the course that we have followed has not necessarily worked. What other countries such as the Netherlands and Finland have in common is that they took radical and bold action. That is exactly what the cabinet secretary is attempting to do.

Given that we are all policy makers, I hope that members have read the report of the Scottish sentencing and penal policy commission, which was published earlier this year, because many of the measures that the cabinet secretary has outlined are contained in that report. He is following the evidence and, as he does so, he deserves the support of the Parliament.

However, I raise challenges with the Scottish Government—particularly when it comes to remand, which other colleagues have raised. One in four prisoners in the prison system is on remand. Those prisoners have not been tried or convicted. The latest figures that I have seen suggest that 33 per cent of the population at HMP Barlinnie in Riddrie are on remand. As we pursue the measures that the cabinet secretary has outlined—I think that we should—my question for the Scottish Government is about having the wraparound support that will be required when people come out of the prison gate, which is my big concern.

From my experience early in the process of joining the Criminal Justice Committee, doing background reading and taking evidence from HM Inspectorate of Prisons in Scotland, it is clear that we need to set people up to succeed both when they are in the prison system and when they come out. That relates to things such as addiction support, health support and making sure that housing is in place. I hope that the cabinet secretary can count on his colleagues across Government to make sure that we mobilise every aspect of the state so that, when we come to the release measures, people do not come back into the system.

My final point is that, as a result of James Adams joining the Parliament today—I warmly welcome him and wish him every success for the five years that he is here—the majority of members are in this place for the first time. That gives us an opportunity to do things slightly differently, perhaps.

My plea to members is to follow the evidence, give the cabinet secretary our support as he tries to take things through and resist the temptation to do the shock-jock comments to the *Daily Mail* and the walking-and-talking videos outside the Parliament. We should follow the evidence and ensure that the policies that we implement mean that the prison population starts to fall, as it did in Finland and the Netherlands because they took bold and radical action, which is exactly what the Scottish Government proposes.

15:38

Michelle Campbell (Renfrewshire North and Cardonald) (SNP): I draw attention to my entry in the register of members' interests: I am a nurse in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde.

As is outlined in the motion, we recognise the scale and complexity of the current prison population, and we recognise that the design and operational capacity of the estate have caused significant challenges. I welcome the contributions that we have heard so far, and I am sure that some of the themes that I speak about will be similar. That is good, because it demonstrates that, across parties, we are having similar thoughts about where the issue needs to go, which is always a good thing. However, I welcome the comments by my colleague David Linden about being bold in order to have the radical changes that we need.

The SNP Government is investing £1 billion in Scotland's prisons in this financial year. Although that support is welcome in dealing with the overpopulation of our prisons, we understand that we must invest further in rehabilitation and in safer communities to ensure that the prison population remains stable. This SNP Scottish Government is also investing around £169 million in community justice services in this financial year. Evidence has shown that community-based sentencing is often more effective than short prison sentences in reducing reoffending and has a wider community benefit while also allowing a proportionate way of addressing the consequences of criminality.

During my years as a mental health nurse, I have cared for many individuals who have also been offenders. It is important to recognise that there is specific mental health legislation for Scotland—the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003, as amended by the Mental Health (Scotland) Act 2015—to ensure that those who are deemed to be mentally unwell at the time of their criminality will receive specialist care and treatment in our forensic services. That is also not the end of the matter, because we know that many offenders within our prison population have experienced adverse childhood experiences such as neglect, abuse or addiction within the home or are care experienced. The lives that they have lived can have a cumulative impact, and repeat offending and a reliance on institutions can become the norm for some. Vulnerability, if not addressed, can have adverse outcomes for individuals and for all of us in society.

In my opinion, that is why the work that the Scottish Government is carrying out through the Promise is so important—because it directly supports children and families. We know that the Promise exists to transform how Scotland cares for its children, care-experienced adults and families. Although we cannot change the past for individuals who are already in the justice system, we must recognise that the appropriate trauma-based support, family interventions and nurturing relationships that the Promise seeks to provide were not available to many who have already offended.

We must also recognise that there are bad people who do bad things. For those who commit serious crimes and who pose the highest risk, prison sentences and remaining in prison in the most severe of circumstances can be the most appropriate action and outcome. However, for offenders where the risk can be reasonably assessed—on a case-by-case basis—as being low or reduced, allowing them to remain connected to support services within an appropriate community setting while remaining accountable for their actions can mitigate against reoffending and could be more beneficial for all in society.

Stephen Kerr: Given what Michelle Campbell has said in the good speech that she is making, I hope she will agree that the concerns of victims must be at the heart of any of the programmes that she is describing. There is nothing more terrifying for someone who has been a victim of crime than to see the perpetrator back in the community as if nothing has changed, as far as the victim can see. Does she agree that victims must be at the heart and centre of our justice system?

Michelle Campbell: The member is moving ahead. I will be addressing the issue of victims in my speech and will get to that point if he will allow me to go on.

To show that we are serious about creating safer communities and reducing reoffending, we must continue to invest in trauma-informed services both inside and outside our prisons. By providing adequate support—including mental health support, work to tackle addiction and help to rebuild lives—to those who are affected by childhood trauma, we can break cycles of both offending and reoffending that can often span generations.

Supporting victims must also be a priority, where appropriate, in serving the ends of justice. Restorative justice, which my fellow Campbell, Kate Campbell, already made a point about today, can be an opportunity for increased accountability of the offender while empowering victims and giving them the opportunity to have some closure or, at least, to move forward. Justice must be firm, fair and focused on prevention as well as on punishing those who deserve that.

The challenge of the rising prison population cannot be solved by incarceration alone. Continued investment in rehabilitation, the prison estate and community-based justice has a role to play in supporting society and in addressing the root causes of offending. That investment can support victims while seriously addressing the need to be ambitious about preventing reoffending and supporting offenders with traumatic backgrounds or adverse past experiences, so that they can access consistent and appropriate support.

15:45

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): Scotland's prison population is at a critical point. As the motion demonstrates, the Scottish Government recognises the importance of the issue and is taking action through sustained investment, careful planning and a clear focus on public safety. The 2026-27 budget includes investment of £1 billion in Scotland's prisons. That

is a significant commitment to our justice system and it is an investment in capacity, safety, rehabilitation and the long-term effectiveness of our prison estate.

We all recognise that prison remains an essential part of our justice system. It is the appropriate place for those who have committed serious crimes against people and society and for those who present a risk to the public. The protection of victims and the safety of communities are central to the Scottish Government's approach.

Scotland's prison population continues to rise despite our having the lowest number of recorded crimes, and the average custodial sentence length increased by 37 per cent between 2014-15 and 2023-24. That is all having an impact on capacity in our prisons.

The Scottish Government is taking action to strengthen the justice system and support public confidence, and it is clear that public safety remains the highest priority. For example, changes to the early release scheme do not apply to those who serve long-term custodial sentences of more than four years or those who serve sentences for domestic abuse or offences of a sexual nature. The protection of victims clearly remains central to decision making.

In the remainder of my remarks, I will focus on the role of community justice as a sustainable response to the situation. Deputy Presiding Officer, you will know that I am interested in that, as you are. We were both members of the Criminal Justice Committee in the previous session of Parliament.

Evidence shows that community-based sentences are effective in reducing reoffending. They support accountability while helping people to address the causes of offending behaviour, and they contribute to having safer communities and fewer victims. That is why the Scottish Government is investing around £169 million in community justice services in 2026-27. Is that enough? Personally, I do not think that it is. It is a minuscule amount in the justice budget, which is very, very heavily weighted towards punishment.

The additional £10 million to support diversion from prosecution, alternatives to remand, community sentencing and throughcare services is welcome. It builds on the investment of £25 million over the previous two years. I also welcome the cabinet secretary's remarks on reviewing community justice. However, the evidence is already clear. Statistics show that people who are released from custody experience higher rates of reconviction than those who receive non-custodial sentences. In the 2022-23 cohort, 42.5 per cent of those who were released from custody were reconvicted within a year. For those who were given a community payback order, the figure was 28.6 per cent. Those figures demonstrate the value of effective community interventions.

Community justice is not soft touch. It is fair, proportionate and trauma informed and it benefits all of society, not just the offender. The approach is balanced, evidence led and focused on long-term outcomes.

For those who should and must serve a custodial prison sentence, that sentence should provide an important opportunity to address offending and health inequalities and improve health outcomes. We must put the resources in to try to stop the cycle of the same people coming in and out of prison.

When I was first elected to this place, 10 years ago, I had been working as a criminal justice social worker. I came here thinking that Scotland was very much on a path towards a rehabilitative community justice model, like many of our European neighbours who have been mentioned in the debate. Sadly, however, we are not making quick enough progress in shifting that balance. I have to be blunt here. Until we stand up to the rhetoric of the political right in this chamber, we will always be spending billions on prisons and trying to outdo each other as to who is tougher on crime. That money could be spent on hospitals and other things for our communities.

Stephen Kerr: Will the member take an intervention?

Mark Simpson: Will the member take an intervention?

Fulton MacGregor: I will take an intervention from Stephen Kerr.

Stephen Kerr: I am really confused by Fulton MacGregor's objection to the idea that we should invest in the prison estate. The reason why we are having this debate is that the prison estate has not kept up with demand. I intervened on the Cabinet Secretary for Justice to point out that ministers have failed to plan and to make decisions. Surely to goodness Fulton MacGregor is not expecting us to continue with the Victorian-style facilities that we have in our prisons. They are not conducive to the rehabilitation that we would all like to see prisoners experience before returning to society.

Fulton MacGregor: I thank Stephen Kerr for that intervention, but he knows fine well that that is not what I said. I welcome the investment in our prison estates. I meant that, of the money that is in the criminal justice system, the balance should be weighted more towards community justice. That is the view that I hold, and neither Stephen Kerr nor anyone else on the Tory benches will change my mind on it.

There is a better way. It will take strength, determination and a lot of work to achieve it, but the rewards will be great: a happier, more just society in which the cycle of offending is effectively interrupted and our jails and prisons are kept for the most violent, dangerous and serious offenders.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): We now move to closing speeches. I call Yi-pee—sorry, Yi-pei—Chou Turvey to speak for up to four minutes.

15:50

Yi-pei Chou Turvey: Do not worry, Deputy Presiding Officer—Yi and pei are both pronounced like EE, the phone company, if that makes it easier to remember.

This week, I spoke with the family of a man who was released on licence to serve his sentence in the community. He has been tagged with an electronic device and must stay within the four walls of his house from 7 o'clock every evening until 6 o'clock the following morning. He cannot leave his local authority and can travel only for work and social purposes. He must serve 300 hours of community service and pay a £3,000 fine. He admitted guilt. He committed an act of violence and punishment is appropriate, but we agree with the Scottish Government that to assume prison is a panacea for all crime is to simplify the most complex of issues.

As my colleague from across the chamber emphasised today, the aim of our justice system is twofold: to punish and to rehabilitate.

In that instance, a prison sentence would surely have led to that man losing his home. Serving a custodial sentence would have meant that he was unable to work or pay his mortgage, and—as he is the primary carer for his children—it would have resulted in greater pressure on our children and family services, which would have come at a cost to our public purse and been to the detriment of the young people involved.

Home detention as part of a wider set of tools to manage a prison population does work, yet the number of prisoners on home detention curfew is lower now than it was 10 years ago. Between 2016 and 2018, an average of 288 prisoners were on home detention at any one time; during the same period ending in 2025, the average number was 87. We have tools at our disposal to manage the prison population and we need to use them.

The same is true about the size of our prisons. We are going in two very different directions. On one side, we are considering gigantic prisons while, on the other, we are considering smaller ones that are more community oriented. We need to consider what the research is telling us about which kind suits our society best and which is best for rehabilitation.

I call on the Scottish Government to do what Pauline McNeill described clearly and take the action that is needed to clear the backlog in the justice system. We need to reduce the number of people who are held on remand.

As several colleagues from across the chamber have stated, offending often sits hand in hand with complex issues that the offenders face. We call on the Scottish Government to pour money into programming that works to treat the underlying issues, including by providing addiction support, services to improve mental health, and support with housing and for the families of offenders, which Kate Campbell, Maggie Chapman and Michelle Campbell mentioned.

At the start of the debate, the cabinet secretary highlighted that community sentences need to be effective. I am reminded again of my discussion with the family of the man on licence in the community. They reported that there is a broken community payback system and that hours have been wasted by a poorly managed scheme.

For those reasons, the Scottish Liberal Democrats call on the Scottish Government to publish a long-term strategy for achieving a sustainable prison population that commands public confidence. Justice cannot be about one emergency after another. This problem is solvable and has not come as a surprise. I call on the Scottish Government to take the bold decisions needed to effect deliverable, actionable differences. It is what we were elected to do.

Delivery, action and getting things done are what the Scottish Liberal Democrats are committed to deliver in the Parliament. I call on the Government to work with us where our shared values align to create lasting benefits for the people of Scotland.

The current crisis in our prison system is the consequence of years of being on the bottom of the to-do list, of the backlogs of the justice system, the delay to the prison infrastructure, the high remand population and of missing the fact that there is predictable pressure on the prison estate. It is like that unloved but necessary drawer of doom in your home that you always do last and only find time to sort when you cannot close it any more. Let us agree to that and move forward with purpose.

15:55

Stephen Kerr (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Yi-pei Chou Turvey sums things up very well. This whole issue has been at the bottom of the to-do list—that is exactly where we are.

The title of the Government's motion, which is the subject of today's debate, is:

"Achieving a sustainable prison population".

We can all share that perfectly reasonable objective.

Neil Gray: It has certainly remained at the top of my to-do list. I would reflect on the fact that, after a month in post, I have presented to Parliament a plan to achieve a sustainable prison population.

