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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 23 September 2026

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

Portfolio Question Time

Climate Action and Rural Affairs

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): Good afternoon. Our first item of business today is portfolio questions, and the first portfolio is climate action and rural affairs. I will try to accommodate as many questions as possible, but I would ask for concise questions and answers.

Woodland Purchases for Community Use

1. **Adam Harley (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government what support it provides to organisations seeking to purchase woodland for community use. (S7O-00259)

The Minister for Agriculture, Marine and the Islands (Jim Fairlie): The Scottish Government provides support in several ways. The community right to buy and the asset transfer legislation provide the opportunity to purchase assets, including woodland. The Scottish land fund is a source of funding for acquisition. In addition, the Scottish Government provides funding for advisory services, including support for the Community Woodlands Association, which provides independent advice and support to community groups that own, are involved in or are responsible for the management of woodland across Scotland, as well as new or existing groups looking to purchase woodland.

Adam Harley: Members of the Birdston Regeneration Group in Milton of Campsie, which is in my constituency, have knocked on more than 1,600 doors, raised more than £14,000 from local people and gained huge support for their efforts to bring Birdston woods into community ownership. The group was therefore bitterly disappointed when its application to the Scottish land fund was rejected, with insufficient evidence of need and economic returns from the project cited as the reason for that.

Does the minister agree that the substantial community work that has already been undertaken should be recognised and considered in any future funding decision, particularly because the group now faces the prospect of having to return money that was donated in good faith by local residents?

Jim Fairlie: The Scottish land fund is always oversubscribed, so the group not receiving funding does not necessarily mean that its scheme was not a good one. If the member wants to write to me and have a chat about it, I will be more than happy to meet him.

Julie MacDougall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform): Will the minister confirm whether a wider review will be conducted into the general administration of community asset transfers, given that many community groups have complained about the complicated, bureaucratic and lengthy process that is presently used?

Jim Fairlie: I am not aware of the complaints that the member is talking about, but if she wants to come to me and give me specific details, I will be more than happy to take that away.

Environmental Protection Funding (Prioritisation)

2. **David Kirkwood (South Scotland) (Reform):** To ask the Scottish Government whether, given the finite amount of funding available for environmental protection, it considers that funding should be prioritised towards measures with certain outcomes or those with uncertain outcomes. (S7O-00260)

The Minister for Agriculture, Marine and the Islands (Jim Fairlie): The Scottish Government takes an evidence-based approach to policy making, as well as in its decisions on funding and regulation. Inevitably, decisions must be taken where there is more or less certainty, so we are guided by the precautionary principle to enable proportionate decision making.

The Scottish Government will set out its spending plans for 2027-28, as part of the Scottish budget, on 3 December.

David Kirkwood: It would not be unfair to describe the effect of an increasing level of atmospheric carbon dioxide on our climate as infinitesimal, and any effort to reduce it as contentious. It would not be contentious, however, to describe Scotland's water, our proudest natural asset, as polluted.

Surface water and groundwater are contaminated by perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances—PFAS—microplastics and pharmaceuticals, among other things, and we are dumping raw sewage into the sea for probably more than 1,000 hours every day. Why not divert the thousands of millions of pounds that are currently allocated to chasing the carbon chimera in pursuit of the mythical net zero to where science says that it could make a measurable and positive environmental impact instead?

Jim Fairlie: A debate is happening this afternoon that the member might want to check into. On the debate about net zero, adaptation and where the priorities should be, they are all

priorities, and we have the targets for good reason. We understand that the climate is changing and we will take adaptation measures, because we have effects such as flooding, water scarcity, drought, wildfires and coastal erosion. All those things are happening before our eyes, which the member accepts. Therefore, we have to prioritise our spending in the areas that we know are making a difference at the time, as well as looking at longer-term measures.

Laura Mitchell (Moray) (SNP): When dealing with climate and nature, I am unclear as to how anything that is worth doing can feasibly be described as a certain or uncertain outcome, other than the fact that climate change is certainly real and that the impacts of it are being and will continue to be felt in my community, which is why climate action is essential. The Scottish Government will invest £160 million to maximise the power of our land and forests to help tackle climate change and protect nature. What does the Scottish Government expect to achieve as a result of that investment?

Jim Fairlie: I whole-heartedly agree with Laura Mitchell. The crises of climate change and biodiversity loss are very real, as I just stated to the member who asked the previous question. Those crises are linked and mutually reinforcing, and we need to tackle the two together to protect our valuable natural capital, which directly supports £40 billion of economic output and underpins our health and prosperity as a nation.

We are investing £160.1 million in woodland creation, protecting our ancient Caledonian pinewoods, restoring peatland and delivering Scotland's biodiversity strategy. All that will lock up carbon to protect our land-based industries and increase the resilience of our communities to the growing risks resulting from climate change, including flooding and wildfire.

Climate Justice Fund

3. **Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government whether its commitment to increase the climate justice fund will match the 25 per cent increase committed for the international development fund. (S7O-00261)

The Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Rural Affairs (Gillian Martin): In stark contrast to cuts that are being made by Governments elsewhere, the recent programme for government was clear that the Scottish Government will grow our climate justice fund up from £36 million over the course of this session of Parliament. Obviously, the level of growth will be determined by future budget and spending review settlements.

The Scottish Government remains committed to delivering programmes that support climate-vulnerable communities in the global south—which have contributed least to the climate crisis but face the severity of its effects—to build resilience to climate impacts and address loss and damage.

Patrick Harvie: It sounds as though we need to continue to make that case as we go into the budget process. I encourage the cabinet secretary to make the case strongly that we align the climate justice fund increase with the wider increase in international development funding, not least because some of the people who are most strongly opposed to international development funding also talk the kind of drivel about the climate emergency that we have heard in the past few minutes.

What more can the Government do to increase public understanding of the positive impacts that the climate justice fund and wider international development funding have around the world?

Gillian Martin: I thank Patrick Harvie for that considered question. I work closely with my colleague Simita Kumar, who has international development as part of her portfolio. We are doing a lot of joint working to maximise both streams of funding and to ensure that they are joined up.

On Patrick Harvie's question and comments about the narrative associated with the issue, we need to get an awful lot better at talking about not just our responsibility to help the global south but the impact of doing so. We are talking about people who do not want to leave their homes and who want to live in resilient communities in parts of the world that have been affected by climate change. Protecting their interests and helping them to continue to thrive in their communities has a net impact on us as a global citizen.

For example, if people are food insecure or are taken out of their homes due to flooding or drought, that impacts on the rest of us. It causes conflict, creates climate refugees and has an impact on neighbouring countries and countries in the global north. Until we take that joined-up approach, we will have to see off some of the nonsense that there is on international spend, which is mainly race baiting, in my opinion.

Kate Nevens (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green): Following the devastating floods over the summer in Nepal, which were caused by a glacial landslide that was likely a result of the climate crisis, what engagement has the cabinet secretary had with the humanitarian emergency fund team about increasing support to countries that are affected by climate-induced emergencies, and whether any funds might be committed to supporting communities in Nepal?

Gillian Martin: We are always looking at the particular communities that we work in partnership

with. Scotland has long-standing relationships with Malawi, Zambia and Rwanda. This year, we committed £7.5 million in programmes to support the most vulnerable climate communities in those countries. I recently had a meeting with Simita Kumar and our teams in which we talked about whether we should be looking at having partnership arrangements with other countries that are becoming more affected by climate change.

It is a changing picture, and what happened in Nepal was horrific. We must always be agile with regards to where we put money, and we also need to use our experience in asking other countries to do more in this space. It was particularly disappointing to see the United Kingdom Government reduce its spend in this area.

Hyperscale Artificial Intelligence Data Centres

4. **Q Manivannan (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the cumulative impact of hyperscale AI data centres' energy consumption on its commitment to meet its net zero by 2045 target.(S7O-00262)

The Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Rural Affairs (Gillian Martin): The Scottish Government is working with industry, regulators and partner agencies to understand the cumulative environmental impacts of data centre developments and to ensure that the growth of the sector is consistent with Scotland's net zero ambitions. The Minister for Public Finance has issued a new direction that requires planning authorities to notify Scottish ministers of new data centre applications and mandates environmental impact assessments for all applications that exceed a power capacity of 50MW. Those measures will strengthen our oversight of the development pipeline and ensure that potentially significant environmental effects are considered from the outset.

Q Manivannan: Campaigners in Edinburgh in my region have highlighted that the proposed South Gyle data centre would consume enough electricity to power a quarter of a million homes—more than double the number of households in the city. How is the Scottish Government ensuring that the cumulative impact of such proposals is taken into account in its national climate action plans to reduce emissions from our homes and public buildings?

Gillian Martin: It is important that I do not focus my remarks on a particular application. There are several aspects to that question, and Hannah Mary Goodlad, the Minister for Public Finance, has set out some of the environmental impacts that are associated with live and future planning applications.

One thing that has exercised me over the past few years is that the United Kingdom Government is paying renewable electricity generators to switch off their generation when they cannot get capacity in the grid or when there is reduced demand. We need to consider whether there are off-takers for that electricity—I am not talking only about data centres—so that it can be diverted elsewhere. There was a lot in that question, but I hope that my answer gives Dr Manivannan an indication of my thinking on the matter.

Monica Lennon (Glasgow) (Lab): I will not ask the cabinet secretary about matters that are for the planning minister, but will she advise the Parliament whether the Government will consider what impact the potential hyperscale data centres could have on the commitments in the climate change plan?

Gillian Martin: The climate change plan was set out in March, before the dissolution of the Parliament. However, I have said throughout the whole process that the climate change plan is an agile document. When there are particular developments, such as technological developments, or sectors that are booming, there will always be consideration of whether the climate change plan is fit for purpose. There will also be an update of the climate change plan in five years' time. However, the point was well made about the capacity that we have for particular burgeoning sectors and the stress that they might put on our natural resources. The climate change plan is not a static document for a moment in time that is to be adhered to; it must be agile.

Waste Discharge into Sea (East Lothian)

5. **Miles Briggs (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions ministers are having with the Scottish Environment Protection Agency regarding the reported discharge of waste directly into the sea impacting on communities across East Lothian. (S7O-00263)

The Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Rural Affairs (Gillian Martin): Scotland's bathing waters are important for local communities, and 97 per cent of our bathing waters achieve the bathing water standard for water quality. I have had regular engagement with the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and Scottish Water throughout the bathing water season, including two meetings with SEPA in the past few weeks, to ensure that all the necessary actions are being taken to protect and improve bathing water quality across the whole of Scotland.

A range of actions are under way or planned by Scottish Water and other public partners to identify and address bathing water quality issues, particularly in Edinburgh and East Lothian. As part

of that work, Scottish Water is undertaking a £1 million study—a study that I requested—to consider what work could further improve the bathing water in that region.

Miles Briggs: I am regularly contacted by constituents in Edinburgh and East Lothian about the impact that sewage discharge is having on our communities. Just this morning, there were two reported pollution alerts, at Wardie bay and Belhaven in East Lothian. It is totally unacceptable for such discharges to take place. What action will ministers take? More specifically, will they set legally binding targets to end untreated sewage discharges that affect bathing waters and popular recreational water use by 2030?