Stephen Kerr: With the greatest respect to the cabinet secretary, a more accurate portrayal of his speech is that he presented a consultation on some ideas that might address the issue.

I am not necessarily commenting on the few weeks that Neil Gray has been cabinet secretary. We approach any appointment of a new cabinet secretary with high hopes that there will be words, yes, but also action and delivered outcomes. Therefore, I publicly welcome Neil Gray to his position and wish him, on behalf of the people of Scotland and all of us in the chamber, success in achieving the changes that we all know are needed in our justice system, because Pauline McNeill is right: we are at a low point of public confidence in it.

Before we go any further in the debate about how to fix a problem, it is instructive to discuss how we got there in the first place. How did we get to the point at which there are 8,300 prisoners in a prison estate that is designed for 7,800? How did we get to the point at which we have the worst record for deaths in custody probably in the whole of Europe—the figure is certainly three or four times that in England and Wales? How did we get to the point where rehabilitation opportunities are so under pressure and so limited in accessibility?

Kate Campbell: Does the member recognise—most members across the chamber have agreed—that poverty is a significant driver of people ending up in the prison system and that his Conservative Government did so much damage to this country, particularly through the introduction of universal credit, which pushed thousands of families into poverty? Does he accept responsibility for his party's impact on the increase in prisoner numbers?

Stephen Kerr: The cabinet secretary has a challenge on his hands, because if that is an example of the kind of knockabout politics that members—[*Interruption*.]

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): Members.

Stephen Kerr: Surely not, Deputy Presiding Officer. Here I am, trying to be a constructive participant in the debate, and what do I get? Members crying, "Tory, Tory, Tory."

We can have such debates if members like, because I am quite adept at participating in them—as, I think, the cabinet secretary would agree—but I am trying to be constructive. We must take a problem and understand its roots before we can begin to challenge it.

David Linden: Will the member give way?

Stephen Kerr: I would never not give way to David Linden.

David Linden: Mr Kerr will be aware that, in 2023, the then Conservative Government embarked on a process of early release. I am sure that he will also be aware of some of the work that was undertaken by his, and indeed our, former colleagues at Westminster, Ed Argar and David Gauke, who were ministers. I understand why Mr Kerr might want to look back, but will he reflect on the situation that those former ministers left behind, and will he come up with some solutions, as we are trying to do today?

Stephen Kerr: I stood up to intervene on Alyn Smith in order to compliment him on his speech, which was an acknowledgement of the problems that we face. I think that, in his remarks, David Linden, too, has acknowledged the problems that we face.

All that I am looking for from the Scottish ministers is a degree of humility—for them to say, "Look, we've got this wrong and there's another way to do it." [*Interruption*.] For those who do not know, David Linden is holding up the report from the independent Scottish sentencing and penal policy commission. It is certainly worth reading and debating, but it is not an acknowledgment by those on the Government front bench, which is really all that I seek. It was a very small expectation on my part that they would admit that they got it wrong—that prisons were at the bottom of the to-do list. That would be a starting point for us all to work together from. However, that position has been taken—

Neil Gray: Will the member take an intervention?

Stephen Kerr: —in interventions such as Kate Campbell's.

I will, of course, accept an intervention from the cabinet secretary.

Neil Gray: I certainly do not regret, and nor will I apologise for, the fact that we are prosecuting more serious offences, including sexual offences and historical sexual offences. That has driven the increase in the long-term prison population and is a significant contributor to the current prison population.

Stephen Kerr: I applaud that, but it is not an admission about where things have gone wrong. I

am glad that the cabinet secretary agrees that we should be locking up those bad people. An SNP member said earlier in the debate that there are bad people who do bad things. That is exactly right. Let us be tough on criminality, particularly serious crime, violent crime, sexual crime and organised crime. Let us throw the book at the people in our society who are causing the misery that such individuals cause, but let us not run away from the realities.

Speaking of realities, I draw colleagues' attention to a letter dated 12 September 2025 from His Majesty's chief inspector of prisons, about the prison situation. It is one of the starkest letters that I have ever read from any of His Majesty's inspectors. It is such a call to action that no one who reads the letter could turn their back on what it contains. Basically, the letter says that we are presiding over a prison system that is worse than that of a third-world country. How can that possibly bring about remediation and rehabilitation? One of the Green members talked about countries looking at our prisons and being reluctant to extradite prisoners to Scotland. That is unacceptable for me as a Scot and a Scottish Conservative, because I want us to have a rigorous justice system with victims at its heart.

The letter repeatedly says that none of this is unexpected. The state of our prison system is not a flash-weather moment but the result of prisons being at the bottom of the to-do list. Why do we not just accept that that is what has happened for the past couple of decades? With such a foundation of honesty about where we are at, perhaps we can do something about it.

I see that the Deputy Presiding Officer is inviting me to conclude, which I will happily do. I have not been able to deliver the speech that I prepared—there is nothing new about that—but I will say that ministers were warned.

I suggest that colleagues read the letter of 12 September 2025, because it is a reality check that we—all parties, and particularly the Government, where the responsibility rests—badly need.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): I can assure Mr Kerr that he got extra time for the interventions that he took.

16:03

Kate Nevens (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green): I am really grateful that we are having this discussion. Although we may all have slightly different approaches on exactly what needs to happen to address the problems with our current prison system—

Mark Simpson: Will the member take an intervention?

Kate Nevens: I will make some progress, but thank you.

We may have different approaches, but it seems clear from the debate that the prison system in Scotland is not working—that it is broken. As we have heard, we have one of the highest imprisonment rates in western Europe. We have also heard about how our prison system is failing to rehabilitate people and prevent reoffending. In fact, around 43 per cent of people released from custody in Scotland go on to reoffend. It is a problem that is further exacerbated by the huge issue of overcrowding, which, as the cabinet secretary mentioned, makes it difficult for prisons to engage everyone in activities that help with rehabilitation, such as exercise, education, employment and training.

We urgently need to rethink our approach. We need to move away from a costly and failing system that is focused on punishment and towards one that is focused on harm prevention and public safety, by investing in alternative, victim-focused, restorative and community justice systems for those who do not pose an immediate threat to society—many of which have been mentioned by colleagues. We also need to focus much more on prevention, including addressing the inequalities that mean people from some communities are far more likely to end up in prison than others.

Stephen Kerr: I am grateful to Kate Nevens for giving way on that point. Fairly or unfairly, a view has been attributed to her about the future of prisons. Given the rightful claim that the cabinet secretary made about our ability to imprison bad people, hardened criminals, serious criminals, people who commit sexual crimes and people who are involved in organised crime, does she agree that there is a very important place for prisons within the justice system?

Kate Nevens: I thank Stephen Kerr for that question—it was not unexpected.

I want there to be a complete overhaul of the prison system, including radically reducing, over time, the number of people that we incarcerate.

Mark Simpson: Will the member take an intervention?

Kate Nevens: I am responding to an intervention.

We should be building a justice system that is focused on harm prevention, safety and accountability rather than on punishment. For me, that still means a system in which people who pose a violent threat to communities are removed for our safety, but that system can and should look very different from our current, broken prison system.

In too many cases, our prisons house people who are already experiencing vulnerabilities such as poverty and substance misuse. Janey Starling from Level Up, which is a feminist organisation that campaigns for an end to the imprisonment of pregnant women and mothers, has described prisons as

"just warehouses for people who have fallen through all of the holes in our welfare safety net."

The evidence that we have proves her point. Sixty-three per cent of people in prison have an alcohol use disorder. Almost half of people arriving to prisons in 2024-25 were from the 20 per cent most deprived areas of Scotland. According to the Prison Reform Trust, 70 per cent of women prisoners in Scotland report that they have been a victim of domestic abuse or violence from their partner.

I thank Carol Mochan for bringing up women in prison. Women are also far more likely to be imprisoned for shoplifting than men. Vast inequalities are reflected in the system. If people go into prison vulnerable, they are likely to come out the other side with those vulnerabilities multiplied. UK-wide statistics suggest that, if someone goes into prison with a substance misuse problem, they are seven times more likely to experience an overdose when they come out. If someone goes into prison experiencing housing insecurity, they are far more likely to become homeless again on their release, and they are likely to have lost the community support networks that they had before entering prison. That is why the Greens have called for all prison leavers to go into housing first on discharge, with safe accommodation packaged together with appropriate support, making sure that everyone has access to—

Michelle Campbell: Will the member take an intervention?

Kate Nevens: Yes.

Michelle Campbell: I apologise for the timing, because Kate Nevens was right in her groove. I want to ask about employment. Does she agree that short sentences can interrupt employment and make a more destabilised environment for that individual? That is not good for society at large, either.

Kate Nevens: I absolutely agree. We need to do all that we can to help people to rebuild their lives through, for example, employability services, and make it much less likely that they will find themselves in the same position again.

We also need to send far fewer people to prison in the first place—we have heard a lot about that in the debate. We should expand presumptions against short sentencing and reduce the use of remand in custody, as Yi-pei Chou Turvey's amendment makes clear. We should create a presumption against the imprisonment of pregnant women and women with young children, and expand those alternative, restorative and community options for non-violent crimes. In short, we should be using prisons as a last resort rather than a first response.

In the final report of the independent sentencing and penal policy commission, which the Scottish Government set up in 2025, the commission argued that short prison sentences

"are not effective at reducing reoffending and often destabilise lives by disrupting housing, employment, treatment and family ties",

and that

"Community sentences offer a more effective route to rehabilitation".

We have heard several members talk about the importance of community justice approaches in the debate.

As we have heard, prisons are expensive, costing more than £52,000 per person per year. If we reduced the prison population by 40 per cent, which the Netherlands has shown us is entirely possible, that would free up £180 million that could be transformative for victims and community safety.

We should properly invest in victim support programmes, rape crisis services and shelters that are providing vital support at a time of massive funding cuts. We should also invest in more prevention programmes that support marginalised communities for whom prison sentences are far more likely, such as care-experienced young people, communities that experience high levels of poverty and racialised groups.

We must also start to tackle the underlying social and economic inequalities that cause people to end up in prison. We must invest more not in prisons but in homes, schools, youth work, addiction services, hospitals and community health services as part of a transformative justice approach.

Where we stand on the issue depends on what we think the justice system exists to do. As the University of Strathclyde's Professor Mike Nellis has said,

"there is a price to be paid for confusing pragmatic and justifiable responses in the here and now, because they are available, with the longer-term pursuit of a safer society."

If we want a safer society, we need to start collectively reimagining what our justice system looks like and building new systems that centre victims and the prevention of harm.

16:11

Mark Simpson (North East Scotland) (Reform): I welcome the new member for North East Scotland to the chamber.

A couple of weeks ago, one of my first actions as a Reform MSP was to visit HMP Grampian, so I have a particular interest in the topic. I had a good chat with the governor when I was there. Had Maggie Chapman or Kate Nevens taken one of my earlier interventions, which they did not, I would have asked whether the Scottish Green Party still has a radical policy of abolishing prisons. I would welcome an intervention from the Greens who are in the chamber to clarify whether the answer to that is yes or no.

It seems that no Green member wishes to intervene—there we go.

When I was in HMP Grampian, I saw at first hand the intense daily pressures that our prison system faces: chronic overcrowding, serious staff shortages and the constant challenge of managing a revolving-door population. Scotland's prisons are not sustainable, and that is the fault of the SNP Government. The latest reconviction statistics make that brutally clear. Nearly two thirds of current prisoners have had at least one prison sentence in the past 10 years. For those serving short sentences of three months or less, the reoffending rate is a shocking 60 per cent.

Criminals must serve their sentences in prison to break that cycle. There are far too many repeat offenders in prison. It has become a normalised process for them and not actual punishment. It has become part of their reality.

In a perfect world, we would all like to have fewer people in prison but, sadly, we do not live in a perfect world—we live in a country where victims are far too often forgotten. As we learned this week, sexual crimes in Scotland have hit record highs. They are up 10 per cent on the previous year, at 16,430 offences, which is the highest level since 1971. That is a national disgrace.

Reform says it clearly: victims must come first. Soft sentences for serious and repeat offenders are failing women and girls, and they must stop. Reform supports mandatory minimum sentences for the most serious criminals and tougher sentences for those who repeatedly prey on others. That is not about being punitive for its own sake but about delivering justice for victims and creating a real deterrent.

We must also be honest about rehabilitation. The current system is failing badly. Too many prisoners leave prison with no job, no stable housing and no meaningful support. Those failures help no one, least of all the victims.

We need a stronger stick and a genuine carrot. The stick means that sentences actually deter. The carrot means serious, properly funded rehabilitation, education, vocational skills and a throughcare service that gives people a real chance to break the cycle and find genuine, long-term employment that means that they can provide for themselves, their families and their loved ones.

Stuart McMillan (Inverclyde) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Mark Simpson: I would love to.

Stuart McMillan: Reform's policies are about taking money out of the public sector, but Mr Simpson is now asking for more money to be spent on throughcare support. Where is that money coming from? I am genuinely interested to know.

Mark Simpson: I am sorry, but I do not think that I was calling for more money in the system; I was saying that there should be a readjusting of current budgets.

A sustainable prison population will be achieved only when we stop the revolving door of prison that we have. We need to put victims first, and we need to provide meaningful punishment along with effective rehabilitation. Unfortunately, over the past 19 years, the SNP Government has failed on the issue, and it must do better. Quite simply, victims deserve better, and the people of Scotland deserve better.

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): Reform members think that that was good—they are clapping.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): Can we have quiet for the next speaker, please?

16:15

Joe Fagan (South Scotland) (Lab): I congratulate James Adams on his spirited first speech.

I acknowledge the candour that the Cabinet Secretary for Justice brought to the chamber in his remarks earlier, and I acknowledge the substance of the Government's motion, which I believe sets out in stark terms the nature of the challenge that is before the country.

Stephen Kerr referred to the letter that was sent by HM chief inspector of prisons. I think that that is a good starting point for us. She said:

"Overcrowding is an invidious and all-pervading evil that affects every aspect of prison life"

and that it makes it

"more difficult for the prison to comply with core human rights such as access to fresh air."

She said that, because of overcrowding,

"Relationships between staff and prisoners can become more strained … Rehabilitation focused activity becomes more compromised"

and

"Transformational change opportunities are neglected, leaving more risk around the ability of prisoners to reintegrate successfully on release and stay away from crime".

She pointed out that "such failures cost money", and said that overcrowding means that

"Prisons stop being places of rehabilitation and become warehouses, holding people who may get very little time out of cell."

That is the stark reality of the invidious and all-pervading evil in our prison systems. It is an evil that we cannot ignore.

I say to the Scottish Government that that evil is not new. It is unquestionably the case that the increase in convictions for serious violent and sexual offences is contributing to the growth in the prison population, but policy makers have been grappling with the size of Scotland's prison population throughout the history of devolution. This is not year zero.

In his foreword to the document setting out the Government's public service reform strategy, the then Minister for Public Finance acknowledged that the vision of the Christie commission on the shift towards prevention had

"not been realised to its full potential."

The Christie commission identified Scotland's prison population, which at that time had been growing year on year, as a prime example of failure demand. Although it is true that there was a period after the Christie commission's report when the prison population fell, it is now back at record levels. I contend that that is because we have not sufficiently addressed the underlying factors driving demand in the system. I believe that the Cabinet Secretary for Justice accepted that point in his remarks earlier.

There are criminals who belong in prison—let us be clear about that—but, to build safer communities and make the system more sustainable, more action is needed on remand and more action is needed to break the cycle of reoffending. Repeat offending retraumatises victims, undermines community confidence in the justice system and costs us all. The Scottish Government estimates the total cost of reoffending to the Scottish economy to be somewhere between £3 billion and £4 billion.

As Pauline McNeill set out, we simply have not done enough as a nation to strengthen our approach to rehabilitation and community justice and to break that cycle of reoffending. As the chief inspector of prisons has said, the size of the prison population is a barrier to effective rehabilitation. As Katherine Sangster said, we have to build alternatives that can command the confidence of the public and the confidence of the judiciary. Therefore, our message to the Scottish Government is that Scottish Labour is prepared to work across party lines to reduce reoffending and to improve outcomes. On that note, I welcome the Cabinet Secretary for Justice's announcement of a consultation and his remarks on GPS tracking in relation to bail and home detention curfews. I hope that, in that spirit, he might be able to agree with Labour's amendment today.

I acknowledge Fulton MacGregor's insightful contribution on community justice. It is not a soft-touch approach. If it is proportionate and well resourced, it is an important part of our justice system.

On that point, I declare an interest as a local councillor, because I want to highlight Scotland's first alcohol and drug problem-solving court in South Lanarkshire and its promising approach to structured deferred sentencing. That involves a collaboration between Hamilton sheriff court and South Lanarkshire Council that we can build on, especially if the Scottish Government were minded to confirm its continued support for the project going forward.

This time, things have to be different. On the dashboard of indicators in front of us that tell us that something is going wrong with our public services, the one for our prison population has been flashing red for far too long.

The theme of avoidable, preventable failure demand is a common one across our public services, whether we are debating delayed discharge, the housing emergency or the stubborn gap in healthy life expectancies. There has been a chronic implementation gap—a mismatch between the ambitions of Government and the outcomes that we achieve. That is not just my view; it is the view of Audit Scotland. The Government signals progressive intent, secures a mandate for progressive change, but fails to deliver the progressive outcomes that can transform this country. That is what has to change, and that is why this Parliament has to be different from the last.

16:20

Neil Gray: The sustained level of overcrowding in our prisons is posing an unacceptable level of risk and impacts on the ability to deliver rehabilitative work. I very much welcome that speech from Joe Fagan. Our prison population today stands at 8,459, against a design capacity of

7,800, which speaks to the challenge that we are facing. That increases the risk of reoffending and creates a vicious circle in which the impact is felt across the criminal justice system as a whole. Again, I thank the dedicated front-line staff for their hard work. I hope that that is the level of humility that Stephen Kerr has been looking for from me. I am saying that there is a challenge, I am pointing to the challenge and I will point out the steps that I want to take to address it.

I outlined the range of actions that the Government has taken with partners already and I assure Parliament that I will continue to engage regularly with justice partners and members to progress any action that helps to alleviate the pressure faced by the system.

I was really pleased with—and pleasantly surprised by—the debate today: there has been a recognition of the scale of the challenge that we face. I am keen that we learn lessons from countries that have had successes in reducing their prison population. I do not ask whether we can spend millions on exporting prisoners from Scotland to Estonia; I ask how Estonia has achieved a two-thirds reduction in its prison population over the past 20 years, and what steps it has taken to achieve 50 per cent capacity in its new jails.

I have listened carefully to the speeches this afternoon. As I said, I found the debate incredibly constructive. Kate Campbell summed it up incredibly well when she said that we are looking for the same thing—fewer crimes, fewer victims, fewer people in prison, less crowded prisons and less money spent on incarceration. There was a significant reflection on the problem and a refreshing willingness to engage in the proposals that I have set out.

I will now turn to some of the other contributions. I very much appreciated Pauline McNeill's clarity on the challenges that we face. In the opening stages of the debate, she raised a point about public perception and the transparency of sentences. I understand that issue, and it is part of what we need to consult on. She will be aware that the system in England and Wales is moving to a sentencing model of three parts, in which a third of the sentence is spent in custody, a third of it involves monitoring and a third is spent at liberty. That puts into context the situation that we are looking to set out in the consultation that I have discussed. I also absolutely accept her point and the point raised by Stephen Kerr about deaths in custody. That is something that I will be engaging with. I will take that away, and we will discuss it further.

I absolutely recognise what Amanda Bland was saying about the escalation of the prosecution of serious sexual and organised crime. She will know from her background that that provides significant additional complexity for our prison system to manage, not least in the segregation of organised criminal gangs. With the prison population at its current level, that is incredibly challenging. She spoke about capacity, but we cannot just build our way out of this situation. We need to take steps around capacity, but I am also proposing consideration of how we reduce the population.

Maggie Chapman was absolutely right to set out that crime is not out of control. Indeed, she and Fulton MacGregor pointed to the fact that recorded crime rates are on a downward trend. Howevr, incarceration is up and is higher than the European average. That speaks to the challenge that we must grapple with as well as contradicting another point that has been made today, which is that the system prioritises criminals over victims. We are incarcerating more people per head of population than most of the countries in western Europe. We have seen an increase of more than 600 in the number of long-term prisoners over the past two years, and we have seen an increase of 37 per cent in the average length of sentences.

I disagree with those who say that we do not need any additional capacity. To be frank, I believe that we do. Maggie Chapman is right to point to the Netherlands, Estonia and other international examples and to how they have moved forward.

I welcome James Adams to the chamber. I congratulate him on arriving in the Scottish Parliament and I offer, through him, my congratulations to Douglas Lumsden on his success. James Adams hails from Fraserburgh and my father is a Torry loon and has links to Aberdeenshire, so I was heartened to hear about James Adams's family heritage and what drives him in politics. I am sure that, based on his opening speech today, he will make a significant contribution to the Parliament.

Pauline McNeill: Fulton MacGregor made an important point in his speech. I looked back at the Community Justice (Scotland) Act 2016 that changed how we deal with long-term prisoners, which is covered in the consultation. Fulton MacGregor said—and I agree with this—is that, in the debate on that legislation, there was a bit of a competition about who would be toughest in relation to the justice system. That is a difficult issue for politicians, and it is a big challenge for the Government.

One way in which the Government could demonstrate its commitment to balancing the realities in the political scenario around justice issues is by putting serious investment into alternatives. I know that the cabinet secretary has made an announcement in that regard, but it

seems quite small. I think that all parties would like to see a bigger investment.

Neil Gray: I hear that and I understand it. I heard very clearly the point that was made by my friend and colleague Fulton MacGregor about the comparative investment between community justice and custodial sentences. I understand that. We have increased the budget for community justice to £170 million a year, and it is almost an inevitability that, if we are expanding the use of community justice, we will need to fund the support that goes alongside that. That support needs to be iterative and considered. I believe that, if we are successful in the approach that I am setting out—a more preventive approach—it will become what Pauline McNeill is looking for.

I very much welcome Yi-pei Chou Turvey's approach and the Liberal Democrat amendment, which we will support. I absolutely want to move to a more preventative approach. I have set out in my response to Pauline McNeill where we want to go and that we want the system to be more proactive than reactive.

Alyn Smith was very kind in his contribution. I thought it was a very complimentary and very thoughtful speech from the new convener of the Criminal Justice Committee. I welcome him to that role and congratulate him on his election. He remarked that recorded crime has come down since 1991. Much of the increase in the recording of sexual and violent crime—there was an exchange between Alyn Smith and Stephen Kerr on that point—is due to a significant shift in prosecution. That is a legacy of the previous Lord Advocate and previous justice secretaries, which has generated an increased confidence in reporting, which is absolutely fundamental.

Carol Mochan's intervention on Alyn Smith about women in custody was also very important. During my visit to HMP Stirling, which the previous justice secretary invited me on when I was the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, I saw very clearly that many of the women in the justice system are victims themselves, so we have a big job of work to do in that space. Alyn Smith also made good points about older people in jail and moving upstream into prevention.

I recognise the point that Katherine Sangster made about the perception of whether sentences fit the crimes. However, I again point to the increase in the long-term prisoner cohort, which is up by 600 people in the past two years, while the average sentence length has increased by 37 per cent.

Similarly, David Linden was very thoughtful in his speech and he put the scale of our levels of incarceration into context. He also referenced the genesis of what I have set out today, which is the independent sentencing and penal policy commission. Its membership was comprised of a range of independent expert professionals: Martyn Evans, the former chair of the Scottish Police Authority; Catherine Dyer, chair of Community Justice Scotland; Cathy Jamieson, who is well known in this parish; Sheriff David Mackie; Dr Hannah Graham, the senior lecturer in criminology at the University of Stirling; and Lynsey Smith, the joint chair of the Social Work Scotland justice standing committee. I commend them for their work and I thank David Linden for raising the fact that their work is the genesis of what I am presenting today.

We need the whole Government and the whole of the public, community and voluntary sectors to move towards prevention. In my former life as the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, I often pointed to the fact that 80 per cent of the drivers of poor health are outside the control of the health service. I do not have a similar statistic to quote for the justice system, but the figure will be very similar. My portfolio and victims across society will be the greatest beneficiaries if we can move to a more preventative system, which is exactly what I am seeking to corral with colleagues in the Government; that is absolutely the focus of this Government.

Michelle Campbell referred to the £169 million that has been invested in community justice, her experience working in the health service, the drivers of mental illness, the link between mental illness and the justice system and the impact that we wish to see from the Promise. She was also right to emphasise that we must have prisons to deal with the most serious and dangerous offenders.

Fulton MacGregor has significant professional experience, as well as experience that has been gained through membership of the Criminal Justice Committee, and his speech was informed by that experience. He commented on the issue of investing in community versus custodial sentences. I readily understand that point and will, no doubt, engage with Mr MacGregor on it.

Mr Simpson suggested in his speech that this Government has somehow been soft on crime. On the basis of what I have set out, I cannot understand what planet that comment comes from. We have the highest levels of custody per head in western Europe, the long-term sentence population has increased by 600 in the past two years—that is equivalent to the size of Kilmarnock prison—and there has been a 37 per cent increase in the average length of sentences in the past decade.

One of the greatest drivers of the increase in the prison population has been the increased

population of people who have been sentenced for sexual and violent crimes. I make no apology for that; I am pleased to see serious sentences for serious crimes. In the face of those facts, it is simply not credible to suggest that our justice system is anything other than robust in dealing with serious criminality.

I am determined to deliver a sustainable approach to the management of Scotland's prison population and a prison estate that is safe and fit for purpose, with prevention at its heart and a clear focus on reducing offending and reoffending behaviour. That is how we serve justice and create a safer community. I therefore ask members to support us in consulting to bring about change in order to deliver a sustainable prison population, safer communities and a strong justice system.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): That concludes the debate on achieving a sustainable prison population. I will allow a few moments for members on the front benches to swap over before we move to the next item of business.

National Health Service Capital Projects

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): The next item of business is a statement by Angela Constance on national health service capital projects. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of the statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

16:35

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Care (Angela Constance): I am grateful for the opportunity to provide an update to members on NHS capital projects, specifically on the current position and next steps for the Monklands replacement project.

I begin by being absolutely clear: the Government will deliver a new Monklands hospital. That commitment has not changed and it will not change. However, having carefully considered the full business case that was submitted by NHS Lanarkshire, I cannot approve it in its current form within our current financial landscape. That is not a decision that I have taken lightly. The case for replacing Monklands is well established. The current hospital estate is ageing, it presents ongoing operational challenges and it constrains the delivery of modern models of care. Staff have worked in difficult conditions for many years and they deserve better. Patients deserve better.