Gillian Martin: When it comes to the pollutants that go into our bathing waters, it is important to understand that there are a number of contributing sources. SEPA gives advice to local authorities and landowners and has discussions with Scottish Water. Over the summer, there have been instances in which there have been bathing water alerts in particular bathing waters that have not been a result of anything that has come from the sewerage system but which have been to do with factors such as litter, seagull activity and dog mess, in particular. There are a number of contributory sources. That is why I provided £1 million for the study that I mentioned, to ascertain where the pressures are coming from in East Lothian and Edinburgh. Off the back of that, we will be able to identify whether we need to take certain action in certain places, whether with Scottish Water or local communities.

In addition, there is a big piece of work to be done on communication in relation to what people flush down their toilets that can cause blockages and other issues. There are a number of sources of pollution that must be addressed.

Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): I thank the cabinet secretary for her very full answers to Miles Briggs's questions.

I want to move us from the east coast to the west coast. The waters around the beautiful coastline of Argyll and Bute are used by locals and visitors alike for swimming, paddling, surfing and sailing. What consideration is the Scottish Government giving to supporting communities to introduce bathing water designation for more waters around Argyll and Bute's wonderful coastline?

Gillian Martin: I need do nothing other than agree with Jenni Minto about the beauty of the coastline of her constituency. Over the summer, I had the great privilege of being in Tiree, which must have some of the best bathing waters in the whole of Scotland.

The bathing water regulations require the Scottish ministers to designate a bathing water if they expect a large number of people to bathe there, taking into account past trends, infrastructure and facilities. Any organisation or individual can suggest to the Scottish ministers that a bathing water should be designated. The relevant proposal form is available on SEPA's website, which sets out the supporting information that can be provided. Obviously, things change and certain areas become more popular, so it is important for people to know that communities have the ability to request the designation of bathing waters.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): Question 6 has been withdrawn.

Bluetongue Outbreak (Vaccine Procurement)

7. **Jamie Langan (South Scotland) (Reform):** To ask the Scottish Government, following the previous ministerial statement outlining that it will not be providing support to farmers affected by the bluetongue outbreak in South Scotland region, whether it will reconsider its position and commit to looking at the central procurement of vaccine. (S7O-00265)

The Minister for Agriculture, Marine and the Islands (Jim Fairlie): I fully understand that this is an incredibly difficult time for livestock keepers who are dealing with the impacts of the disease on their stock.

As I said to Senga Beresford during questions on the statement that I made to Parliament on 9 September on the bluetongue virus in the south-west of Scotland, the Government already provides the most comprehensive package of support to the livestock sector through direct payments and targeted grants.

We also support farmers through horizon scanning and alert systems, which forewarned us that bluetongue was coming ever closer to Scotland—not least because the restriction zone that was imposed by the United Kingdom Government covered the whole of the land base of England.

The Scottish Government also provides advice and practical guidance on the implementation and maintenance of control measures, which include the testing of suspect animals, wider surveillance and veterinary investigations.

Vaccination of stock is a commercial decision, and the Scottish Government has done its bit in licensing the vaccine in Scotland and working with other Governments, industry and manufacturers to ensure continuity of supply, but I must reiterate that demand for vaccine needs to be generated within the industry.

Jamie Langan: The minister alludes to his awareness that bluetongue was coming to Scotland. Does he feel that the Government did enough? How can he assure farmers that, in the future, the Government will be more proactive and not reactive on significant challenges for the industry?

Jim Fairlie: The Government was not reactive; the Government was very proactive. We were messaging the livestock sector that the only way to protect stock was through vaccination. There was vaccine in the country but, because of the low uptake, it was directed back to the European Union, and it then had to be brought back because there was an outbreak of bluetongue. Those in the farming community will have to address the issue by ensuring that they put in their orders to buy their vaccine for the season coming.

Andrew Baxter (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (LD): The livestock industry has made it clear that vaccination uptake will depend on farmers and crofters receiving practical advice from organisations and individuals they already trust. Will the minister commit to funding an industry-led campaign over the winter to explain that vaccination is the only effective way to protect livestock from bluetongue, and to drive up vaccine uptake before the next high-risk season?

Jim Fairlie: I do not believe that a paid campaign is required. The farming community are very well aware of what is going on. They can see it in the papers. I have spoken to farmers from the south to the very north, and everybody knows about bluetongue. They know that it is there, and they know that it has now gotten into Scotland. It is therefore in their best interests to protect their investment and ensure that they get their livestock vaccinated before the next season.

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): Given that achieving high vaccination rates before next year's mid-season will be critical in protecting Scotland's livestock sector, will the Scottish Government commit to funding the sector and running a national awareness campaign to encourage vaccine uptake, providing clear and consistent guidance to farmers to give them confidence that they are making the right decisions for their business, and will the Government consider underwriting vaccine procurement for veterinary practices, so that vets can order sufficient supplies without carrying the financial risks themselves, therefore supporting a rapid and comprehensive vaccine roll-out across Scotland?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): I ask the minister to address the vets issue.

Jim Fairlie: I see that we have consensus across the chamber, as both Andrew Baxter and Finlay Carson are asking exactly the same question—and the answer is exactly the same. The farming community are very well aware of the risks associated with bluetongue. We do not need a targeted, funded campaign. I am more than happy to keep talking about it. Individual members are talking to their rural constituents. We know that bluetongue is here, so farmers have a responsibility to protect their own livestock by ordering the vaccine and giving the companies that provide the vaccine plenty of notice that a demand-led programme is coming.

Rural Support Plan

8. **Tim Eagle (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its rural support plan. (S7O-00266)

The Minister for Agriculture, Marine and the Islands (Jim Fairlie): The rural support plan provides a period of clarity and certainty, delivering direct support for the next five years to provide the industry with reassurance and boosting confidence in long-term investment.

I have to point out that certainty does not mean no change. Agriculture reform will follow an evolving continuous-improvement approach designed and delivered in partnership with our rural communities and valued stakeholders and supported by a monitoring and evaluation framework.

The plan will be amended to reflect that evolving reform journey, and I look forward to discussing it further when providing closing evidence to the Rural Affairs Committee inquiry next month.

Tim Eagle: My apologies, Presiding Officer. I should have declared an interest: I am a small farmer, and I am in receipt of payments under the basic payment scheme.

The minister just said "clarity and certainty". Let me give him some quotes from the Rural Affairs Committee. We have heard that lots of things are "missing from the plan", and that

"we are all a bit frustrated by there being no change at all."—[*Official Report*, *Rural Affairs Committee*, 2 September 2026; c 30.]

I even have a quote to say that

"the rural support plan is a manifest failure of policy making."—[*Official Report*, *Rural Affairs Committee*, 16 September 2026; c 3.]

That, according to the Scottish National Party, is "clarity and certainty". How many times must we remind the Government that farmers need action? Perhaps, for example, it could give the underspend from the less favoured area support scheme—LFASS—back to the farmers who need it. Has the minister actually been listening to what the experts

have been saying to the Rural Affairs Committee? What are his real takeaways from that?

Jim Fairlie: I have certainly been listening to the takeaways from the Rural Affairs Committee and I will give my full responses when I am in front of it. There is absolutely no doubt that we have given clarity and certainty to the farming community. Between now and 2030, farmers know what they have coming, what their payments will be, and what the system is. I point out to Mr Eagle that his party introduced the sustainable farming investment scheme in England, which ran out in six hours, so thousands of farmers across the country had no chance of getting anywhere near that money. The stability and certainty that the Government has provided is exactly what farmers need. They know that they are getting a good deal.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): If we have concise supplementaries, we could fit more in, so I ask for succinct questions.

Donald MacKinnon (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab): I draw attention to my entry in the members' register of interests, which shows that I run a crofting business.

After introducing the calving interval condition to the suckler beef support scheme, the Scottish Government correctly had to amend the scheme's rules to make it workable for small herds. What lessons has the Government learned from that experience? How will the rural support plan ensure that future schemes get it right first time for small producers?

Jim Fairlie: Donald MacKinnon has just pointed out the absolute beauty of how we are approaching the system. We constantly speak to the stakeholders—

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): You could change it!

Jim Fairlie: If we are going to keep hearing chirping from the sidelines, the member will not hear my answer.

Finlay Carson: It is nonsense!

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): Enough, Mr Carson.

Jim Fairlie: Mr MacKinnon has just pointed out the flexibility of the scheme that we have brought into play. We are speaking to the people who are directly affected. When we have seen things that we can change to make them better, that is exactly what we have done and will continue to do through the evolution of the rural support plan.

Dawn Black (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): The rural economy and its associated industries are some of Scotland's most important and make up a vast amount of my constituency. Therefore, how will the rural support plan ensure that the SNP Government continues to develop and articulate the future of Scottish agriculture, in close consultation and collaboration with the industry during the period of the plan and beyond?

Jim Fairlie: The rural support plan is an iterative process that will continue to evolve and develop. Dawn Black is absolutely correct that the system needs to work with and for the farming community. We have done that and have worked with the agriculture reform implementation oversight board for five years to develop the plan. This parliamentary session is entirely about delivery, which is what I have committed to doing.

Climate Action Policies (Integrated Public Transport and Active Travel Networks)

9. **Monica Lennon (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the climate action secretary has had with the transport secretary regarding how climate action policies are supporting the development of integrated public transport and active travel networks that connect rural communities with major urban centres, including Glasgow. (S7O-00267)

The Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Rural Affairs (Gillian Martin): I last met the transport secretary on 10 September about the climate action policies that he has responsibility for delivering in his portfolio. In addition, I have established a ministerial delivery group on climate change; I chair the group, and Mr Flynn is a member of it. The group will strengthen delivery monitoring across Government.

This financial year, we are investing more than £2.7 billion to support public transport and a modal shift from car use. We have also delivered our 100-day commitment to a £2 bus fare cap across the Strathclyde area and have frozen all ScotRail fares this financial year. With my responsibility for rural affairs, I am pleased that those measures will improve connectivity for low-income communities and people in rural and urban communities.

Monica Lennon: Free bus travel is a key policy driver in the climate change plan. As getting more people on to buses will help to reduce Scotland's transport emissions, will the cabinet secretary discuss with the transport secretary how the Bus Services Act 2025 will support local transport authorities and regional transport partnerships to franchise bus services or set up publicly owned bus companies? Will they discuss how the 2025 act will help to ensure that bus services meet the needs of all people across Scotland, instead of cutting routes and hiking fares in regions that are outwith the £2 bus fare cap?

Gillian Martin: In his previous role, Mr Fairlie had responsibility for buses, and he spoke about the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019, which gives local authorities the powers that they require. To bring the question back to the responsibilities of the current Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Tourism and Transport, I note that there was a round-table event on 26 August at which there were opportunities for stakeholder involvement to inform the better buses legislation. That was the first stage of the consultation process, and I believe that it was a productive meeting. There will be further opportunities for engagement and discussion as the proposals develop, and I will of course keep a keen eye on how they impact on the climate change plan.