There have been active campaigns by members across the chamber to represent the views of constituents in Lanarkshire, including by my colleagues Neil Gray and Fulton MacGregor. I fully appreciate the strength of feeling on the need for a new Monklands hospital. However, it is also my responsibility to ensure that major investment decisions are affordable, deliverable and aligned with the future direction of our health and care system. The proposal that is before us has an estimated cost of around £2.1 billion and would represent an unprecedented concentration of capital investment in a single health project. For context, it would cost an estimated £5 million per bed to deliver and would exceed the cost of delivering Scotland's largest hospital, the Queen Elizabeth university hospital, and the new HMP Glasgow. Proceeding in that cost envelope would significantly limit our ability to invest in services and infrastructure across the wider NHS. I have carefully weighed the opportunity cost against our objective on improving public services.

The current proposal also raises important questions about value for money. It is significantly more expensive than comparable programmes. Investment of that scale must be fully justified before it can be approved. Just as importantly, the

current design is heavily reliant on large acute hospital provision. That is not the direction in which our health service is moving. Across Scotland, we are shifting towards delivering more care closer to home, strengthening community services, making better use of digital technology and ensuring that hospitals are focused on those who need specialist and complex care. To proceed with the current proposal would risk locking us into a model that does not represent the best use of public investment in the years ahead. Finally, the project is approaching a point where continued design development would lead to further cost escalation and reduce our ability to consider alternatives. It is therefore essential that we act now.

Today, I am announcing that we will undertake a formal reset of the Monklands replacement programme. It is a reset and not a stop. It will involve pausing progression of the current design and commissioning a comprehensive redesign, which will be led jointly by the Government, NHS Lanarkshire and partners across the west of Scotland. It is not delay for its own sake and we are not stepping back from our commitment. The new design will take a whole-system approach, bringing together acute care, community services, diagnostics and digital provision in an integrated model. Importantly, the work will take place at pace from the summer and will be focused on designing a modern hospital with a more efficient footprint.

I recognise that the announcement will raise concerns locally, and I will address those directly. First, we remain fully committed to building a new hospital at Monklands. Secondly, this is not about downgrading services; it is about delivering the right service in the right place. Core services, including accident and emergency, will be retained. Thirdly, I recognise the challenges that staff and patients in the current hospital face, and I can announce today that we will invest in addressing immediate infrastructure risks, including known issues that affect patient experience. That will ensure that safe, high-quality care continues while the replacement programme is taken forward.

I pay tribute to the staff at Monklands for their dedication, patience and professionalism. They have been waiting a long time for a new facility, and the project team has worked hard to progress this important project. I am committed to working closely with NHS Lanarkshire to move the project forward at pace.

I am committed to ensuring that the new Monklands hospital plays a core role in designing how we deliver services in the future. That means ensuring that Monklands acts as the blueprint for how we deliver better services in the community, building on the work that is being taken forward by our subnational planning partnership. For example, I am open to the prospect of Monklands not only being an acute hospital but delivering specialist services for communities across the central belt and west Scotland. Alongside the reset of the Monklands programme, we will use this opportunity to rebalance investment across the wider system. The scale of the original proposal would have concentrated a significant proportion of our capital budget in a single project. By taking a different approach, in addition to investing in services that serve the people of Lanarkshire, we can invest more broadly.

Central to that will be investment in community health hubs, which will bring together services such as general practice, community nursing, mental healthcare, diagnostics and out-patient services in modern facilities closer to home. The hubs will make it easier for patients to access co-ordinated care in a single place, reducing the need to travel to hospital. We have set out the first phase of investment in the hubs in Port Glasgow, Cowdenbeath and Lochgelly, and East Calder. We will use those projects to deliver a standardised model for further centres, including in Hamilton, Cumbernauld, Edinburgh, Ayr, Kincardine, Inverness, East Dunbartonshire and Glasgow. For patients, that will mean quicker access, earlier intervention and more care delivered in the community. For the wider system, it will reduce pressure on acute hospitals, allowing focus on those who need specialist care most.

I can announce today that, as part of the programme, specifically for Lanarkshire, we will begin with a new general practitioner walk-in facility in Lanark—transforming an old shop front and a retail park in the town centre into a GP walk-in centre. We will also deliver a new walk-in GP service in Shotts.

By rebalancing our investment, it is my intention that we will deliver on other NHS capital projects that are priorities for communities across our country. For example, if further investment is required to ensure that the Baird hospital and ANCHOR—Aberdeen and north centre for haematology, oncology and radiotherapy—project in Aberdeen can be delivered safely, ministers will consider that carefully.

Under the reset approach, we will move at pace to complete the redesign over the next year and bring forward revised options by the middle of 2027. Subject to ministerial decisions, the design will then progress, with an ambition to begin construction in 2028. We will set clear milestones, including completion of the redesign, agreement of the final scheme and the start of construction. We will ensure demonstrable progress during this parliamentary session.

This is a difficult decision, but it is the right one. I want to reiterate three key points: we will build a new Monklands hospital; we will do so as part of a wider transformation of care across Lanarkshire and the west of Scotland; and we will ensure that the investment meets the standards that are required for managing public money by delivering the best possible outcomes for patients, staff and the people of Scotland.

I commit that the Government will work as quickly as possible with NHS Lanarkshire to ensure that there is a redesign that is affordable and, crucially, that reassures the local community that vital services will not be lost or downgraded.

I am happy to answer any questions that members have. I will also reach out directly to offer a meeting to any local MSPs who have further issues that they wish to discuss.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): There is great interest in the statement. I request that members ask succinct questions and that the cabinet secretary gives succinct answers. Those who wish to ask a question should press their request-to-speak buttons.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I thank the cabinet secretary for the advance copy of her statement.

First, there is no doubt in my mind that the people of Lanarkshire and the hard-working NHS staff at Monklands hospital will be bitterly disappointed by the cabinet secretary's announcement. It does not sound like a reset; it sounds like an indefinite halt. Can she tell us when a new Monklands hospital will actually be built?

Secondly, in the cabinet secretary's answer to a parliamentary question on replacement general practices, she said that there will be no spades in the ground until 2031. Can she advise whether that timeline is correct?

Finally, it has taken a mere seven weeks for the Scottish National Party to ditch its manifesto commitment. Is it not the case that the SNP was economical with the truth in its manifesto when it promised all those things, knowing that there was no budget to deliver any of them?

Angela Constance: This Government will deliver a new hospital for the Monklands. This is not about ditching; it is about delivering. I made a decision that I believe, as I have reported to the Parliament, is in the best interests of the people of Lanarkshire and provides a credible plan to deliver the new hospital that they require. The plan will deliver more than a new acute hospital. It will deliver the transformation of care that we all know is required. Ms Baillie has listened—I assume—to the information about the timetable that I gave in my statement. I assure her that I will keep her duly informed about it.

I read every party's manifesto very carefully. I saw no commitment in the Labour Party's manifesto to the good people of Lanarkshire in relation to a replacement for the Monklands hospital. I can say, hand on heart, that if I had not intervened at this stage on a project that would have required in excess of £2 billion, Ms Baillie would have been asking me far harder questions than she is asking today.

Helen McDade (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform): I thank the cabinet secretary for her statement. She says that this is a whole-system approach, that the old approach of having a large acute hospital is not now the answer and that there will be better services that bring together acute care, community services, diagnostics and digital provision. We have seen before good intentions from the Scottish Government for more integrated care. One smaller example, in relation to GP services and care, is Pitlochry community hospital, which was built and opened to some fanfare by Nicola Sturgeon. That hospital has been plagued by a lack of staff and wards being closed due, partly, to issues with funds.

Where will the money come from? If a new hospital would be too expensive but the cabinet secretary is going to deliver the many things that she set out in her statement, can she assure us not only that capital funding will be included—obviously, that will be less than the £2.1 billion—but that resource funding is already being allocated in budgets now and in the future? Can she estimate when the facility will open?

Angela Constance: For the record, I have written on this matter to Ms McDade in her capacity as the convener of the Health, Care and Sport Committee.

Let me be clear: we still need acute hospitals. The good people of Lanarkshire still need and will get a new Monklands hospital. However, Helen McDade's point about the stewardship of public finances is crucial. We cannot spend £2.1 billion—nor, indeed, more—on one project and meet all our other commitments relating to the aspirations that we all share across Scotland. We know that we need to do things differently, and I know that, in quieter moments, the majority of MSPs acknowledge the need for public service reform and to do things differently. To deliver on the many commitments that I have outlined today, we have to make hard decisions, and I am prepared to make hard decisions about affordability and what is best for future health and care services.

If I have missed anything, I will happily follow up with Helen McDade in writing. We are investing

£22.5 billion across the health and care portfolio, with additional investment in many areas.

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): As one of the two Monklands MSPs, I cannot stand here and say that I am happy with today's announcement. As the health secretary will be aware, Monklands hospital urgently needs to be replaced. Various concerns have been raised about the ageing infrastructure, water contamination and asbestos. The people of Monklands and wider Lanarkshire have been promised a new hospital for some time, and the road that has led us to where we are today has long been documented. Therefore, I do not fully understand how we have arrived at this point.

NHS Lanarkshire has been developing its plans for a long time. It has kept MSPs and all stakeholders—including, I presume, the Scottish Government—up to date. Its plans have been public and have included visits from MSPs and MPs. At what point did the Scottish Government deem that the cost outlined in the business case was too high? What discussions did it have with NHS Lanarkshire to try to resolve issues earlier? In addition, although I acknowledge and welcome the fact that the Government remains committed to a new hospital, how will it work with NHS Lanarkshire to deliver that hospital speedily and ensure that there is in no way a downgrading of services?

Angela Constance: First and foremost, I want to reassure Fulton MacGregor, who has been an unashamed and powerful advocate for his constituents and for that project, because he has expressed disappointment. I want to be in the business of delivery; I am not in the business of aspirations. A single project costing in excess of £2 billion is unaffordable. Given that it is unaffordable, there would be an almighty battle to deliver it, if that could happen at all. The issue is about having a credible plan, with the timescales that we have to date, to deliver for the benefit of the people of Lanarkshire and people elsewhere in Scotland, with that shift in the balance of care.

I have made the decision very early in my tenure as Cabinet Secretary for Health and Care, because I think that it is important to do so. I do not want people hanging on—I have never been in the business of leading people up the garden path.

The Government received the full business case some months ago, at the turn of the year. I expect my officials to scrutinise any full business case. Clearly, some decisions cannot be made until such scrutiny has been completed. However, it would not be responsible to ignore the risks of not delivering as a result of that business case. We need to make a decision now—as I have done—because, otherwise, we would end up proceeding by default and not delivering for either Lanarkshire or the people of Scotland, and neither scenario would be acceptable to me.

Kayleigh Kinross-O'Neill (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green): The statement refers to a shift towards bringing care closer to home, which we welcome.

Figures that were published by Macmillan Cancer Support show that nearly a quarter of Scottish cancer patients lack specialist support. In my region, Edinburgh cancer centre improvements remain paused, due to constraints on capital funding. Will the cabinet secretary provide a timeline for those in the east of the country who are still waiting for updates and specialist care?

Angela Constance: As would be expected from the health secretary, I recognise the importance of cancer care. We still need to overcome many challenges in that care, notwithstanding the fact that the risk of dying from cancer in Scotland is the lowest that it has ever been. There is a list of projects that we have delivered in the past five years, there are projects under construction and there are projects in development. I should afford the member a very detailed response to her serious question, and I will do so in writing as soon as possible.

Miles Briggs (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Con): The *Sunday Mail* reported on 26 April that ministers had failed to sign off on the business case for the new Monklands hospital prior to the election, so it is important that the cabinet secretary publishes the information that Scottish ministers knew during that period and that she explains why there was no statement to the Parliament before the election so that voters would have the opportunity to judge the Government on that.

Minutes from NHS Lanarkshire board meetings suggest that any delays to building a new Monklands hospital will cost almost £4 million a month—an estimated £45 million a year—in maintenance. What contingency plans has the cabinet secretary seen that will ensure that there is a plan B if the hospital closes because of any system failure? What are the estimated costs of the delay?

Angela Constance: It was always going to be the case that the old hospital would continue to be used while the new hospital was being built, which means that important investment is required in that regard.

I hope that I may say to Mr Briggs that any commitment to the Monklands replacement project was absent from his party's manifesto and that he has also been a powerful advocate for the eye pavilion in Edinburgh. The cost of the Monklands

project is currently estimated to be £2.1 billion, and there is a risk that the final outturn costs will increase. If I were to allow that to happen, I think that Mr Briggs might be worried about another project that we are committed to. We will deliver for the people of Lanarkshire, but we are also going to deliver for the people of the Lothians and people elsewhere in Scotland.

I am happy to furnish Mr Briggs with further information about the process. When we deal with any full business case, it is important that that is thoroughly examined and scrutinised, out of respect for those who have compiled it. Final decisions are not made until the final business case has been thoroughly scrutinised by the Government, and I hope that Mr Briggs, and other members, will take heart from the fact that I have come here very early in my tenure as Cabinet Secretary for Health and Care to put all of that on the record.

Adam Harley (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (LD): It is not a great look that the Government has waited until after the election and until the very last moment before recess to deliver what will be bitterly disappointing news to people who rely on Monklands hospital.

I welcome the investment in community health clubs, including in my constituency in East Dunbartonshire. The cabinet secretary also said that that rebalancing will allow for the delivery of other capital projects in the NHS. How will that impact the building of the new Belford hospital in Fort William? Will the Government fully commit to a replacement for the Gilbert Bain hospital in Lerwick?

Angela Constance: I say to the member that this is a parliamentary day—it might be the last day before recess, but it is still a working day. I do not know about him, but every day is a working day for me, so he will get no sympathy from me if he is complaining about the day or time. I put that on the record.

We have a number of projects that are in construction, and we have a commitment to the Belford project, which was in the infrastructure investment plan and in our manifesto. We do not currently have the same level of commitment to the Gilbert Bain hospital in Shetland, but we will have when we take our new whole-systems approach to NHS infrastructure planning, because we are not just delivering for particular board areas—we need to deliver for Scotland as a whole so that those other projects can be considered in due course.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): If we are to get through all members who want to ask a question, we will need shorter questions and answers, please.

Alex Kerr (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP): I thank the cabinet secretary for her update on NHS capital projects and the future delivery of the Monklands hospital, and for the direct and transparent way in which she has come to the Parliament to communicate on that at an early stage.

GP walk-in centres and out-of-hours clinics, such as the excellent Douglas Street service in Hamilton, play a vital preventative role in delivering care at the point of need while relieving pressure on our A and E departments and helping us to continue to bring down waiting lists. Before the election, I campaigned relentlessly for a GP walk-in centre in my constituency. Will the cabinet secretary work with me to explore a future GP walk-in centre in Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse, looking at sites such as the out-of-hours service in Douglas Street and the now-vacant bank in Larkhall, in order to better support my constituents and our wider NHS across Scotland?

Angela Constance: I appreciate Mr Kerr's advocacy on the issue. It is important to recognise the fundamental and basic point that investing in good primary care, improving access and expanding community resources helps to reduce the pressures on our hospitals and acute services. As a Government, we have made a clear commitment to expand GP walk-in services, including in Lanarkshire. That is part of improving access to care and reducing pressure on accident and emergency services.

I am keen that NHS Lanarkshire develops proposals that reflect local need and make best use of available sites, and I would be happy for Mr Kerr to engage with the board as that work progresses. I am sure that the suggestions that he has put forward will be part of that consideration. Our focus is on ensuring that communities such as Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse benefit from improved access to services in the most appropriate locations.

Joe Long (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): People in Kincardine, in Fife, desperately need a new health centre. The existing practice was condemned as not fit for purpose in 2016. A decade on, can the cabinet secretary provide any indication of when we might see the first wave of community hubs and when spades will finally be in the ground in Kincardine?

Angela Constance: I know that there is great interest in primary care in terms of GP services and local health centres. We have made a number of commitments with three pilot areas, which I mentioned in my statement, and which will help us to develop a standardised approach to replacement projects. We have identified 12

projects, which were in our manifesto, and, after the delivery of those projects, other areas will be able to be considered. However, I would be more than happy to receive more detail about the area that the member is championing.

Laura Mitchell (Moray) (SNP): I thank the cabinet secretary for her statement and I note her remarks on the Baird and ANCHOR in Grampian. Will she set out how the Government is supporting NHS Grampian to also invest in infrastructure at Dr Gray's hospital? Can she provide an update on plans to open Moray's GP walk-in clinic, which will undoubtedly ease pressure on A and E and GP services in my constituency?

Angela Constance: I recognise the importance of services at Dr Gray's hospital and access to primary care for Laura Mitchell's constituents. I reassure her that I will work closely with NHS Grampian to support investment across Moray, including strengthening the role of Dr Gray's within that regional network of care. I confirm that plans are being developed to establish a GP walk-in facility in Moray, which will help to improve access to services and reduce pressure on both general practice and A and E.

Victor Currie (Highlands and Islands) (Reform): I declare an interest as an employee of NHS Lothian.

I thank the cabinet secretary for the advance sight of her statement. In the light of the decision to pause the replacement of University hospital Monklands and implement sub-acute community health hubs in supplementation, can the cabinet secretary provide more detail of the funding timeline for the hubs? Given that a replacement for the hospital is needed, what contingency plans have been put in place for the current hospital to maintain current standards of care and ensure that acute cases and emergency pressures are not simply displaced to the nearest hospitals?

Angela Constance: The member makes an important point about taking a whole-system approach. We cannot address issues in one part of the system without being cognisant of pressure or potential consequences elsewhere.

I outlined the timing in my statement. I want a reset that will deliver a new Monklands hospital and community services so that Lanarkshire can lead the way. Some of the reforms that need to take place across Scotland will still be made, and we will work at pace on those.

Although this is perhaps a change of plan—I would not describe it as a pause—we need to reset on the basis of deliverability, affordability and what is best for patients.

Stuart McMillan (Inverclyde) (SNP): Can the cabinet secretary provide any details about when funding will be in place to replace the Port Glasgow health centre with a new health hub? Can she advise when there will be investment to improve the fabric of Inverclyde royal hospital?

Angela Constance: I recognise the importance of investment in facilities such as the new Port Glasgow health centre and of improvements to Inverclyde royal hospital. Planning work on a replacement health centre continues, and I will ensure that local members are kept up to date on that.

The decision that we have made on the exterior of Inverclyde royal hospital creates more flexibility in the capital programme and allows us to accelerate that work. Officials are meeting with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde on Monday to discuss how we can move that work forward at pace.

Our broader approach is focused on balancing investment across Scotland to improve access, modernise infrastructure and support high-quality care in hospital and community settings.

Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Green): There are lessons to be learned from this situation, but that will be of little comfort to the staff and patients who are dealing with an old hospital. Right now, it is 30°C in some parts of Monklands hospital, wall trims are held on with duct tape and there are historical issues with asbestos in the building.

The cabinet secretary said that immediate infrastructure risks will be addressed. How quickly will those infrastructure risks be dealt with? Will the cabinet secretary meet unions and staff representatives to ensure that the hospital is a safe place to work?

I declare a voluntary interest, as I am a member of Unite the Union.

Angela Constance: I agree with the member that there are always lessons to be learned in every journey travelled. I assure her that, in this instance, lessons will be learned. I am more than happy to meet staff and union representatives.

In the interest of expediency and time, I will write to the member in more detail, because there are detailed concerns here and now about Monklands, and they need to be addressed. As we have always said, the current hospital will have to continue until the new one is built—and there will be a new Monklands hospital.

David Barratt (Cowdenbeath) (SNP): I thank the cabinet secretary for her statement. I will pick up on investment in community health hubs and, specifically, the replacement of Lochgelly health centre. Can the cabinet secretary advise whether a decision will be made on the funding model—for

example, the potential use of the mutual investment model—in the coming months?

Angela Constance: In-depth work is continuing around the revenue-based funding model to enable the three pilot areas that I mentioned in my statement to proceed; that includes the project in Mr Barratt's constituency. The focus is on a standardised approach so that we can make best use of public money for best effect, for Mr Barratt's constituents and for all the people of Scotland.

The focus now, post the statement, is on taking forward modern facilities that support multidisciplinary working to improve access to services for local people. I can assure the member that I and my officials are continuing to work closely with NHS Fife and partners to progress the proposals and ensure that they reflect local need, and I will keep him up to date on the matter

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): That concludes questions on NHS capital projects.

Point of Order

17:10

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Despite Jenny Gilruth, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government, declaring for me my entry in the register of members' interests after her statement on non-domestic rates on Tuesday, I failed to do so myself. I feel that it is appropriate to do so, so I draw members' attention to my entry in the register.

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): Thank you.

Scottish Commission for Public Audit

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): The next item of business is consideration of motion S7M-00455, in the name of Stephen Kerr, on behalf of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, on membership of the Scottish Commission for Public Audit.

17:10

Stephen Kerr (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The Scottish Commission for Public Audit performs an important role in our system of public accountability. It does not examine the spending decisions of Government; instead, it oversees Audit Scotland, scrutinising Audit Scotland's budget and helping to ensure that the organisation that is responsible for auditing Scotland's public finances remains independent, is properly governed and is accountable to Parliament.

That independent oversight matters, because confidence in public audit depends not only on rigorous scrutiny of public bodies but on confidence in the body that carries out that scrutiny. I am therefore pleased to move the motion to appoint Miles Briggs, Michael Marra, Jenni Minto and Kate Nevens as members of the Scottish Commission for Public Audit. I thank each of them for their willingness to serve, and I commend the motion to Parliament.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees to the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body's proposal to appoint Miles Briggs, Michael Marra, Jenni Minto and Kate Nevens to be members of the Scottish Commission for Public Audit.

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

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:12

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): The next item of business is consideration of two Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motions S7M-00492, on committee membership, and S7M-00505, on membership of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that James Adams be appointed as a member of the Climate Action Committee.

That the Parliament agrees to nominate Keith Brown as a full member and Jenny Young as an alternate member of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

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

Decision Time

17:12

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): The next item of business is decision time. There are eight questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Amanda Bland is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Stephen Kerr will fall. If the amendment in the name of Maggie Chapman is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Stephen Kerr will fall in those circumstances. Sorry, Mr Kerr—them's the rules.

The first question is, that amendment S7M-00469.2, in the name of Pauline McNeill, which seeks to amend motion S7M-00469, in the name of Neil Gray, on achieving a sustainable prison population, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division. First, we will halt to enable members to enter the voting system.

17:13

Meeting suspended.

17:15

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We come to the vote on amendment S7M-00469.2, in the name of Pauline McNeill. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is closed.

Calum Kerr has just sneaked in with a point of order.

Calum Kerr (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I do not think that my vote went through. I would have voted no.

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

The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Kirsten Oswald): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I had difficulty voting. I would have voted no.

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

You have started something. I call Kate Nevens.

Kate Nevens (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My technology did not work. I would have voted yes.

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

For

Adams, James (North East Scotland) (Con)
Ahmed, Irshad (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Bannerman, Max (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Baxter, Andrew (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (LD)
Beresford, Senga (South Scotland) (Reform)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
Bland, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Briggs, Miles (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Con)
Bruce, Holly (Glasgow Southside) (Green)
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
Chou Turvey, Yi-pei (North East Scotland) (LD)
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh North Western) (LD)
Currie, Victor (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Dijkstra-Downie, Sanne (Edinburgh Northern) (LD)
Duane, Iris (Glasgow) (Green)
Dunlop, Duncan (South Scotland) (LD)
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Fagan, Joe (South Scotland) (Lab)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Con)
Green, David (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (LD)
Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Harley, Adam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (LD)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
Kerr, Stephen (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Kerr, Thomas (Glasgow) (Reform)
Kinross-O'Neill, Kayleigh (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Kirkwood, David (South Scotland) (Reform)
Langan, Jamie (South Scotland) (Reform)
Leask, Kristopher (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Lindsay, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Long, Joe (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Mackay, Gillian (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Green)
MacKinnon, Donald (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab)
Manivannan, Q (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Massey, Duncan (North East Scotland) (Reform)
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
McDade, Helen (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
McKee, Cara (West Scotland) (Green)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
Moodie, Laura (South Scotland) (Green)
Nevens, Kate (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Offord, Malcolm (West Scotland) (Reform)
Rennie, Willie (Fife North East) (LD)
Ross, Angela (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Reform)
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Sangster, Katherine (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
Schmulian, Kim (Glasgow) (Reform)
Simpson, Graham (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)

Simpson, Mark (North East Scotland) (Reform)
Slater, Lorna (Edinburgh Central) (Green)
Smith, David (West Scotland) (Reform)
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
Young, Jenny (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)

Against

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)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North) (SNP)
Black, Dawn (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
Bonnar, Steven (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
Bouse, Gary (Falkirk West) (SNP)
Brown, Alan (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
Campbell, Kate (Edinburgh Eastern, Musselburgh and Tranent) (SNP)
Campbell, Michelle (Renfrewshire North and Cardonald) (SNP)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Day, Martyn (Falkirk East and Linlithgow) (SNP)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Kelvin and Maryhill) (SNP)
Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
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)
Hagmann, Katie (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen and Cambuslang) (SNP)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Kerr, Alex (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
Kerr, Calum (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
Kumar, Simita (Edinburgh South Western) (SNP)
Linden, David (Glasgow Baillieston and Shettleston) (SNP)
MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh North Eastern and Leith) (SNP)
Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
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)
Oswald, Kirsten (Eastwood) (SNP)
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)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S7M-00469.2, in the name of Pauline McNeill, is: For 65, Against 53, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S7M-00469.1, in the name of Amanda Bland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

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

The Presiding Officer: I trust you. You do not need to show me the evidence.

Thank you. Your vote is recorded.