Net Zero Policies (Local Economic Development)

10. **Max Bannerman (Highlands and Islands) (Reform):** To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on whether its net zero policies are compatible with stimulating local economic development. (S7O-00268)

The Minister for Agriculture, Marine and the Islands (Jim Fairlie): Policies contained in the climate change plan are compatible with economic growth.

Max Bannerman: I thank the minister for that short answer. Reliable infrastructure is crucial to economic development in the Highlands and Islands. I have mentioned the A96 in the chamber before. When I last did so, I received a contemptuous answer from the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Tourism and Transport, so I will try again with the minister. In 2021, the dualling of that major trunk road was put on hold for a climate compatibility assessment—the price of Green support for the then Sturgeon Government. Five years on and £6 million later, no bypass for Elgin and Keith is in sight. Can the minister guarantee that net zero ideology will never again be used to hold up vital improvements to the A96?

Jim Fairlie: “Net zero nonsense” sums up the way that Reform is tackling the very serious issues that we have in this country with climate change. I find it really disappointing that we cannot get at least some understanding that the fires and floods and the changes that we are seeing with coastal erosion are very much part of the climate change issue that we are dealing with. We will continue with our net zero journey.

Education, Culture and Gaelic

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): The next portfolio is education, culture and Gaelic.

Scottish Attainment Challenge Funding

1. **Gary Bouse (Falkirk West) (SNP):** I refer members to my entry in the register of members’ interests, which shows that I am a sitting councillor in Falkirk Council.

To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it is having with local authorities regarding the Scottish attainment challenge funding beyond 2026-27. (S7O-00269)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education, Culture and Gaelic (Màiri McAllan): Over the past decade, we have invested £1.75 billion in the Scottish attainment challenge. Further investment this year, including £130 million of pupil equity funding, is helping to empower headteachers to best support the needs of their pupils.

In recent weeks, I have made clear to Parliament my intention to continue supporting the fund. As Mr Bouse highlights, local authorities are an important partner in the work to develop it. Discussions are ongoing, and just yesterday I chaired a meeting of the education and childcare assurance board, which includes members of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland. My officials are meeting further representatives today, and I will update Parliament when I can.

Gary Bouse: The Scottish Government has provided significant funding to schools and councils that is aimed at closing the poverty-related attainment gap. Although the gap will remain until we eradicate poverty, the funding has proved positive in places such as the Falkirk Council area, where recent figures have confirmed a closing of the gap in literacy and numeracy at various stages, leading to record numbers of school leavers going to positive destinations—some 97.2 per cent in the previous academic year.

Can the cabinet secretary outline what plans the Government has to continue sustainable funding to schools and local authorities to further support closing the poverty-related attainment gap? Can she outline a timescale for when announcements on that funding will be made?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): I have to ask for more succinct questions.

Màiri McAllan: I very much welcome the positive progress in Falkirk, which the member noted. He is also right to highlight the figure on positive destinations.

I repeat what I said in my first answer. No decisions have been made on budgets, which are yet to be decided, but I am committed to continuance of the Scottish attainment challenge

and I will update Parliament with more detail when I can.

Katherine Sangster (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab): The Scottish attainment challenge fund is used in a diverse number of ways to suit the needs of local areas. The success story in Falkirk has been mentioned. However, just because a problem is local does not make it unique. Will the Scottish Government commit to analysing how the funding is being used in order that schools facing similar circumstances can learn from one another and that best practice guidelines can be created so that every school can make the best use of the funding?

Màiri McAllan: Katherine Sangster is absolutely right. We need to strike a balance between what makes pupil equity funding so excellent, which is that it is directed by schools and school leaders, and involving local authorities and the Scottish Government in understanding what exactly the funding is being used for and the difference that it is making. We commit to ongoing oversight of the programme. Equally, the number of staff who are supported by PEF, which is specific to a school's needs, speaks to its value, and, as I say, I am committed to its continuance.

Young Learners with Additional Support Needs (Informal Exclusion from Education)

2. **Joe Long (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government how informal exclusion from education among young learners with additional support needs is being recorded and addressed, for example, those neurodivergent young people who are unable to attend school regularly or are on part-time timetables. (S7O-00270)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education, Culture and Gaelic (Màiri McAllan): All pupils are entitled to a full-time education, and schools should provide personalised support that maximises the attendance and engagement of pupils, including those with additional support needs. Temporary reductions in learning hours should be used only in exceptional circumstances and always as part of a wider package of support around a child.

Education authorities are required to have robust arrangements to record, monitor and review attendance, including through the use of specific coding for part-time timetables. That is all done with a view to planning well and supporting a return to full-time education as soon as possible for a child.

Joe Long: I thank the cabinet secretary for that answer and commitment. We will not see truly inclusive education without a serious investment in training for educators and provision for young people with additional support needs. More than £500 million has come into the Scottish budget as a consequence of increased special educational needs provision in England. Will the cabinet secretary indicate how much of that money will be committed to additional support needs provision in Scotland?

Màiri McAllan: We are entering into a period of budget negotiations for the coming financial year, but, in respect of the current financial year, I will reflect on a couple of things.

There has been a significant increase in the spend from us to education authorities to invest in additional support for learning. If we look at the difference between the years 2024-25 and 2012-13, we can see that it has gone from £540 million of investment to almost £1.1 billion. There has been an increase in investment to reflect the increase in requirements and needs.

In this financial year, we also made an additional £29 million available for additional support needs, with £28 million of that going to councils and £1 million being held back nationally to, for example, provide support for professional learning.

When it comes to the coming financial year, I will shortly be entering into discussions with the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government.

Iris Duane (Glasgow) (Green): I appreciate the cabinet secretary's response to Joe Long's question, but, with the refusal of the Scottish Government to take forward the highly anticipated learning disabilities, autism and neurodivergence bill, many of our disabled and neurodivergent constituents are rightfully afraid that institutional failure and discrimination will continue.

Will the cabinet secretary detail what work has been done to ensure that the refusal to take forward the bill will not continue to disadvantage disabled and neurodivergent young people in our education system?

Màiri McAllan: The Scottish Government is absolutely committed to improving outcomes for people with learning disabilities, autistic people and neurodivergent people. Iris Duane referred to the LDAN bill. Our view is that practical action, investment and change now will be of greater practical assistance to those who need it than a long primary legislation process would be.

I assure Iris Duane and those who are listening of two things. First, practical action is under way, not least through the national staged intervention model in the education space. My health colleagues are also taking forward a lot of work.

Secondly, the work that was done in preparation for the bill is informing the action that we will take now. We remain open-minded to the question of a

bill, but that would be down the line, once greater practical support has been put in place and action has been taken.

Paul McLennan (East Lothian Coast and Lammermuirs) (SNP): Efforts to support learners to achieve and succeed must account for the varying needs of our young people, including those with additional support needs. Can the cabinet secretary provide an update on how the Scottish Government is working to deliver the recommendations set out in the McManus review?

Màiri McAllan: I confirmed to the Parliament in a recent statement that we accept the recommendations of the McManus review and will spend the parliamentary session implementing them.

One of the most impactful changes, perhaps, will be the national staged intervention model that I mentioned. A lot of local authorities are currently using a staged intervention model, but this one will take a national approach so that there is simplicity and consistency, and so that young people and their families know what support to expect for additional learning support needs.

I published a route map to that national staged intervention model in August, and we are working very closely with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and education authorities on its implementation.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): I call Mark Griffin, who joins us remotely.

Widening Access Policies (Disability, Neurodivergence and Long-term Health Conditions)

3. **Mark Griffin (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government, regarding widening access policies for Scottish-funded students applying to university, what its position is on whether disability, neurodivergence and long-term health conditions should be considered. (S7O-00271)

I apologise that I am not there in person. My appendix clearly does not respect parliamentary timetables

The Minister for Innovation, Technology and Tertiary Education (Alyn Smith): I wish Mark Griffin well with his recovery.

The Scottish Government is committed to ensuring that learners with disabilities, long-term health conditions or additional support needs can access higher education and receive the support needed to succeed.

Recent statistics show significant progress. The proportion of Scots entering full-time first degree courses with a known disability has risen from 11.5 per cent to 25.5 per cent over the past decade. Colleges and universities have duties under the Equality Act 2010 to make reasonable adjustments and provide tailored support. To look at what more we can do, we will consider the findings from a recent consultation on disabled student support.

Mark Griffin: I thank the minister for his answer and for his concern.

I have been contacted by the family of Devyn Taylor from Stepps, who achieved five A grades at higher and excellent advanced higher results despite years of illness, disability and delayed neurodevelopmental support. Despite those achievements and the resilience that she demonstrated in overcoming those barriers, she was unable to secure a place to study her dream course in dentistry.

Does the minister believe that disability, neurodivergence and long-term health conditions are given sufficient regard in Scotland's widening access framework, particularly for highly competitive courses such as dentistry? Is that adequately reflected in how we assess the barriers that young people have overcome to achieve their academic success?

Alyn Smith: I would very much say that that applies to the high-demand courses as much as everything else. The duties under the Equality Act 2010 apply to everybody. The member raises a specific case and, if he would like to meet me, I would be happy to discuss it with him.

I say to all colleagues across the chamber that, if they have a specific case that they would like to raise, they should do so in advance, and I will probably give them a better answer.

Katie Hagmann (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): I know that free tuition under the Scottish National Party is tackling financial barriers to attending university, and Scotland's approach to supporting access to higher education goes further than is the case anywhere else in the United Kingdom.

Will the minister share what assessment has been made of the impact of the Scottish Government's investment, especially in providing pathways to university for more of our young people, regardless of their background?

Alyn Smith: I thank Katie Hagmann for raising a subject that I know is close to her heart. The statistics show that Scotland is widening access to university, with the number of Scots from the most deprived backgrounds who enter university on full-time first degree courses up 55 per cent since this Government's establishment of the commission on widening access. In 2024-25, we had a record 17.4

per cent of full-time first degree entrants coming from Scotland's most deprived areas, which is an increase from 16.7 per cent in 2023-24. That is the highest proportion recorded and it shows progress towards the commission on widening access's target that one in five students who enter university will come from the 20 per cent most deprived areas by 2030.

University Entrants (Scotland-based Students)

4. **Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the number of Scotland-based students gaining entry to university for the academic session 2026-27. (S7O-00272)

The Minister for Innovation, Technology and Tertiary Education (Alyn Smith): Universities and Colleges Admissions Service data shows that around 37,360 Scotland-domiciled students have secured a United Kingdom university place for 2026-27, with record numbers going to Scottish universities and record numbers of 18-year-olds in Scotland achieving a university place. That shows that the continued success of the Scottish Government's commitment to access to higher education should be based on the ability to learn, not the ability to pay, and should be supported by free tuition for eligible Scotland-domiciled undergraduate students.

We are also making progress towards our widening access targets, with a record 6,390 Scots from deprived areas heading to university this year.

Alan Brown: I welcome the fact that a record number of students gained entry to university. The minister mentioned free tuition as well, which means that that record number of students will not graduate with the crippling £50,000-worth of debt that students south of the border have.

A couple of my constituents have contacted me to raise concerns about some universities closing clearing to Scotland-based students. Does the minister have any discussions with universities about a uniform approach to the clearing process?

Alyn Smith: We are in fierce agreement about tuition-free education. Some universities have closed clearing places to Scotland-domiciled applicants at an earlier stage this year, after filling their allocation of funded places.

We are alive to that issue, and the member is right to raise it but it is important to note that neither new students from the rest of the UK nor international students are able to access funded places that have been set aside for Scottish students. Clearing closed a bit earlier, but that was after the allocation was full.

The latest UCAS data for 2026 shows that 76 per cent of acceptances to Scottish universities were from Scotland-domiciled students in 2026, which is up from 71 per cent a decade ago.

Endangered and Critically Endangered Heritage Crafts

5. **Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what support it is providing to endangered and critically endangered heritage crafts. (S7O-00273)

The Minister for Innovation, Technology and Tertiary Education (Alyn Smith): I pay tribute to Paul Sweeney's advocacy for those issues over a long period. We recognise the importance of traditional and heritage crafts in sustaining Scotland's historic environment, cultural identity and specialist skills base. We support those skills through our investment in Skills Development Scotland and Historic Environment Scotland, which currently includes a range of provision for apprenticeships and skills development opportunities across the heritage sector through the skills investment plan for Scotland's historic environment.

The sector progresses heritage skills and learning and career pathways by building capacity and growing provision. Helping to retain and pass on traditional craft skills ensures that endangered and critically endangered heritage crafts can continue to contribute to Scotland's economy and communities.

Paul Sweeney: I thank the minister for his kind words. I am sure that he will agree that many of our heritage crafts are now critically endangered because public bodies are not buying enough locally. Following the devastating collapse of Ballantine Castings in Bo'ness last year—its historic moulds, which go back 200 years, face being scrapped altogether—Scotland's last architectural iron foundry, Laing's of Lochgelly, wants to purchase it, but the foundry's survival is threatened by a lack of consistent public sector contracts for civic ironwork. We see the exact same failure in the stone industry, with local suppliers at Tradstocks bypassed for imported materials for the Glasgow avenues project and George Square renovation.

If we want to keep these skills alive and allow businesses such as those to take on apprentices, we must change how we spend public money. Will the minister help me and Laing's to save the Ballantine moulds and agree to progress reforms to public procurement so that social value weightings are prioritised to protect Scotland's traditional trades?

Alyn Smith: I thank Paul Sweeney for the very specific question. The closest you will get to me

finding an advantage to Brexit is that we can look at procurement rules domestically. Procurement rules could be better worked to ensure a market for the traditional skills.

If there is an opportunity for us to intercede in relation to the issue that the member has raised, I would be very happy to do so. Perhaps we can take that offline.

Morven-May MacCallum (Highlands and Islands) (LD): The minister will be aware that this Sunday marks the start of the 17th Shetland wool week, an annual celebration of Shetland's textile heritage. The textile sector in Shetland has faced difficulty in recent years, including cuts to courses at the University of the Highlands and Islands, reduced availability of funding for small businesses and, on top of that, increased costs for small businesses in the islands. How will the Scottish Government tailor support to meet the needs of those small island-based businesses in the textile and craft sector?

Alyn Smith: I am very glad that the Shetland wool week has been mentioned. My colleague, Hannah Mary Goodlad, was talking about it earlier today, and it is great that we have an advocate for it. We could be doing more through the skills sector.

The member has raised several issues that are not directly in my remit, but I am very supportive of the craft sector. I should declare an interest as a former director of Radical Weavers in Stirling, which is a body that spends a lot of time on such skills. We could be doing more, and I am keen to see those businesses succeed and be supported.

Historic Buildings (Visitor Attraction)

6. **Lloyd Melville (Angus South) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how it is working with Historic Environment Scotland and VisitScotland to attract visitors to historic buildings. (S7O-00274)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education, Culture and Gaelic (Màiri McAllan): The Scottish Government works with both Historic Environment Scotland and VisitScotland to promote Scotland's historic buildings and our heritage attractions. Scotland's historic environment remains a major economic asset, generating around £6 billion annually for our economy and supporting more than 81,000 jobs. Through the national strategy, which is entitled "Our Past, Our Future", partners are working to increase public engagement with heritage, strengthen the evidence base for decision making and, ultimately, ensure that our precious historic attractions continue to contribute fully to our economy.

Lloyd Melville: Arbroath abbey, in my Angus South constituency, is one of Scotland's most important historic buildings. However, many visitors and tourists have limited knowledge about its importance. A lot of constituents have come to me to tell me that they feel that it is underpromoted. What more can the Scottish Government do to promote Arbroath abbey and to draw people to the town centre? Will the cabinet secretary meet me and relevant stakeholders to discuss the matter in detail?

Màiri McAllan: I agree with Lloyd Melville about the importance of Arbroath abbey as one of Scotland's historic sites, and I underline the importance of working together to conserve and promote it locally and nationally. I am aware of events such as the Arbroath market, the declaration day celebrations, bioblitz activities and scaffolding tours, all of which allow people to see conservation work up close and help to attract new audiences to the site. Historic Environment Scotland is leading those efforts, alongside a substantial community effort to raise the abbey's profile. However, I would be pleased to engage with Mr Melville about what more we can do for that important site.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Many historic buildings that are popular with visitors, such as Dunkeld cathedral, face extensive bills for repair and maintenance. The replacement for the VAT recovery scheme for listed places of worship, which was announced by the United Kingdom Government, has generated more than £9 million in Barnett consequentials for the Scottish Government, yet only £1 million has been allocated for Scottish buildings. Why are the custodians of those important Scottish buildings being short-changed in comparison with those that are south of the border?

Màiri McAllan: I am pleased that Murdo Fraser is able to acknowledge the work of Historic Environment Scotland in putting in place the places of worship scheme after the unexpected decision by the UK Government to change its arrangements, which had a significant impact on Scotland. That fund is in place and is being piloted. Along with Historic Environment Scotland, we will consider the interest in it and the impact that it has.

However, Mr Fraser will also be aware that ministers have asked and will continue to ask the UK Government for a targeted VAT reduction for the repair and maintenance of traditional buildings. I point Mr Fraser to our housing to 2040 strategy, which was clear that reductions in VAT on household repairs would encourage home renovation in Scotland and better equip homes and buildings, including our traditional buildings, for, among other things, the challenges of net zero.

Additional Support Needs Provision

7. **Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Con):** To ask the Scottish

Government whether it will provide an update on what measures it will introduce as part of the programme for government to improve additional support needs provision in schools. (S7O-00275)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education, Culture and Gaelic (Màiri McAllan): Owing to the importance of additional support needs, a number of questions have been raised today, so I will put on the record in response to Meghan Gallacher what I have said before: that the national staged intervention model, on which we are working with education authorities, is one of the principal pieces of work that we are taking forward. That was a part of the recommendations of the McManus review. It sits alongside additional funding in this financial year and discussions on future budgets, to which I have already referred. It also sits alongside work in teacher workforce planning, in which I am keen to support an ease of transition from parts of the profession into additional support for learning.

Meghan Gallacher: We know that the number of children who are now presenting with additional support needs is increasing, but we also know that there are challenges in our early learning facilities. Can the cabinet secretary update Parliament on ASN training in the workforce, and say whether she is looking specifically at ASN provision as part of any childcare expansion, bearing in mind the current challenges that the sector faces in the private, voluntary and independent sector in particular? We know that if those processes are embedded at the early stages, there is a better transition for children throughout their time in school.

Màiri McAllan: I absolutely agree with Meghan Gallacher on the importance of those formative early years in a child's development, and on the need to ensure that a child gets the support that is right for them and their needs at the earliest opportunity in life.

The Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise is leading on our development of childcare expansion and, together, she and I are currently working with officials on investing to test, in various childcare settings, what is required and what can best rise to meet a wide and varied cross-section of needs for our children and young people. That money is being invested now and the settings are being tested. In our development of the workforce, which we know will have to be done to facilitate the expansion of childcare, we are very mindful of the needs of our children and of meeting those needs as early as possible.

"Scotland's colleges 2026"

8. **Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to Audit Scotland's report, "Scotland's colleges 2026". (S7O-00276)

The Minister for Innovation, Technology and Tertiary Education (Alyn Smith): I warmly welcome Audit Scotland's report, "Scotland's colleges 2026", because it recognises the challenges facing the sector and the vital contribution that colleges make to learners and communities, and to Scotland's economy. This morning, I was at Fife College, seeing some of the fantastic work that it is doing with schools and local businesses.

That is why we increased college funding in the round by 10 per cent this year. We are working with the Scottish Funding Council and the sector to strengthen financial sustainability and provide greater flexibility while also redesigning the sector through the college sector of the future workstream. Together, those measures will ensure a sustainable, resilient and high-quality college sector that is equipped to meet Scotland's future needs. I value colleges very highly.

Katy Clark: As the minister will know, more than half of Scotland's colleges are now classed as being at high or very high financial risk. In the past five years, colleges have faced a 7 per cent real-terms funding cut and have lost 13 per cent of jobs, and in the past two years, student numbers have been cut by around 40,000. Ahead of the budget, does the minister agree that colleges need better funding and investment, not more cuts and underinvestment?

Alyn Smith: The member invites me to make commitments that are well beyond my remit, but I very much value colleges and very much appreciate the Audit Scotland report. I have to say that the report itself found a £5.6 million shortfall out of a £740 million investment from the Scottish Government; that does not strike me as being as existential as it has been presented from some quarters.

Scotland's colleges are innovating brilliantly. We need to see some reform of the sector and a focus on skills and the lifelong journey of the citizen, but I have confidence and faith that Scotland's colleges can rise to that challenge, as will the Scottish Government, and, as the minister, I am committed to ensuring that colleges are central to the delivery of our agenda.

Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP): Does the minister recognise the impact on colleges of the Labour Party's decision to increase national insurance contributions, which places a massive burden on our colleges? Can he advise of any further discussions that the Government has had with Forth Valley College regarding the long-term future of its Alloa campus after a successful campaign last year? Can he provide an update on progress toward securing that campus's future?

Alyn Smith: I warmly pay tribute to Keith Browns's ferocious advocacy for the Alloa campus. I know Forth Valley College well, as it has a campus in Stirling. I think that the Alloa campus has a glittering future as part of Forth Valley College; there is some fantastic work under way. At Fife College today, I heard about the Babcock partnership with Forth Valley College and Fife College. That sort of investment across the private and public sectors, focused on skills for the future, is crucial.

On the member's point about the increase in national insurance contributions, that has hit the entire public sector, and indeed the private sector, very hard.