For

Adams, James (North East Scotland) (Con)
Bannerman, Max (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Beresford, Senga (South Scotland) (Reform)
Bland, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Briggs, Miles (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Con)
Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Currie, Victor (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Con)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
Kerr, Stephen (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Kerr, Thomas (Glasgow) (Reform)
Kirkwood, David (South Scotland) (Reform)
Langan, Jamie (South Scotland) (Reform)
Lindsay, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (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)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
Ahmed, Irshad (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Anderson, Heather (Dundee City West) (SNP)
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire West and Levern Valley) (SNP)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Barratt, David (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
Baxter, Andrew (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (LD)

Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North) (SNP)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
Black, Dawn (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
Bonnar, Steven (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
Bouse, Gary (Falkirk West) (SNP)
Brown, Alan (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (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)
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
Chou Turvey, Yi-pei (North East Scotland) (LD)
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
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)
Dunlop, Duncan (South Scotland) (LD)
Fagan, Joe (South Scotland) (Lab)
Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
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)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)
Hagmann, Katie (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Harley, Adam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (LD)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen and Cambuslang) (SNP)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
Kerr, Alex (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
Kerr, Calum (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
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)
Long, Joe (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
Mackay, Gillian (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Green)
MacKinnon, Donald (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab)
Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh North Eastern and Leith) (SNP)
Manivannan, Q (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
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)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
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)
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
Moodie, Laura (South Scotland) (Green)
Nevens, Kate (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Oswald, Kirsten (Eastwood) (SNP)
Rennie, Willie (Fife North East) (LD)
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Sangster, Katherine (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
Slater, Lorna (Edinburgh Central) (Green)
Smith, Alyn (Stirling) (SNP)
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
Stafford, Pauline (Bathgate) (SNP)
Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thewliss, Alison (Glasgow Central) (SNP)
Young, Jenny (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S7M-00469.1, in the name of Amanda Bland, is: For 26, Against 94, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S7M-00469.3, in the name of Maggie Chapman, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Bruce, Holly (Glasgow Southside) (Green)
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
Duane, Iris (Glasgow) (Green)
Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Kinross-O'Neill, Kayleigh (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Leask, Kristopher (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Mackay, Gillian (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Green)
Manivannan, Q (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
McKee, Cara (West Scotland) (Green)
Moodie, Laura (South Scotland) (Green)
Nevens, Kate (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Slater, Lorna (Edinburgh Central) (Green)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
Adams, James (North East Scotland) (Con)
Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
Ahmed, Irshad (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Anderson, Heather (Dundee City West) (SNP)
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire West and Levern Valley) (SNP)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Bannerman, Max (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Barratt, David (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)

Baxter, Andrew (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (LD)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North) (SNP)
Beresford, Senga (South Scotland) (Reform)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
Black, Dawn (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
Bland, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
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, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
Campbell, Kate (Edinburgh Eastern, Musselburgh and Tranent) (SNP)
Campbell, Michelle (Renfrewshire North and Cardonald) (SNP)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Chou Turvey, Yi-pei (North East Scotland) (LD)
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh North Western) (LD)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Currie, Victor (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Day, Martyn (Falkirk East and Linlithgow) (SNP)
Dijkstra-Downie, Sanne (Edinburgh Northern) (LD)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Kelvin and Maryhill) (SNP)
Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
Dunlop, Duncan (South Scotland) (LD)
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Fagan, Joe (South Scotland) (Lab)
Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (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)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)
Hagmann, Katie (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Harley, Adam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (LD)
Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen and Cambuslang) (SNP)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
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)
Kerr, Thomas (Glasgow) (Reform)
Kirkwood, David (South Scotland) (Reform)
Kumar, Simita (Edinburgh South Western) (SNP)
Langan, Jamie (South Scotland) (Reform)
Linden, David (Glasgow Baillieston and Shettleston) (SNP)
Lindsay, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Long, Joe (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
MacKinnon, Donald (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab)
Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh North Eastern and Leith) (SNP)
Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
Massey, Duncan (North East Scotland) (Reform)
McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
McDade, Helen (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
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)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
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)
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
Offord, Malcolm (West Scotland) (Reform)
Oswald, Kirsten (Eastwood) (SNP)
Rennie, Willie (Fife North East) (LD)
Ross, Angela (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Reform)
Sangster, Katherine (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
Schmulian, Kim (Glasgow) (Reform)
Simpson, Graham (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Simpson, Mark (North East Scotland) (Reform)
Smith, Alyn (Stirling) (SNP)
Smith, David (West Scotland) (Reform)
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
Stafford, Pauline (Bathgate) (SNP)
Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thewliss, Alison (Glasgow Central) (SNP)
Young, Jenny (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S7M-00469.3, in the name of Maggie Chapman, is: For 16, Against 104, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S7M-00469.5, in the name of Stephen Kerr, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adams, James (North East Scotland) (Con)
Bannerman, Max (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Beresford, Senga (South Scotland) (Reform)
Bland, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Briggs, Miles (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Con)
Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Currie, Victor (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Con)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
Kerr, Stephen (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Kerr, Thomas (Glasgow) (Reform)
Kirkwood, David (South Scotland) (Reform)

Langan, Jamie (South Scotland) (Reform)
Lindsay, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (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)

Against

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)
Brown, Alan (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (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)
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)
Dunlop, Duncan (South Scotland) (LD)
Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
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)
Harley, Adam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (LD)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen and Cambuslang) (SNP)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Kerr, Alex (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
Kerr, Calum (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
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)
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)
Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
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)
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Sangster, Katherine (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
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)

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)
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)
Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
Young, Jenny (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S7M-00469.5, in the name of Stephen Kerr, is: For 26, Against 78, Abstentions 15.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S7M-00469.4, in the name of Yi-pei Chou Turvey, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: Well done.

The next question is, that motion S7M-00469, in the name of Neil Gray, on achieving a sustainable prison population, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
Adams, James (North East Scotland) (Con)
Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
Ahmed, Irshad (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Anderson, Heather (Dundee City West) (SNP)
Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire West and Levern Valley) (SNP)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Barratt, David (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
Baxter, Andrew (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (LD)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North) (SNP)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
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, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
Campbell, Kate (Edinburgh Eastern, Musselburgh and Tranent) (SNP)
Campbell, Michelle (Renfrewshire North and Cardonald) (SNP)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Chou Turvey, Yi-pei (North East Scotland) (LD)
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
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)
Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
Dunlop, Duncan (South Scotland) (LD)
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Fagan, Joe (South Scotland) (Lab)
Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (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)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)
Hagmann, Katie (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Harley, Adam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (LD)
Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen and Cambuslang) (SNP)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
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)
Kumar, Simita (Edinburgh South Western) (SNP)
Linden, David (Glasgow Baillieston and Shettleston) (SNP)
Long, Joe (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
MacKinnon, Donald (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab)
Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh North Eastern and Leith) (SNP)
Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
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)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
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)
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
Oswald, Kirsten (Eastwood) (SNP)
Rennie, Willie (Fife North East) (LD)
Sangster, Katherine (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
Smith, Alyn (Stirling) (SNP)
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
Stafford, Pauline (Bathgate) (SNP)
Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thewliss, Alison (Glasgow Central) (SNP)
Young, Jenny (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)

Against

Bannerman, Max (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Beresford, Senga (South Scotland) (Reform)
Bland, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Bruce, Holly (Glasgow Southside) (Green)
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
Currie, Victor (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Duane, Iris (Glasgow) (Green)
Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Kerr, Thomas (Glasgow) (Reform)
Kinross-O'Neill, Kayleigh (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Kirkwood, David (South Scotland) (Reform)
Langan, Jamie (South Scotland) (Reform)
Leask, Kristopher (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Lindsay, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Mackay, Gillian (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Green)
Manivannan, Q (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Massey, Duncan (North East Scotland) (Reform)
McDade, Helen (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
McKee, Cara (West Scotland) (Green)
Moodie, Laura (South Scotland) (Green)
Nevens, Kate (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Offord, Malcolm (West Scotland) (Reform)
Ross, Angela (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Reform)
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Schmulian, Kim (Glasgow) (Reform)
Simpson, Graham (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Simpson, Mark (North East Scotland) (Reform)
Slater, Lorna (Edinburgh Central) (Green)
Smith, David (West Scotland) (Reform)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S7M-00469, in the name of Neil Gray, on achieving a sustainable prison population, as amended, is: For 89, Against 31, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament recognises the scale and complexity of the current prison population, which is above the design and operational capacity of the estate and causes significant associated operational and safety risks for prison staff; notes that Scotland has one of the highest prison populations in western Europe; acknowledges the underlying drivers, including the growing number of individuals convicted of serious violent and sexual offences who receive longer sentences, reflecting progress in how the justice system supports victims and holds offenders to account; notes that the cost per prisoner per year to the public purse is £52,000; recognises the importance of effective rehabilitation to reduce re-offending and to benefit the communities that individuals return to; agrees that public safety is paramount and that it is vital that victims are supported and have confidence in the justice system; agrees, therefore, that a balanced package of measures to increase capacity in the prison estate, expand effective community sentencing, and enact preventative measures to stop people entering or re-entering the prison system, are necessary to achieve a sustainable prison population now and in the future; is concerned that the current prison population crisis is chronically hampering effective rehabilitation; calls on the Scottish Government to increase its investment in GPS technology and speed up its roll out, and notes that the current approach to rehabilitation, community justice and early release is failing to address the prison population crisis; further notes the persistently high remand population and the contribution that court delays and wider pressures within the justice system have on overcrowding in the prison estate; believes that public protection, rehabilitation, alternatives to custody and a reduction in reoffending must be pursued together rather than in competition with one another; further believes that investment in addiction treatment, mental health services, supported housing and effective community justice are essential to reducing offending and easing the pressure on prisons, and calls on the Scottish Government to publish a long-term strategy for achieving a sustainable prison population that commands public confidence and adequately supports victims and their rights to information, protection and safety.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S7M-00455, in the name of Stephen Kerr, on the Scottish Commission for Public Audit, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees to the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body's proposal to appoint Miles Briggs, Michael Marra, Jenni Minto and Kate Nevens to be members of the Scottish Commission for Public Audit.

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

The question is, that motion S7M-00492, on committee membership, and motion S7M-00505, on membership of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that James Adams be appointed as a member of the Climate Action Committee.

That the Parliament agrees to nominate Keith Brown as a full member and Jenny Young as an alternate member of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Action Mesothelioma Day 2026

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): Our final item of business is a debate on motion S7M-00343, in the name of Marie McNair, on action mesothelioma day 2026. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises Action Mesothelioma Day 2026, which will be marked on 3 July; understands that this is a national event held each year to raise awareness of mesothelioma and asbestos; notes that mesothelioma is a rare but aggressive form of cancer that is usually caused by exposure to asbestos, with tiny fibres getting into the lungs and damaging them over time; understands that over 2,700 people in the UK are diagnosed with the condition each year, including around 200 in Scotland; notes that the cancer most commonly occurs in the lining of the lung, but can also be found in the lining of both the abdomen and the heart, with symptoms including shortness of breath, chest pain, coughing and tiredness; recognises the importance of grass-roots activism to seek justice for victims, including the campaign, Cape Must Pay!, which calls for the former asbestos manufacturer Cape plc, which is now owned by Altrad, to donate £10 million to mesothelioma research; acknowledges with concern what it sees as the time bar injustice for mesothelioma victims and welcomes the Scottish Law Commission report, Report on Damages for Personal Injury; notes the calls for action to be taken to implement the report's findings; welcomes the events taking place across the country and encourages everyone to "Go Blue for Meso" by joining or organising a Blue Light Walk to raise awareness or fundraise; applauds the longstanding and ongoing work of the Clydebank Asbestos Group, which has provided information and support to people with asbestos-related conditions for over 30 years, and hopes for a successful Action Mesothelioma Day 2026.

17:25

Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): This is the fifth year that I have managed to secure a debate to mark mesothelioma day. My determination to secure truth and justice for asbestos victims and their families will never wane. I thank those members who have supported my motion and those who are speaking in today's debate.

This is an issue that deserves cross-party support and, once again, that has been achieved. I also invite Parliament to welcome members of the Clydebank Asbestos Group and Asbestos Action (Tayside), and I make a special mention of Christine Sayer, my local hero from Clydebank Asbestos Group, who will be visiting the Parliament again on Saturday. For decades, those groups have stood beside individuals and families in their time of greatest need. They provide not only advice and support but a voice, ensuring that those affected are heard in this Parliament and beyond.

Since my debate last year, we have, sadly, lost two central figures in the fight for truth and justice: David Colraine, a founding member of the Clydebank Asbestos Group; and former MP for Clydebank and Milngavie, Tony Worthington, who passed away earlier this year. They were a real driving force behind the pursuit of truth and justice for asbestos victims—true giants whose legacy and impact have been felt throughout Clydebank and beyond. Unfortunately, every year, I have mentioned individuals we have lost. For them and for the many unheard victims of asbestos exposure we must see progress and secure justice.

Mesothelioma is a rare but devastating cancer that is mostly caused by exposure to asbestos. Across the United Kingdom, there are around 2,700 new cases each year, including more than 200 in Scotland. However, statistics alone cannot convey the reality of the disease. In my hometown of Clydebank, the issue is deeply personal. Clydebank has paid one of the heaviest prices anywhere in the United Kingdom for asbestos exposure. West Dunbartonshire has some of the highest mesothelioma mortality rates in the country: over a period of nearly 40 years, 295 men in the area died from mesothelioma when only 81 deaths would have been expected. That is one of the highest mortality rates anywhere in the UK. However, even those stark figures do not tell the whole story. Women in our area have also been significantly affected, with more than double the expected number of deaths having been recorded over the same period. Those are not abstract figures; they represent hundreds of families in one community who have lost loved ones.

Clydebank was once described as the mesothelioma capital of Europe. That is a title that no community would ever wish to hold, and it speaks directly to our industrial past: the shipbuilding, manufacturing and construction industries that built our nation at an enormous human cost. However, that cost was not inevitable. For decades, workers were exposed to asbestos fibres—often daily, often without protection, and too often without being advised of the risks. Evidence has since shown that companies were aware of the dangers long before meaningful protections were put in place. As campaigners have rightly said, that was not simply an accident of history; it was a profound failure to protect workers. I say in the strongest terms that knowingly exposing people to a deadly substance without adequate safeguards is not neglect; it is an abhorrent criminal act.

The legacy of asbestos is not confined to the past. It continues to affect people across the United Kingdom today. Around 5,000 people still die each year from asbestos-related disease,

making it the single biggest cause of work-related death.

Asbestos is still present in the buildings around us. In Scotland alone, more than 1,700 schools are known to contain asbestos, and there have been cases of teachers—people with no connection to heavy industry—developing mesothelioma after exposure in their workplaces. That is why we need to see the phased removal of asbestos from public buildings, starting with our schools.

We must also address the issue of justice. I have campaigned hard on what I have described as the disgraceful three-year time bar, which has denied justice to some victims of asbestos-related disease. Under current law, an individual who is diagnosed with a relatively minor condition such as pleural plaques might have just three years in which to raise a claim, even though they might not go on to develop mesothelioma until decades later. The nature of asbestos-related disease makes that time limit totally unjust. It is welcome that the Scottish Law Commission recognised that issue and proposed reforms. I met the First Minister and other members of the Government to stress the urgent need to implement those reforms, and I want the earliest possible progress to be made on that.