Additional Support for Learning

9. **Steven Bonnar (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to ensure that the new national approach to additional support for learning delivers more consistent support for children and young people across Scotland, and provides schools and families with greater clarity about what support is available. (S7O-00277)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education, Culture and Gaelic (Màiri McAllan): The frequency with which additional support for learning has been raised today in questions underlines its importance to members and the people they represent, and I want to confirm that the Government shares that view of its importance.

I spent the morning with Cerebral Palsy Scotland, speaking to its staff and to young people and their families, who have varied and complex requirements. The young people I was with included people of primary school age and people who have left school, and there was also a young person who is in university. I put on the record that we are having those engagements and are speaking to as many people as we can to understand the varied educational needs of our young people and to ensure that Government policy reflects that.

I emphasise again that the framework that Mr Bonnar asks me about is designed to make support in schools more consistent and predictable for children and their families, regardless of where they live in Scotland.

Steven Bonnar: Last week, pupils from Uddingston grammar school visited Parliament. I know that supporting every young person to reach their full potential is a priority for the school, the school's families and, indeed, the Government. The new national approach to additional support for learning is an important step towards greater consistency of provision. Will the cabinet secretary outline how she will ensure that those changes translate into practical support for pupils, teachers and families in schools such as Uddingston grammar and make a real difference in terms of the positive outcomes that we all seek for young people?

Màiri McAllan: Mr Bonnar spoke about practical support and the need to make a noticeable difference for children and families. That is exactly what the Government is focused on. The staged intervention model, on which we are working collaboratively with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and others, is about ensuring that we provide the right support at the right time, as early as possible—Meghan Gallacher was right to make a point about that—while always giving families clarity on what they can expect and how decisions are made around a child, and, of course, always being guided by the principles of getting it right for every child.

Cultural Organisations (Aberdeen City Centre)

10. **Jack Middleton (Aberdeen Central) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how the programme for government aims to benefit cultural organisations in Aberdeen city centre. (S7O-00278)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education, Culture and Gaelic (Màiri McAllan): Our significant increase in investment in culture is doing just that by supporting cultural organisations in Aberdeen, including through Creative Scotland's multiyear funding programme, which I understand is currently funding eight organisations that are based in Aberdeen city, five of which are new to the funding cycle. Our expanded festivals fund also supports projects in Aberdeen.

Jack Middleton: Aberdeen is home to many cultural organisations of national significance, including, of course, His Majesty's theatre, which celebrates its 120th anniversary this year. However, our offering could grow even further, with the world-renowned institute, Peacock Visual Arts, looking to expand into a new cultural hub. Is the Scottish Government aware of Peacock's ambitions, and what avenues of Scottish Government support will be available to help with that expansion?

Màiri McAllan: I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate His Majesty's theatre on its anniversary. It is undoubtedly a cultural anchor in Aberdeen, and I wrote to it this week to congratulate it.

We have received an application to the regeneration capital grant fund from Aberdeen City Council for the Peacock project that Mr Middleton raised. That application will be considered alongside others I know of in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire.

Drug Harms

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): The next item of business is a statement by Maree Todd on addressing drug harms. Questions will be taken at the end of the statement, so there should be no interruptions or interventions.

15:04

The Minister for Mental Wellbeing, Public Health, Sport, Alcohol and Drugs (Maree Todd): Today's publication by National Records of Scotland shows that 1,133 people in Scotland tragically lost their lives to drugs in 2025. I begin by expressing my deepest condolences to the families, friends and loved ones of each of those people. Behind every death is a person whose life has been cut far too short because of avoidable circumstances, a family living with grief and a community affected by loss. The loss of 1,133 people is simply devastating. To everyone who has experienced that loss, I want to be clear that they remain at the heart of our efforts to reduce harm, save lives and improve support.

The figures show an increase in the number of drug deaths compared with the number in the previous year. That increase is deeply concerning to me, and the numbers are completely unacceptable.

Today's publication comes at a time when services across Scotland are reporting an increasingly toxic and unpredictable drug supply. There are growing risks from highly potent synthetic substances, changing patterns of drug use and high levels of people using multiple drugs at the same time. Those changes create significant dangers for people who use drugs and can rapidly increase the risk of overdose and death. In the chamber, I have spoken about the potency of nitazenes, for example, which are synthetic opioids that can be hundreds of times stronger than heroin.

At the same time, many of those at risk continue to experience the interconnected harms of poverty, poor physical and mental health, trauma, homelessness and social exclusion. Today's statistics highlight that people in the most deprived areas are 15 times more likely to die from drugs than those in the least deprived areas.

Those realities reinforce the need for a co-ordinated public health response that addresses the immediate risks that people face and the wider circumstances that can make recovery harder to achieve. In recognition of that incredibly challenging context, our programme for government reasserts our commitment to reduce the number of drug-related deaths. Our vision is of a Scotland where people receive the support that they need in their communities under a system that not only treats illness but helps to prevent it through earlier intervention.

Earlier this year, the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities jointly published "Preventing Harm, Promoting Recovery: Scotland's Alcohol & Drugs Strategic Plan 2026-2035", which sets out our long-term vision to prevent harm, promote recovery and save lives. It builds on the progress that has been made through the national mission and recognises that the scale and complexity of current harms require sustained action over the coming years.

The plan is grounded in a human rights approach and recognises that alcohol and drug harms cannot be addressed by any single organisation acting alone. Partnership working between the national Government, local government, health services, third sector communities and, crucially, those with lived and living experience will be essential to delivering change.

That means building on the steps that have been taken so far. On residential rehabilitation, we have exceeded our commitment to support 1,000 publicly funded placements annually, as more than 1,100 people accessed placements last year. Publicly funded access has more than doubled since 2019-20 and, in August, we announced new support for residential rehabilitation, including dedicated detoxification services in Inverness. Residential rehabilitation bed capacity increased to 574 beds in 2025, and we expect to see further increases when a progress report is published later this year.

We are continuing the implementation of the medication assisted treatment standards. The latest benchmarking report shows that clear progress has been made over the course of the programme, particularly on access, treatment choice, outreach and retention. Across Scotland's alcohol and drug partnership areas, 77 per cent were assessed by Public Health Scotland as having fully implemented standards 1, 2, 3 and 5, 57 per cent were assessed as having fully implemented standard 4, and 47 per cent were assessed as having fully implemented standards 6 to 10.

It is equally important that people receive the same high-quality care in the justice system. Yesterday's publication of a report on MAT implementation in prison settings provides a baseline for future improvement. It also highlights good practice, such as HMP Kilmarnock's work to improve same-day access, which has reduced treatment waiting times through joint working. As patterns of substance use change, we will expand

the standards beyond opioids to cover all substances, including alcohol.

We have also continued to widen access to life-saving naloxone, and we remain committed to ensuring that it is available to anyone who may need it. The latest estimates suggest that almost 89 per cent of people at risk of an opioid overdose have now been supplied with a take-home naloxone kit.

We continue to support our emergency services to provide rapid naloxone access during overdoses, with Police Scotland officers having administered it more than 1,300 times since its introduction, five years ago. Since opening, in January 2025, the Thistle, which is Glasgow's safer drug consumption facility, has been accessed well over 22,000 times, with staff having responded to almost 200 medical emergencies.

Vitally, these policy interventions and the actions of our valued front-line workers are saving lives. Today's statistics are a reminder of the need for all of us to empower and support the exceptional people in services who are delivering the vital changes that we need to see on the ground, such as those at the charity Cahootz, which I visited this morning and which supports people in recovery through creative activities. It is one of more than 300 local and grass-roots projects that we have supported. Through a new alcohol and drugs fund, independently administered by the Corra Foundation, we will expand this support for community organisations and provide more than £36 million over the next three years.

I also recognise the vital role that recovery communities play by providing trusted, peer-led support to complement clinical services. We will continue our support for the Scottish Recovery Consortium, to strengthen recovery communities and the distinct contribution that it provides.

I know that the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Care visited HMP Addiewell last Friday to take part in its recovery walk, and this week marks West Lothian's recovery week.

This Government has already delivered a broad range of measures to tackle the societal harm that drug deaths cause, but today's figures are an acute reminder of the need for further action. In recent months, we have worked closely with Public Health Scotland and partners to accelerate our response. That includes a strengthened focus on assertive outreach, temporary and supported accommodation, and public protection measures for people at greatest risk.

In June, I attended the drug deaths summit, along with the First Minister and the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Care. The summit was convened in direct response to data on preventable drug deaths and harms. We heard powerful testimony from families who have lost loved ones, and we will continue to work with and support initiatives such as families campaign for change, to ensure meaningful family involvement in shaping services and in driving change. The final report from the summit was published yesterday, and we will be working with partners to drive forward action in the key areas identified, including improving accountability, better information sharing and addressing workforce issues.

However, we must also improve the early identification of emerging risks. I am therefore pleased to confirm that Scotland's first local drug-checking service will open in Glasgow at the beginning of October. The service will help people to make safer decisions while providing vital intelligence on the drugs in circulation to our national early warning system. Services in Aberdeen and Dundee will follow in the coming months, with Edinburgh also working towards a site. Those sites, together with the national testing and research laboratory at the University of Dundee, will form a pilot backed by more than £1.7 million of Scottish Government funding.

One of the clearest messages that we have heard from people with lived and living experience is that we must continue to listen, learn and adapt. That is why we are bringing together national and local government, key partners, expert advice and individuals and families with lived and living experience through our new advisory forum and executive group. I will co-chair the advisory forum alongside COSLA's health and social care spokesperson, Councillor Paul Kelly. The forum will draw on front-line insight to ensure that national decision making remains grounded in the realities that individual local communities and services face.

Today's figures are a stark reminder of the devastating effect that drugs have on our communities. They remind us that, despite progress, investment and the dedication of those working to save lives, Scotland continues to face an intolerable level of harm from drugs. The figures must strengthen our resolve, not weaken it. They must push all of us who are working to tackle drug harms in every area—be it health, local government, education, the third sector, justice, housing or national Government—to be compassionate and take an approach that is grounded in human rights.

I close by again offering my condolences to every person who has lost a loved one to the harms of drugs. We must be better. We must strengthen our efforts to prevent harm, promote recovery and, ultimately, save lives. I commit to

Parliament to doing that and to ensuring that we use every possible lever available to the Scottish Government to continue this vital work.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): I will allow around 20 minutes for the minister to answer questions on the issues raised. Members who wish to ask a question should press their request-to-speak button now.

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

The number of drug deaths is a national scandal, with an 11 per cent increase in one year alone. Each of those deaths is a human tragedy, and my thoughts are of course with the families who have lost loved ones. However, seven years on from when the Scottish National Party Government declared a public health emergency, the numbers are increasing, and remain the worst in the United Kingdom and in Europe.

I have repeatedly warned the Government about the danger of synthetic opioids, in every year since 2023. Drug checking facilities are the Government's answer to the problem, but we have been talking about those for more than five years. The Glasgow drug checking facility was delayed because of the snail's pace at which the Government operates. It was approved by the Home Office in October 2025, so why the delay in bringing it into being?

We know that synthetic opioids evolve quickly, so does the minister think that drug checking facilities will be effective? She rightly says that the numbers are unacceptable, but what is she doing to prevent people from losing their lives due to the increased risk of synthetic opioids in Scotland?

Maree Todd: The reason for the delay in bringing forth the drug checking facilities is complex.

Jackie Baillie: No, it is not.

Maree Todd: Yes, it is. We were delayed. As the member is well aware, it took some time—a number of years—to get the licence through the Home Office process. It is not a simple overnight process to set up a drug checking facility. We had to procure equipment and calibrate it. We had to create a national drug testing laboratory in Dundee. [*Interruption*.]

This is a serious subject, and I would appreciate it if, when members ask questions, they listened to the answers that are given. As Mr Marra well knows, we had to build the system in Dundee to create a national drug testing reference laboratory, where samples can be sent for a full and comprehensive check. The facilities in Dundee and Aberdeen both have licences and are in the setting-up phase, so they will follow quickly. The Edinburgh drug checking facility was later to join the pilot and will take some time to bring into use.

Jackie Baillie is absolutely correct about the threat that nitazenes pose. I hypothesise that much of the challenge that we face and many of the reasons why drugs deaths are going in the wrong direction are because of the ever-changing nature and lethal toxicity of the market out there. Those drugs are really dangerous, and they have only recently burst on to our scene—the toxicology test for etonitazene at post-mortem, which is one of the most common and potent of those drugs, was introduced in May 2026. The data that we are examining today is therefore undoubtedly an underestimate of the impact of nitazenes.

The challenge that we face is that those synthetic drugs appear about once a week, with 50-odd appearing in a year. I put to Jackie Baillie that—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): Minister, you will need to give shorter answers.

Maree Todd: Okay. It would be much easier to make progress if people were not interrupting and heckling me; this is a really serious subject.

The Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 is outdated and I would appreciate Jackie Baillie's support in taking up conversations with the UK Government on that issue.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): Another 15 members have indicated that they would like to ask a question of the minister, so we will need shorter answers. I am sure that the minister will be able to make her points in her responses.

Thomas Kerr (Glasgow) (Reform): Here we are again: another year with more deaths, all at the hands of this SNP Government, which continues to take its eye off the ball. A brief 10-minute statement will not cut it for the families who have been devastated across our country. I have watched from afar as countless SNP ministers failed more families than I care to imagine with inaction and rhetoric. Now I sit in this Parliament as this Government oversees an 11 per cent increase in drug deaths. Where was the minister for drugs this summer? She was living it up at the world cup in America.

Minister, as a son of addiction and on behalf of families across this country, I say: please keep your deepest condolences to yourself, because we're no interested—what we want is action. We are sick fed up of hearing from politicians, commentators and academics who analyse rather than act. Where are the monthly updates? Where is the dedicated Government department? Where is the closure of Glasgow's failing shooting gallery? Where is the real funding for rehab rather

than the spin in this statement? Where is the support for the right to recovery for all our fellow Scots who suffer? Where is the genuine sorrow at the pain that this Government has inflicted on thousands of families?

I have a very blunt question for the minister: how many more working-class Scots need to die before she finally wakes up, takes action and declares this a national emergency?

Maree Todd: As the daughter of addiction, my condolences go out to each and every member of our community who has suffered loss. It would be remiss of me not to focus on the people who have lost loved ones.

This is a complex problem that requires a multiplicity of responses—there is no simple answer. It is not as simple as building residential rehabilitation, although we have done that; we have literally built buildings and provided beds. We have increased publicly funded access to residential rehabilitation. There has been a more than 60 per cent increase in the number accessing it since 2019—more than double the number of people are able to access it.

Because of the level of deaths on our streets, we have needed to take many harm-reduction approaches to public health, including the work of Thistle, which is undoubtedly saving lives. About 15,000 injection episodes have happened there since it opened and nearly 200 overdoses have been treated. Not a single individual in that facility has died from the drugs that they have taken, so there is no doubt that it is life saving.

On a day like today, when we see that the number of deaths is increasing, it is difficult and painful to say that we are absolutely committed to making a difference on all those fronts—but we are committed, and I commit to the Parliament that I will make progress.

Heather Anderson (Dundee City West) (SNP): The number of drug deaths in my home city of Dundee remains unacceptably and distressingly high. My condolences, too, go out to every family, friend and loved one of people who have lost their lives. The situation is unacceptable, and the changing pattern of drug use is alarming.

Last week, I visited Jericho House, a rehabilitation service with a high success rate. The staff there were very clear that everyone should be entitled to person-centred, trauma-informed care. What steps can be taken to ensure that we have a continuous line of treatment so that people move from detox into rehabilitation? Without rehabilitation following detox, there is a greater chance of people not recovering.

Maree Todd: I thank the member for that question, because I welcome the opportunity to recognise the important work that is carried out by services such as Jericho House. Residential rehabilitation can play a vital role in supporting recovery, and everyone should have access to person-centred, holistic and trauma-informed care that is tailored to their individual needs.

Through our national mission, we invested in expanding residential rehabilitation capacity across Scotland, and we exceeded our commitment to support more than 1,000 people into publicly funded residential rehabilitation each year. We will maintain and build on that ambition through the alcohol and drugs strategic plan.

We recognise that residential rehabilitation is just one part of a person's recovery journey and that people need to have access to the right support at the right time. That is why we are working to increase residential detox services and to strengthen pathways from detox into residential rehabilitation, which will help to reduce delays and ensure that people can access the treatment that is right for them.

Kayleigh Kinross-O'Neill (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green): Acknowledging that people need a multiservice approach, how will organisations and those who support people who are affected by drugs and alcohol be consulted on public sector reform? What engagement is taking place with the UK Government in relation to drug tracing and other reserved policy?

Maree Todd: Our new alcohol and drugs plan and the Public Health Scotland report on the drug deaths summit that was attended by the First Minister and other ministers in June were discussed at yesterday's meeting of the reform oversight board, which is chaired jointly by the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Care and Councillor Paul Kelly, who is the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities spokesperson on health and social care. The board accepted all the report's recommendations, including the recommendation about the importance of involving individuals with lived and living experience at all levels of reform, including the big public service reform process that is going on at the moment. Individuals with lived and living experience will continue to be engaged through participation and co-design arrangements, and they will be represented on the new joint advisory group, which will ensure that their views will help to shape the development and implementation of reform activity.

As far as engagement with the UK Government is concerned, I have regular four-nation meetings with ministerial colleagues from all over the UK, but I would certainly appreciate any help and support that I can garner from members across the chamber with a view to having a grown-up

conversation about reform of drugs law, which is undoubtedly outdated and unfit for addressing the enormous threat and harm that we are facing in Scotland today.

Miles Briggs (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Con): Over the past 20 years, 16,082 of our fellow Scots have lost their lives to drug addictions, which is the equivalent of the population of St Andrews. It is clear that the SNP Government's policies have been a failure. Male drug deaths alone have gone up by 19 per cent. If the Scottish Government were a health board, it would be put into special measures.

We cannot continue to approach the issue through a harm prevention strategy alone. There needs to be a national shift to rehabilitation and a right to recovery. The Scottish Conservatives have consistently suggested options and a new approach. Does the minister accept that, after 20 years of SNP Government, there has been a failure to deliver on the rehabilitation and recovery support that are so desperately needed? Will the Government finally admit failure and change course?

Maree Todd: It is incorrect to characterise the situation as one in which we are not focusing on rehabilitation and recovery. We have absolutely focused on recovery and harm reduction. It would be remiss of us not to focus on harm reduction when the situation that we are facing, as has been discussed, is one in which, in 2025, more than 1,100 people in Scotland lost their lives to drugs. We must take measures to stop the deaths.

We continue to focus on increased access to residential rehab and to wider treatment services through service investment and service improvement, and a rights-based approach. We believe that that is the most effective way to improve outcomes for people who are affected by substance use. I have already mentioned the increased toxicity in the ever-changing market. When we consider what has happened over the past few years, it is very clear that the unregulated toxic drug supply—with people in Scotland who buy drugs not getting what they think they are buying—is one of the main reasons why we are facing the devastating harm that we are discussing here today.

Adam Harley (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (LD): We are now five years into the national mission to tackle this issue, and the crisis has taken a tragic turn for the worse—each death preventable and each death heartbreaking. Liberal Democrats warned three years ago of the dangers posed by nitazenes entering Scotland's drug supply. We have therefore been calling for drug checking facilities, so that people know what they are taking.

As the chief executive of the Scottish Drugs Forum said this morning, we cannot respond to a public health emergency without an emergency response. Does the minister agree that that must include the roll-out of safer drug consumption facilities across Scotland, not just in Glasgow, so that people at greatest risk have life-saving support and better access to other services, including rehabilitation? We need to stop people dying.

Maree Todd: I absolutely agree with the member that we need more and broader services, and we need those services to be available all over Scotland.

I point again to the constraints of the UK-wide legislation. The Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 is older than me, and it is not fit for current purposes. Despite the supportive position from the Lord Advocate, the setting up of safer drug consumption facilities in Scotland remains restricted by the 1971 act. It is not a simple process to open those facilities all over Scotland. That has to be worked at carefully with the community, the police, the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service and the Lord Advocate. The process has begun here in the centre of Edinburgh, which is facing an increase in drugs deaths this year, and the Scottish Government is supporting that process.

The member will be aware of the limits of the drug checking facilities—and I have discussed that with other members of his party. Home Office licensing restricts that facility to people who are dependent on one or more illicit drugs. I would advocate that that service needs to be available to everyone who is taking illicit drugs. We have an exceptionally contaminated market here in Scotland, and that is leading to fatalities in our nation.

Jack Middleton (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): The minister has just touched on the fact that the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 is holding us back from the radical action that we need to take to help some of the most vulnerable people in our society. What steps is the Scottish Government taking to ensure that this Parliament has the full suite of powers that we need to save more lives?

Maree Todd: I believe, and many experts believe, that problem substance use must be treated as a public health issue. I have been absolutely clear about the limitations that the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 places on Scotland's response. The 1971 act restricts our ability to implement evidence-based harm reduction measures and services to protect some of the most vulnerable people in our communities. That includes interventions that reduce the risks

associated with problematic substance use and help to save lives.

We will continue to work constructively with UK Government counterparts, but the current legislative framework does not provide the flexibility that is needed to respond to Scotland's specific challenges. Scotland does have specific challenges, and there is no shying away from it. Here in the Parliament, we are all well aware that the level of death that we face here in Scotland is two and a half times that next door.

As discussions on further devolution continue, there is a very strong case for Scotland having greater control over drug policy, allowing this Parliament to pursue innovative, public health-focused approaches that reduce harm, improve outcomes and save lives.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): During my recent visits to Providence and Cincinnati, I saw how those American cities empower individuals directly by distributing rapid fentanyl and nitazene test strips at scale, alongside naloxone. With the hyper-toxic supply of synthetic opioids driving our death toll, people need the means to test drugs before they consume them. Although I welcome that Glasgow's drug checking service will open next month, albeit too late to solve some of the problems in the city, it cannot match the scale of personal test strips. Will the minister commit to making them fully and widely available across Scotland?