Despite the scale of the challenge, people are showing resilience. Again and again, I have met individuals who, even in the face of a devastating diagnosis, choose to campaign not for themselves but for others. That selflessness speaks volumes about the strength of our communities. It also places a responsibility on all of us, because we cannot simply reflect on the issue; we must act. We must continue to raise awareness of mesothelioma and asbestos-related disease, we must support research so that we can improve treatment and outcomes, and we must ensure that compensation is fair and accessible by removing barriers such as the time bar. Critically, we must also prevent future exposure. That means properly managing asbestos where it remains and making progress towards its safe removal from public buildings, including our schools.

Mesothelioma is a disease that is rooted in our industrial history, but its impact is still being felt today in Clydebank, across Scotland and throughout the United Kingdom. It reminds us of the human cost of that history and of our responsibility to those who have been affected.

Unfortunately, mesothelioma is not just a disease of the past—far from it. In 2023 alone, 2,218 people in the UK died from it. That is a stark and sobering reminder that the disease continues to take lives every year. In communities such as mine, in Clydebank, that reality is not distant. It is still being felt, heard and lived. Families continue to face loss, people continue to receive a diagnosis and the risks that cause the harm of mesothelioma have not yet been fully removed from the world around us.

Therefore, this is not a closed chapter. We have a continuing responsibility to act where we know that the risk remains, to ensure justice where it has been denied and to prevent future generations from facing the same fate. The burden that is carried by communities such as Clydebank has been far too great for far too long. Although we cannot change what has happened, we can decide what happens next. The future of the issue, whether it remains a story of harm or becomes a turning point for action, is in our hands. Therefore, our purpose must be to recognise the scale of this legacy and our duty to address it so that, in the years to come, it can be said not only that we understood the consequences of asbestos, but that we chose to act decisively to bring them to an end.

17:34

Pauline Stafford (Bathgate) (SNP): I thank Marie McNair for her long-standing commitment to the cause of action on mesothelioma and for bringing this important debate to the chamber ahead of action mesothelioma day 2026.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak in the debate, as I have a close relative in England who was diagnosed with pleural mesothelioma two years ago. I also represent the Bathgate constituency, which was home to a wide range of heavy industry, where asbestos use was endemic. It has also been at the forefront of securing justice, with landmark legal cases such as that relating to the Atlas steel foundry in the town of Armadale, in my constituency, helping to shape asbestos liability in Scotland.

At the point of my relative's diagnosis, even family members who had heard of mesothelioma had little idea of what living with the illness would mean. As the cancer disproportionately affects communities where heavy industry was present and can have such a long latency period, raising awareness of mesothelioma will enable people with symptoms to present earlier and, in the case of diagnosis, will enable patients to be moved as soon as possible on to the best specialist care pathways, so that their quality of life can be maximised, which I am pleased to say was the case for my relative.

Although we are fortunate to have such a strong mesothelioma treatment infrastructure in Scotland, our industrial past and the historical prevalence of industries with heavy asbestos use mean that we also have a disproportionately high number of cases. That is why I commend all that the Scottish

mesothelioma network is doing to improve patient care throughout Scotland.

My family knows from experience the massive difference that treatment by a specialist mesothelioma team makes not only to medical outcomes but to mental wellbeing and everyday quality of life. It is essential that everyone who is diagnosed with mesothelioma is able to benefit from specialist treatment wherever they are and whatever their background. To that end, the drive to foster co-operation between treatment hubs, as well as research institutions, is welcome.

It is also essential to ensure that patients everywhere are able to benefit from the latest treatments. Fantastic, innovative research on the condition is working to improve outcomes for mesothelioma patients. That includes the development of new, more effective therapies and better drug delivery techniques.

We must also acknowledge that we are able to have this debate due to generations of campaigners who have worked tirelessly for decades to raise awareness and achieve justice for those affected by asbestos-related disease. Those campaigners have also had to fight hard to hold companies in the asbestos industry to account. The industrial use of asbestos might be a thing of the past, but its legacy still hangs over many of the people who worked with it.

Every member will mark international workers memorial day in their constituencies to mourn those who have lost their lives and to fight for safer conditions for workers today. We must be guided by this message: remember the dead, but fight for the living. Those cannot be just words. The memory of historical injustice must drive our actions today, tomorrow and every day after, as future generations deserve to live without fear of asbestos-related illness. However, with patients generally contracting mesothelioma decades after exposure to asbestos, it will continue to be necessary to build the medical and support infrastructure that is needed to deal with it as well as with other complex and incurable conditions caused by asbestos.

I thank Marie McNair once again for bringing the matter to the chamber for debate. We must continue to raise awareness of this cancer and continue improving outcomes for those affected by a legacy that should never have been theirs to bear.

17:37

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I congratulate Marie McNair on bringing the motion to the chamber for debate and on her consistent championing of the cause.

Asbestos was finally completely banned in 1999, the same year that the Parliament was established. Although it might therefore be tempting to associate it with industries of the past and 20th century buildings, it remains a feature of life. Strikingly, the nature of mesothelioma is such that, because it makes itself known decades after the first interaction with asbestos, we might not even have reached the peak of case numbers.

Scotland's history as a shipbuilding nation means that Scots have suffered disproportionately from asbestos-related illnesses such as mesothelioma. There are around 200 diagnoses in Scotland every year and the figure is not going down. Although shipbuilders and tradesmen might be the most affected, their wives and children might also have been exposed to asbestos dust, and, of course, all families are impacted by a loved one's diagnosis.

The members of Clydebank Asbestos Group, some of whom are listening in the chamber, have done incredible work campaigning for the rights of those patients and their families to get compensation. Righting past wrongs is another reason why asbestos-related conditions are very much an issue today.

Cape Intermediate Holdings Ltd was one of the largest asbestos companies in the world but, when the dangers of asbestos first became apparent, it downplayed the risks and withheld its own data, putting profits before lives. Today, Cape is owned by the construction engineering company Altrad, which operates around the world, and its UK arm alone made a pre-tax profit of £37.3 million in the year to August 2025. Campaigners are calling for Altrad, on behalf of Cape, to donate a mere £10 million for much-needed research on mesothelioma, but, so far, their calls have gone unanswered.

The time bar, which Marie McNair was right to mention, means that someone who is diagnosed with an asbestos-related condition has only three years to claim compensation. In practice, that means that somebody who was diagnosed with asymptomatic conditions such as pleural plaques and developed mesothelioma, say, five years later would not be able to claim, even though both conditions were caused by asbestos. In 2024, the Scottish Law Commission recommended, helpfully, that the time bar be removed, but that was not legislated for in the previous parliamentary session. I hope that the Scottish Government will make such legislation an urgent priority in this parliamentary session.

There is also the fact that many public buildings might still contain asbestos, which becomes dangerous when it is disturbed. I understand that Scottish Borders Council faces a £2.5 million bill to

remove asbestos from its schools. In that context, I wonder whether national support from the Scottish Government could be available to assist councils that are in that position.

I echo Marie McNair's comments and pay my respects to two people. Tony Worthington, the former MP for Clydebank and Milngavie who passed away this year, campaigned tirelessly to bring this issue to the attention of decision makers at Westminster. He also fought for compensation on behalf of countless individual constituents. This year, we also lost David Colraine, who founded the Clydebank Asbestos Group with others in 1992. As a tribute to him noted, David was a man who did not just feel sad or angry about the injustice that he saw; he actually did something about it. We can all be inspired by David and support the work of the group that he helped to found.

17:42

Helen McDade (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform): I apologise for joining the debate slightly late.

I am speaking mainly on behalf of Julie MacDougall, but I have an interest in the matter because both of my grandfathers were miners and died of lung disease, although I did not know either of them, because they died so long ago. One died very young and the other died soon after he retired. I do not know whether they were diagnosed, but it seems likely that what we have been talking about today was a contributory factor.

However, I am here to speak on behalf of my colleague Julie MacDougall, who, unfortunately, has taken ill. I am sure that everyone will join me in hoping that she recovers quickly. She very much wanted to be here.

I would like to read something about Julie's father, John MacDougall, whom some members would have known. He was a British Labour politician who served as MP for Glenrothes from 2005 until his death. He was first elected to the House of Commons in 2001, as the MP for Central Fife. In 2007, he was diagnosed with malignant mesothelioma and, due to his illness, his participation in the Parliament became fleeting, although he remained an MP until his death the following year. He had major surgery and had a lung removed before his death, and his illness was caused by working in the shipyards.

Julie MacDougall very much wanted to participate in this debate. I assure Marie McNair and other members that we are interested in co-operating with any move to take matters forward, and I thank her for securing the debate.

17:43

Colm Merrick (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): I welcome the opportunity to contribute to today's debate, which marks action mesothelioma day 2026. I understand that it is a long-standing tradition to mark the date each year in the Scottish Parliament, so I thank Marie McNair for continuing the tradition and highlighting the issue, which she has truly made her own. I pay tribute to her long-standing dedication, commitment and leadership on this very important issue over many years.

As we have heard, action mesothelioma day provides us with an opportunity not only to raise awareness of the devastating disease but to renew our commitment to those who are living with its consequences and to the families who continue to suffer because of asbestos exposure. Around 2,700 people across the UK are diagnosed each year, including around 200 people in Scotland. I would like us to pause for a moment to reflect on that, and on the fact that, behind those figures, every one of those diagnoses is an individual, a family and a community whose lives have been changed for ever.

Last year's action mesothelioma day debate highlighted that

"the face of mesothelioma is changing."—[*Official Report*, 19 June 2025; c 31.]

While many people still associate asbestos-related disease with traditional heavy industries such as shipbuilding, construction and engineering, we are increasingly seeing cases among women, younger people and workers in occupations that were not historically considered high risk. Teachers, healthcare workers, clerical staff and others have developed mesothelioma following exposure that they neither expected nor understood at the time. That reality serves as a stark reminder that the legacy of asbestosis is far from over.

In that respect, I recognise the tremendous work of Action on Asbestos, formerly known as Clydebank Asbestos Group, which—as the name change suggests—is facing up to those new realities in the support, advice and advocacy that it continues to provide, and has been providing for more than three decades, for those who are affected by asbestos-related conditions. Its dedication has been invaluable to countless families, and it continues to be a powerful voice for justice and accountability.

I also pay tribute to the wider grass-roots campaigners who continue to fight for victims and their families. They include the Cape must pay campaign—which has been mentioned—that highlights the need for greater corporate responsibility and continues to call for meaningful investment in mesothelioma research. The campaign's efforts demonstrate the importance of

grass-roots activism in driving change and ensuring that those who are affected are not—are never—forgotten.

One issue that remains a significant concern is the injustice that has been created by the current time-bar arrangements affecting some mesothelioma victims. We have already heard a bit about that today. As was discussed in last year's debate, there are circumstances in which individuals who have previously pursued claims relating to asymptomatic asbestos-related conditions may find themselves prevented from seeking further damages if they later develop mesothelioma, which is a terminal and life-threatening illness.

The Scottish Law Commission's "Report on Damages for Personal Injury" recognised that problem and made clear recommendations to address it. I welcome that work, and the growing consensus that reform is needed to ensure that people are not denied justice because of a legal technicality. Should Marie McNair introduce legislation to address that issue, she will have my full support and, I would guess, the support of the entire Cabinet and Parliament. Those who are affected by mesothelioma deserve fairness, dignity and access to justice. We should work together across the Parliament to ensure that the law reflects those principles.

As action mesothelioma day approaches, on 3 July, I encourage people across Scotland to get involved in the events that are taking place in communities throughout the country, whether by participating in a blue-light walk, supporting fundraising efforts or simply helping to raise awareness. Everyone can play a part in supporting those who are affected and remembering those whom we have lost.

I once again thank Marie McNair for securing the debate, and I pay tribute to all those campaigners, organisations, families and individuals who continue to fight for justice.

Finally, I note that it is fitting that we are able to have such a constructive and consensual debate as we approach the end of the parliamentary term. I wish all my colleagues across the chamber, parliamentary staff and everyone who is watching the debate a great summer, and at least one more football match. I look forward to us all returning refreshed, revitalised and ready to rock.

17:49

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank Marie McNair for bringing this important debate to the chamber and I welcome action mesothelioma day 2026, which will be marked on 3 July.

I am pleased, in the years that I have been in Parliament, to have played my part in joining Marie McNair and other members to raise awareness of this cruel condition and to call for further research and for the condition to be properly understood as an industrial injury.

As the motion highlights, it is important to recognise the role of grass-roots activism in seeking justice for victims. It is often grass-roots campaigns that really turn the dial on these issues, and it is great to welcome those people to the public gallery again this year.

I support the Cape must pay campaign, which calls on the former asbestos manufacturer Cape plc, now Altrad, to donate £10 million to mesothelioma research. As my colleague Jackie Baillie said, that is a small amount to expect. Such companies and the state owe a great deal to individuals, families and communities. We need that research to be done and compensation to be delivered for what is fundamentally a class-based issue.

At this point, it seems totally appropriate to pay tribute to my former colleague and comrade Richard Leonard. Richard, as members might know, spoke in the annual debate on this topic. He was—and, I am sure, will continue to be—an avid campaigner for the right to justice for those affected by mesothelioma and the right to health and safety for the next generation of the workforce. Those who were members during the previous session of Parliament will know not only that Richard Leonard was a passionate and committed campaigner but that his speeches were also very passionate—as passionate as his beliefs. I thank him for his time in the Parliament, for his guidance and for his commitment to economic justice. I will miss Richard in the chamber, particularly during debates on this subject—we always sat up here, at the back, together. He often mentioned socialists and campaigners who influenced his beliefs and work, and I now do the same by thanking him for his guidance and influence on the work that I have undertaken as an activist and now as an MSP.