Maree Todd: I am aware of some of the potential benefits, as well as the limitations, of rapid test strips as harm reduction tools. I am also aware that the member has recently visited America, due to the many questions he has put to me on the issue.

Test strips are used for risk reduction, but there are limitations. Depending on the concentration and type of nitazene in the drugs, they occasionally have an unacceptable level of inaccuracy and produce false negative results, which means that a negative test cannot assure someone that the substance is safe to take.

I do not think that that means that test strips should be precluded from being used within our system, and we are absolutely aware that they are available from some services in Scotland. As with everything relating to the issue, there is no magic answer. We have to do a whole suite of things; we have to do them well; we have to keep doing them; and we have to do them everywhere in Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): I remind the minister that we need shorter answers.

Emma Roddick (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP): I am concerned about the proliferation of online drug ordering services. Through popular social media applications and often without having to leave those sites, folk can order all manner of substances, with no oversight or safety and authenticity checks. Very little trail is left for the authorities to follow if something goes wrong. Is the minister aware of the scale of that practice? Can she explain what is being done to avoid the potentially catastrophic results?

Maree Todd: I recognise the situation that Emma Roddick has described. She will be aware that the online world is reserved to Westminster, but there is ongoing work with the UK Government to ensure that drugs are not being supplied through social media apps. We recognise that there is a challenge here and in the rest of the UK. I would be more than happy to hear further details about the concerns that the member has about her constituency and will work together with her to resolve them.

Helen McDade (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform): The minister is trying to distract with her talk of nitazene, synthetic opioids and how to take drugs more safely and in more places. Einstein said that, when something has not worked, it is insanity to do more of it. We have had methadone and the Thistle, and we have given out naloxone—God help us, the police have had to use it 1,000-odd times. Those methods have not worked. Doubling rehab funding would take it from only a pittance to insignificant.

When will the minister face up to the fact that the disaster is unfolding on her watch? Will she bring back the Right to Addiction Recovery (Scotland) Bill, which the SNP disgracefully voted down in the last parliamentary session?

Maree Todd: It is really important that we follow the evidence, which suggests that harm reduction is the way to reduce deaths—[*Interruption*.] I thank members for the quiet.

I remind everyone in the chamber that we are discussing the deaths of 1,133 people in Scotland. We have to take a suite of actions. I have spoken to the member before about the stigmatising language that she has used. It is important that we do not stigmatise evidence-based treatments that have been shown to reduce deaths. As I said to her last week at the Health, Care and Sport Committee, opioid substitution therapies are known to reduce the risk of death by 70 per cent. Let us not stigmatise those treatments. Let us have a grown-up conversation about the very challenging situation that we are facing in Scotland.

Colm Merrick (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): The Thistle safe consumption room in Glasgow is a clear example of the role that innovation and forward thinking have to play in tackling drug harms. Can the minister say more about the work

that the centre does, not only in reducing drug harm but in signposting users to other services, and the potential for other innovative initiatives such as mobile drug units?

Maree Todd: The Thistle is reducing harm by providing a safe clinical environment, sterile injecting equipment and advice on safer injecting, while enabling staff to respond immediately to overdoses. By the end of 2026, as I have said, the service had recorded 22,533 visits from 809 registered individuals and responded to 195 medical emergencies. That has helped to prevent serious harm and save lives.

As the member says, the service also provides an important gateway into wider support services. In its first year, it made 612 referrals to housing, alcohol, drug recovery and blood-borne virus services, helping people to access treatment, healthcare and recovery support.

We in the Scottish Government remain open to innovative, evidence-based approaches to reducing drug-related harm. However, as I have said before, the constraints of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): The minister needs to give shorter answers.

Maree Todd: —limit what can be delivered. The act limits the possibilities and we cannot have mobile drug units because of it.

Cara McKee (West Scotland) (Green): Given increasing instances of nitazenes being cut in with other drugs, what steps is the Scottish Government taking to ensure that drug users and their carers are encouraged to use naloxone in emergencies, even when they are not aware of taking opiates?

Maree Todd: The member raises a really good point. As I have said before, the drugs market in Scotland is entirely unregulated. As members would expect, all these drugs are illegal. The market is highly contaminated and people are not getting what they think they are getting when they buy drugs. It is really dangerous.

I would encourage anyone who uses drugs to carry naloxone, and those people, like me, who live in an area where drugs are used to do the same. I carry naloxone and I am trained to administer it, because I have seen people collapse literally on my doorstep and I want to be sure that I can take the necessary steps to save someone's life should that be necessary. I encourage people to go and get training.

So far, the approach has been really successful. We have seen that nine out of 10 people who are at risk of an overdose have access to home naloxone. I encourage them to carry it, to use it and to keep using it until the ambulance gets there.

Stuart McMillan (Inverclyde) (SNP): I remind members of my entry in the register of members' interests. I am chair of Moving On Inverclyde, which is a recovery service.

The minister mentioned the use of medication-assisted treatment standards in her statement. Can she say a bit more about the roll-out of MAT standards and how they are making treatment and support available to those who are struggling with problematic drug use?

Maree Todd: The PHS benchmarking report on MAT standards implementation, which was published in July, illustrates clear progress in making quality treatment and support available to everyone. Progress continues in embedding the standards, particularly with regard to access, treatment choice, outreach and retention and, importantly, the key element of strengthening multi-agency collaboration.

Yesterday, PHS published a supplementary baseline report on the implementation of MAT standards in Scottish prison settings, which I referenced in my statement. We will build on those findings with a focus on strengthening pathways between prison, police custody and community services.

Our approach will also widen to reflect current and emerging harms, as set out in the alcohol and drugs strategic plan. By expanding the principles and approach of what has been achieved through MAT standards, establishing standards for all substances will offer the same level of focus on access, choice and support to everyone, no matter what substance they are using.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): That concludes questions on the ministerial statement on addressing drug harms. I am very aware that I was unable to call a number of members who wished to ask a question, but it is time to move on to the next item of business.

Flood Resilience

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): The next item of business is a debate on motion S7M-01283, in the name of Gillian Martin, on building a flood-resilient Scotland—delivering action for communities in a changing climate. Members who wish to speak should press their request-to-speak button now.

15:45

The Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Rural Affairs (Gillian Martin): I am pleased to open today's debate and, given that flooding is one of the most significant climate-related challenges that we face, to have the opportunity to highlight the progress that is being made to improve Scotland's flood resilience.

It is clear that climate change is driving more frequent and severe weather events around the world, and Scotland is not immune from that. Our communities are experiencing heavier rainfall, more frequent storms and rising sea levels. Events that were once considered exceptional are, regrettably, becoming common. For many people, flood risk is no longer a distant future threat; it is today's reality. Behind every flood statistic, there are people whose homes, businesses and communities have been affected. Many of us across the chamber know constituents who have experienced such devastation at first hand, with treasured family possessions irretrievably lost, homes damaged and businesses disrupted.

The science is clear: flood risk will continue to increase. Therefore, we must not only respond to flooding but focus on preparing for the future, reducing risk and, crucially, building resilience.

That is exactly what this Government is doing. We are determined to take action now to protect people, homes and livelihoods. In the past two years alone, significant progress has been made. We have published Scotland's first national flood resilience strategy and a flood recovery framework, and we have invested in new data and monitoring technology to strengthen resilience.

This afternoon, we will publish our national flood resilience strategy implementation plan, which was developed with partners from across Scotland. It sets out 65 actions for delivery over the next four years, including those that will be supported by the additional £15 million of flood resilience investment that was announced this summer and set out in our programme for government.

The funding, which focuses on those communities that are most vulnerable to flooding, will support a new £5 million community flood resilience fund, beginning in 2027, to support local projects that improve preparedness and reduce flood risk. There will be an investment of £3 million in blue-green infrastructure projects, supporting solutions that work with nature to manage rainfall while delivering wider environmental benefits; a further £2.5 million will future proof public assets and resilience infrastructure; and £1 million will support innovative coastal resilience projects.

We will ask Public Health Scotland to develop a tool that combines flood risk and demographic data, helping to identify more vulnerable communities and target support where it is needed most. Working closely with communities, local authorities and partners, we will invest in practical measures that will strengthen resilience for the future.

Earlier today, I laid before the Parliament our report on implementation of the Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Act 2009, highlighting the progress that was made between 2021 and 2025.

Willie Rennie (Fife North East) (LD): I welcome any new additional funds for flood resilience measures, but one scheme for one small community in my constituency is going to cost £1 million. That is just one scheme for a small community. How far will the funds that the Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Rural Affairs has set out reach across Scotland?

Gillian Martin: The £15 million is in addition to funding that is already given to councils and mainly used for hard engineering infrastructure. No one is suggesting that the £15 million is the sum total of flood resilience funding. It is additional money, and it is particularly for small schemes, where interventions can be made at a local scale.

Together, those publications demonstrate not only how far we have come but how we will continue to prepare Scotland for the future.

In 2024, we published the national flood resilience strategy, setting out a clear long-term vision to 2045. It recognised the progress that has already been made through flood protection schemes, forecasting, warning services, community resilience initiatives and strong partnership working across Scotland. It also highlighted the need for a different approach. Flood resilience is about more than just managing water; it is about how we plan our towns and cities, protect vital infrastructure, manage land and support communities to adapt.

The strategy's vision is straightforward: people and places across Scotland are prepared for increased flood risk, with resilience embedded in a way that is fair, sustainable and inclusive. Today's implementation plan turns that vision into action.

The plan is built around three themes: people, places and processes.

Monica Lennon (Glasgow) (Lab): On the point about people, we know that people who have less money are likely to find it harder to protect themselves from flooding and to recover when flooding arises. What will the Government's plans today do to address that inequality?

Gillian Martin: This gives me an opportunity to mention Flo, the Scottish Flood Forum bus that is outside the Parliament today, which I encourage every member to go and see. That organisation is taking a number of actions to help to support low-income households and individuals. There are also resilience services embedded in our local councils. During the recent flooding events in Scotland, community response partnerships have grown up in communities. I encourage people to look into what is available in their local area. The flood resilience bus will stay outside until 6 o'clock to allow everyone to visit. That gives members time after the debate to find out at first hand what support is available for their constituents.

At the heart of our actions is a simple principle: resilient communities are the foundation of a flood-resilient Scotland. In response to Monica Lennon, I mentioned Flo, the flood resilience bus, which offers advice in our communities. We also continue to support the valuable work of the conservation volunteers, strengthening flood resilience through education, training and community action.

Craig Hoy (Dumfriesshire) (Con): [*Made a request to intervene*.]

Gillian Martin: I will take Mr Hoy's intervention in a minute. I need to make some progress as I have a tight 12 minutes.

The lessons from storm Babet have shaped our approach. Last year, we published a flood recovery framework, setting out how communities can be supported after major flooding. Today, I am pleased to announce that £500,000 will be made available to help communities that are recovering from recent flooding, as part of that wider £15 million investment.