As Richard Leonard and others have said, mesothelioma is not a historical disease. In fact, we know that the number of sufferers is increasing. The reality for the people in my area is that the industrial work of the early part of the last century, right up until the mid-1980s and into the 1990s—mainly mining, in my area—exposed men, in particular, to asbestos. However, as others have mentioned, secondary exposure through washing clothes and so on, which was often undertaken by women, also presented a massive risk, which those companies really wanted us to ignore.

The time delay in the progression of the disease means that many of my constituents continue to be affected by what happened during that period, and they are also affected by the ongoing issues around asbestos and how we should deal with it, which members have brought to our attention today.

Industrial conditions such as those that my constituents were exposed to show what the approach of big business and the insurance giants has been. We, in this place, must be clear that people are worth more than this and that working-class people—those men and women who built and maintained our country—must be compensated for the impact on their lives and for loss of life due to the nature of thei work. I agree that the Scottish Law Commission's report on damages for personal injury, which was published in December 2024, must be actioned. I call on all lawmakers to support that call and, of course, on the Government to make it a priority in this parliamentary session.

I fear that we have a lot more work to do as we keep fighting for proper compensation and, importantly, for proper health and safety in workplaces. We must ensure that the rights of workers are at the centre of all that we do and that the generations who come after us have much better work-related health.

17:53

Heather Anderson (Dundee City West) (SNP): I, too, thank Marie McNair for securing the debate and bringing this important motion to the chamber today.

I start by stressing how important it is that we continue to raise awareness of mesothelioma. I do not have a family member who contracted the disease, but I saw a poster for an exhibition of portraits of people who had suffered from it. I thought it was such an astounding poster that I got in touch with Asbestos Action in Dundee and said, "I'm really sorry, but I didn't manage to make it to that exhibition. Can I come and talk to you?" When I met the asbestos campaigners in Dundee, they were very quick to highlight the excellent work that Marie McNair has undertaken in the Parliament to raise awareness of the associated conditions and to advocate on behalf of those affected.

A few different charities work diligently across Scotland to support those living with conditions contracted due to exposure to asbestos. We have heard a lot today about the Clydebank Asbestos Group, but I want to focus on Asbestos Action in Dundee, a charity that supports those across the whole of the east coast who are living with asbestos-related diseases, including pleural plaques, asbestosis, asbestos-related lung cancer and mesothelioma.

Diane from Asbestos Action is in the public gallery today, and I hope that she will excuse me for sharing some details and praise for its work. It is a really small team of four people, and they do a huge amount of work to raise funding to keep the charity going. The support that Diane and her team provide is incredibly important to the men and women up and down the east coast of Scotland who find themselves suddenly diagnosed with asbestos-related conditions. They have supported hundreds of clients across Tayside over the past few years, almost half of whom live in Dundee. They also say that, wherever you call them from, you will get a home visit; whether you are in Inverness or Dumfries, they will come and see you.

Often, Asbestos Action staff are dealing with people who are terminally ill. They and their families may have discovered the severity of the condition only very recently. The staff turn up, sit with people, listen to the stories of those affected, help them to trace their work histories, and support their families both before and after the illness has taken its toll. Many who do that work have personal experience from their own families. They stand with those affected, and their families, at the hardest and most traumatic of times. It is emotionally demanding, but vital, work.

One testimonial about Asbestos Action that I read really stuck with me, and I want to share it today. It simply said:

> "Pass on my thanks for all the hard work undertook on behalf of my father. He was a very proud man and if he's looking down would be delighted to know how much this 'legacy' has helped his daughters, and in particular, his granddaughter"

When you or your family members find themselves a victim of an asbestos-related condition, it is groups such as Asbestos Action that step in to offer support and ensure that you and your family will get the advice that they need.

I will also take a moment to highlight the new generation of victims of this disease. Many of the new cases coming forward are women who did not work in industry but who were teachers, health workers and office workers. We have heard some stories today, and it can be very difficult for them to pinpoint precisely where they would have been exposed to asbestos. It could have been in any of the offices, schools, healthcare settings or homes that they worked in. Such locations are less easy to identify than the large industrial sites, and the women may not have worked directly with asbestos, but they worked in buildings where asbestos is still present.

However, any application for industrial injuries disablement benefit requires a person to identify

exactly where and when they were exposed to asbestos, which creates an additional barrier for those women in seeking some form of compensation. We know from the statistics that the percentage of men getting some form of settlement is much higher than the percentage of women. If someone cannot identify the source site of exposure, or prove the link, their only route is to apply for a PWC1 lump-sum payment. However, that also requires those women to sign away any future claims they might have in future civil cases. More needs to be done to support this new generation who are finding themselves affected by asbestos in a different landscape. Many of those affected are currently missing out on relevant benefits and support, and the complexities involved are preventing them from getting the support that they need. Groups such as Asbestos Action are doing all that they can to raise awareness of those difficulties.

I hope that today's debate will raise further awareness of the issues affecting those who are living with the condition, and I will do all that I can to support Marie McNair in any work that she takes forward in the Parliament to remove the time bar and get those people the justice that they deserve.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): I invite the minister to close the debate.

17:58

The Minister for Community Care (Alison Thewliss): I thank my colleague Marie McNair for bringing this debate to the chamber, which she has now done for a fifth year. I also thank all members—both those who spoke and those who were not able to speak today—for their presence and thoughtful contributions. As Carol Mochan mentioned, it is also worth recognising members who previously contributed to these debates but who are not with us in this session of Parliament, including Richard Leonard, Bill Kidd and Jackson Carlaw. We are in a new session, but the fact that members who are no longer with us in the chamber have also spoken about the issue reflects the fact that it is not a new one. The issue of mesothelioma has not gone away, and it is now on all of us in this Parliament to continue the fight for truth and justice that so many have begun. In that light, I welcome the campaigners in the public gallery today, who have dedicated their lives to that fight.

The Scottish Government has proudly supported action mesothelioma day and has contributed to members' business debates on the subject for several years. As the new Minister for Community Care, I am honoured to lend my voice to the much-needed awareness raising on mesothelioma and on the good work that is being done by people across Scotland.

As everyone has said, mesothelioma is a devastating disease that continues to affect individuals, families and communities across Scotland. It is a devastating and long-lasting part of our post-industrial legacy, not only in Clydebank and along the Clyde, as we have heard, but in different parts of the central belt and everywhere where there has been some degree of heavy industry. As others have mentioned, the issue has not gone away, due to the presence of asbestos in some buildings across Scotland. Therefore, awareness raising is vital in improving earlier diagnosis, helping people to access the care and support that they need and supporting new innovations in research and treatment.

It is well known that asbestos exposure is a major contributing factor in the development of mesothelioma. As well as seeking to prevent exposure to asbestos, the use of which, as Jackie Baillie mentioned, has been banned in the UK since 1999, and ensuring that appropriate medical care is available for those who are affected by asbestos exposure, the Scottish Government remains committed to protecting individuals' rights to compensation. As many members have mentioned, the current law on limitation, which sets time limits for raising court proceedings, can create difficulties for people with mesothelioma. Through absolutely no fault of their own, they might find themselves unable to raise a case within the required timescales, which, in effect, denies them access to a legal remedy.

The Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament have a strong record of supporting those who have been exposed to asbestos, whether through negligence or breach of a statutory duty. I am therefore pleased to be able to confirm that the Scottish Government intends to introduce a bill that will give effect to the Scottish Law Commission's recommendations for reform of the law of limitation in relation to certain asbestos-related conditions. [*Applause*.]

I know that Marie McNair is among those who have campaigned for such a change and had asked the First Minister to include such a bill in the programme for the first year of this parliamentary session, so I am very pleased to be able to confirm that we will do so.

Marie McNair: I am delighted to hear it. I welcome today's announcement on the time bar issue, which I know will be well received by asbestos sufferers and campaigners. Does the minister accept that, on this issue, justice delayed is justice denied? Can she tell us how quickly the Government will proceed with the bill?

Alison Thewliss: I hope to be able to introduce the bill by the end of the year, but the member will appreciate that parliamentary timescales prevent me from giving a specific date at the moment. She is correct in saying that justice delayed is justice denied. I hope that all members, as well as the campaigners, will welcome the commitment to a bill and that Parliament will be able to support it on a cross-party basis, because, as we have heard, the issue affects people across our country. There is no party-political point to be made on that front—mesothelioma affects people regardless.

I want to acknowledge some of members' contributions. Several members—including, in particular, Heather Anderson—mentioned the barriers to compensation for women. That issue is worth further consideration, because, in many cases, it is difficult to prove where that harm has come from. We will need to give further thought to that.

Jackie Baillie mentioned the case of Scottish Borders Council schools. As she will understand, I will not make a financial commitment in that regard today, but the point has been noted, and I will give thought to that.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): As a member of the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee, I welcome the news on the proposed legislation, which is very welcome. Indeed, it is something that has been long hoped for.

Does the minister share my concern about the fact that the former Cape Marinite factory in Springburn has been in a state of chronic dereliction and abandonment for 12 years, with the result that the young people who frequently trespass on the site expose themselves to a legacy of asbestos contamination? Will she commit to working with me and Glasgow City Council to resolve the long-term dereliction of that huge industrial facility in Springburn with a view to the site undergoing some sort of regeneration?

Alison Thewliss: Paul Sweeney makes a very good point, because the issue is wrapped up in our post-industrial legacy. The fact that there are such abandoned factories and that the people who enter them—whether for urban exploration or whatever else—do not understand the risks that they are exposing themselves to is a difficulty that we must overcome.

There are also stories of people who are adults now but who, in their childhood, messed around in sites with asbestos in it, utterly unaware of the harm that they were exposing themselves to. We need to consider that. The owners of such sites and buildings have a particular responsibility to ensure that they are secure and safe and that they are not being negligent and exposing people to risk. I encourage anybody who is aware of buildings with an owner who can be held to account to ensure that that is done. There is an awful lot to be recognised in terms of holding people to account, which has been a feature of this campaign over time.

The Scottish Government confirms its commitment to continue to stand alongside those who are affected by mesothelioma, to ensure that they receive the compassionate care and treatment that they require at every stage of their journey. That cannot be achieved through our NHS alone, so I extend my thanks to the third sector, community and social care, industry and other partners who are working collaboratively to improve the outcomes for those who are affected by mesothelioma. In particular, I extend my sincere thanks to all organisations that offer invaluable help and support to anybody affected by mesothelioma and other asbestos-related conditions. I thank Mesothelioma UK for continuing to raise awareness each year through action mesothelioma day. On 3 July, the Scottish Government will proudly show our support by lighting up in blue St Andrew's house and Victoria Quay in Edinburgh to get behind the go blue for meso campaign. I encourage others who have the ability to do so to light up their buildings or to show their support by dressing in blue.

I give special thanks to the Clydebank Asbestos Group, which has provided support to those affected for more than 30 years, and I want to mention the work of the Less Survivable Cancers Taskforce, which also supports people affected by mesothelioma. Heather Anderson mentioned Asbestos Action's campaigners in Dundee and Tayside. Pauline Stafford mentioned the Scottish Mesothelioma Network. I was glad to hear Colm Merrick mention Action on Asbestos, which is based in my Glasgow Central constituency and has done a great deal of work on this campaign and in providing support to people. Other members mentioned the Cape must pay campaign; I agree that £10 million towards clinical research and trials seems to be a small price for such a company to pay, and I welcome the campaign's contribution in that respect.

Clinical trials are being carried out to develop new and effective approaches to the treatment of mesothelioma. They are vital in finding novel ways to treat and detect cancers early. We know that there can be a significant delay between asbestos exposure and symptoms of cancer. I am heartened to hear that several mesothelioma studies have taken place across Scotland, and I understand that four such studies are currently active and open to recruitment.

The Scottish Government's chief scientific officer aims to support and increase the level of high-quality research that is conducted in Scotland

and has funded research into mesothelioma treatments. A new clinical trial called HIT-Meso—hemithoracic irradiation with proton therapy in malignant pleural mesothelioma—is assessing the use of proton beam therapy for patients with unilateral malignant pleural mesothelioma. Those patients currently face limited treatment options, and proton beam therapy has shown promise in treating other thoracic cancers. It is more precise than conventional radiotherapy, and the team behind the trial in England has begun the process of establishing it in Scotland.

Although that trial and others that are open to recruitment show promise for people who are diagnosed with mesothelioma, I recognise the devastating impact that a diagnosis can have on the wider families and communities that are living with mesothelioma. A diagnosis has a far-reaching impact, and that can be particularly true for cancers that are not commonplace, leaving individuals feeling isolated and alone at a distressing time.

The Scottish Government's 10-year cancer strategy sets out a clear ambition that every person with cancer is at the heart of decisions about their care and is supported in what matters most to them when they need it. The single point of contact pilots that we have embarked on are making a significant difference in ensuring that people get the ability to discuss their treatment anxieties and their support. We have invested £2.5 million to expand the reach of that programme across Scotland.

We continue to work in partnership with Macmillan through the transforming cancer care partnership programme, which is worth more than £27 million and provides patients with a specialist key support worker to offer emotional, financial and practical support to people with cancer. I encourage people to go to that service if they need support.

As members from across the chamber have said, this debate is not about the past, as the issue is very much in the present. However, we honour all those who have passed and are not here to watch today's debate. Tony Worthington, David Colraine and John MacDougall were all mentioned as campaigners on this issue who are not here today. We honour their memory by ensuring that we get justice and truth for them and for everyone who is affected by mesothelioma.

I extend my thanks to everybody for their contributions and to all who are involved in improving outcomes for people with mesothelioma.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): That concludes the debate. I wish members, their staff and everyone else who works on the parliamentary campus a wonderful recess.

Meeting closed at 18:10.

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