Craig Hoy: As the cabinet secretary might be aware from written correspondence that we have engaged in, the community of Langholm, which I represent, would like the Scottish Environment Protection Agency to engage in dredging locally. The minister talked about people, and the people of Langholm who would like the dredging to take place. The process is relatively simple and it has been done over a number of years. Does the minister have any understanding of why SEPA seems to be changing its view, which has been held in relation to areas such as Langholm for many years, and why dredging is not one potential solution to mitigate flood risk?

Gillian Martin: That issue has been brought up in my constituency. I am meeting SEPA this week—tomorrow, I think—and if Mr Hoy will permit me, I will add that to the issues that I want to discuss with SEPA. We need to understand why decisions are made, and communities need to have a two-way dialogue with SEPA about the interventions that can be made.

I want to mention some of the flood schemes. There has been £612 million to support local authority flood risk management, which I mentioned in my response to Mr Rennie. Twenty-one flood protection schemes have been delivered, four further projects are under construction, two are under contract and three others are progressing through development. Once the Hawick flood scheme is open later this autumn, I will visit it. It is protecting more than 900 homes and businesses and was named environmental project of the year. I am really looking forward to going down to Hawick to see it in action.

The work that has been done on delivering the schemes reflects the strength of collaboration between national Government, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, and local authorities. We are also working with COSLA on the affordability of current schemes—again, that speaks to Mr Rennie's point—and to reform future funding arrangements for major flood protection schemes, ensuring that that investment delivers best value and maximum benefit.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): Does the cabinet secretary acknowledge that the current funding formula disadvantages small communities across Scotland, which means that there are very few places for them to go when it comes to applying for the bigger infrastructure projects that can protect them?

Gillian Martin: Mr Rennie made a similar point. I point out that there is a £15 million fund in addition to the settlement from COSLA to local authorities. However, I am always looking for ways to make communities more resilient and considering the various interventions that could be made, sometimes in the blue-green infrastructure and sometimes in the hard engineering infrastructure.

We have also funded SEPA to develop our first national flood and coastal asset register; we have strengthened building standards; and work is under way across the public sector to understand and reduce flood risks to important public assets, including national health service facilities.

In the remaining minutes, I want to talk about the importance of nature-based solutions. We are investing in nature-based solutions, from Balruddery near Dundee, where innovative leaky barriers are helping to slow flood peaks, to the Garrel burn restoration project, which is reconnecting rivers and flood plains. I visited the River Peffery remeandering project, just north of Dingwall, which is not only improving the biodiversity in the area but protecting the business park in Dingwall—and, indeed, the town—from flooding.

Through our coastal change adaptation fund, we have supported dune restoration and beach recharge projects in communities including St Andrews, Montrose, Cullipool and Lossiemouth. Our programme for government commits to a further £14 million for the coastal change adaptation fund. Of course, those nature-based solutions are not only about flood mitigation or flood protection interventions; they also have other fantastic outcomes, particularly in relation to stemming biodiversity loss and bringing habitats back. We will continue to build on that work and to expand the evidence. I am interested in speaking to anyone in the Parliament about how we can have more action in relation to flood protection schemes.

SEPA is updating its national flood management maps, targeting the action that will have the greatest impact. We have commissioned SEPA to develop a new flood advisory service that will strengthen planning, governance and delivery of major flood resilience projects.

Climate adaptation is being embedded across national, regional and local planning—32 local authorities are participating in climate ready regions partnerships.

I realise that I am probably running out of time, but I want to mention that the flood resilience strategy sets a course to 2045; today's implementation plan is a major step forward on that journey. Ultimately, success will be measured not by plans or policy but by outcomes that are seen in communities, in particular in communities that have previously faced flooding events or feel that they are at risk.

I thank everyone who has contributed to the development of the implementation plan. By acting now, working together and investing wisely, we can build a safer, stronger and more resilient Scotland for future generations. I look forward to hearing members' contributions.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises Scotland's increasing risk of flooding as a result of climate change and the significant impacts flooding can have on communities, businesses and the environment; further recognises the need to continue to adapt to these changes at pace; welcomes the commitments in the Programme for Government to additional investment in flood resilience and coastal adaptation and the progress being made through partnership working among local authorities, the third sector, communities and wider partners to improve flood resilience; acknowledges the broad range of actions and continued public investment in flood protection schemes, nature-based solutions and community preparedness; recognises the need to support those most vulnerable to flooding with adaptation and recovery, and agrees that building a flood resilient Scotland is essential to protecting people, homes and livelihoods.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): I call Donald MacKinnon to speak to and move amendment S7M-01283.2.

15:58

Donald MacKinnon (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab): I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of members' interests, in that I am a shareholder in a common grazing, with an interest in peatland restoration.

I welcome much of the Government's motion and what the cabinet secretary has said. Our climate is changing, and with it the frequency and impact of flooding events. An increasing number of intense rainfall events can overwhelm drainage systems while sea levels rise and increasingly stormy weather threatens our coastal communities.

Making communities across Scotland more resilient to flooding is essential and will require a holistic approach that combines urban planning, hard engineering and landscape-scale, nature-based solutions. The additional £15 million flood resilience fund is welcome, but it must be followed through with scaled-up and faster delivery of promised projects.

Last year, Audit Scotland reported that the

"funding mechanism for … flood schemes"

was

"not fit for purpose",

that projects were increasing in costs and that timelines were extending, with an increase in expected costs from £350 million in 2015 to £1 billion in 2025 for fewer projects than were originally planned.

The Scottish Government must meet the scale of the challenge that is in front of us. Key to future delivery is addressing the recommendations that were outlined in the Audit Scotland report last year. That is why our amendment calls for a commitment to guaranteeing and increasing funding for the incomplete projects from cycle 1 and to ensuring that future cycles are adequately resourced, with flexibility for increased costs built in. It is clear that a lack of flexibility in the existing programme has

led to challenges with delivery. Collaboration between communities, local authorities, COSLA and the Government will be key to turning a corner and delivering the infrastructure that is required.

Scottish Water's management of the drainage system is a critical part of the story, too, and ensuring that investment in the network prioritises the areas of most concern will be important to ensuring that the results are evident.

Gillian Martin: Does Donald MacKinnon agree that it is important that we maintain Scottish Water's constitution as being publicly owned? Every penny of profit that is made by that organisation goes back into paying for the infrastructure, which is a marked difference from the privatised water companies that operate in the rest of the United Kingdom.

Donald MacKinnon: I totally agree with the cabinet secretary's point. We are fortunate to have a publicly owned water provider, and it is important that Scottish Water uses the money that it takes to invest in its infrastructure and to contribute to addressing the challenges that we face.

Nature-based solutions have a crucial role to play in flood management, and we are minded to support the Liberal Democrat amendment, which calls for catchment co-ordinators. Nature-based solutions will work best on a landscape scale across whole catchments, which will require co-ordination between land managers, farmers, crofters and funding bodies. For that reason, we will also support the Green amendment.

Where appropriate, peatland restoration, tree planting and river restoration schemes can all help to slow the flow of water, which helps to retain water in the soil and in upland areas and protects communities further downstream. Support must continue to be given to the land managers who engage in that work, which should be recognised for its significant benefits in militating against flooding and for the real costs that are involved, particularly if there is a loss of agricultural opportunity. As the cabinet secretary pointed out, that work can also align with wider climate and biodiversity ambitions alongside the creation of landscapes that are more resilient to wildfire and will ultimately remain productive parts of agricultural holdings.

Increasing rainfall is not the only risk to our communities when it comes to flooding, and it would be remiss of me not to mention the impact of the rising sea level and increasingly stormy weather, which also presents a significant risk, not least to our coastal and island communities. Causeways that link islands are at particular risk of damage and disruption as those challenges worsen—for example, the Baleshare causeway in my constituency, which connects a small island to North Uist, is often closed due to bad weather. We cannot lose sight of the importance of protecting the resilience of connectivity between communities and ensuring that such connections are fit for changing conditions.

I reiterate my support for the Scottish Government's ambition to get the issue right. It is simply not an option to find ourselves in a similar position next year, with projects failing to deliver. The changing climate will not wait for us. Action is needed now to protect homes, make our communities more resilient and deliver on these long-promised schemes.

I move amendment S7M-01283.2, to leave out from "acknowledges" to "preparedness" and insert:

> "calls on the Scottish Government to increase and guarantee funding for the remaining incomplete flood protection schemes from Cycle 1 and to ensure that future funding cycles are adequately resourced and provide flexibility to accommodate increased costs; believes that further Scottish Government support is required for nature-based solutions and community preparedness".

16:03

Jamie Langan (South Scotland) (Reform): Unfortunately, flooding is not a new phenomenon for communities across Scotland. Long before the dreaded two-word phrase "net zero" entered the political lexicon, long before climate change was rebranded the climate crisis and long before any of us entered the political fray, flooding affected communities across Scotland.

In my region, one of the most severe weather events to hit the south-east of Scotland was the great Borders flood of 1948. Berwickshire and Roxburghshire received four months' worth of rainfall in less than a week. To the west, in Dumfries, the River Nith hit its highest water level mark of 5.15m in December 1982—a figure that would not be passed for another 40 years.

It is crucial to remember that countless generations of Scots have had to deal with the challenges of flooding across our country; thus, given that the Scottish Government heavily references climate change in its motion, it is important to recognise that, although weather patterns may well change and extreme weather events may increase, it is fundamentally a case of Scotland needing to adapt to known and experienced challenges.

Given the long-running challenge of flooding to communities across Scotland, any serious and meaningful proposals on investment in flood resilience should and will be welcomed, and I look forward to seeing more details of the investment that the cabinet secretary mentioned earlier in the debate.

When we discuss the role of climate change in flood risks to communities across Scotland and assess our response to that, it is imperative that we focus on what we have agency to influence and on the outcomes that we can shape. That means focusing on climate adaptation and not climate mitigation. Scotland accounts for 0.08 per cent of global emissions, with that figure having fallen by more than 50 per cent since 1990. That means that, unfortunately, it is not within our gift to mitigate the global challenge of climate change. Instead, we have the ability—indeed, I would say, the responsibility—to ensure that our resources and energy that are focused on the topic go into methods of adaptation. That means sustained and suitable investment in flood protection schemes for at-risk communities across Scotland.

Earlier this year, the Government announced what it called a

"Record investment for climate action",

but the Scottish public could well ask whether elements of that funding could be better deployed to practical solutions for climate adaptation and flood prevention.

One such spending commitment in that announcement that stood out to me was for

"£12 million to support vulnerable communities in the Global South",

which—for those members who do not speak the language of SOAS postgraduates—means taxpayers' money being spent overseas rather than here in Scotland. It potentially means Scottish taxpayers' money going to some of the world's largest polluters and emitters, depending on what the cabinet secretary's definition of the global south might be.

Craig Hoy: Will the member give way?

Jamie Langan: I would be delighted to take Mr Hoy's intervention.

Craig Hoy: I thank Mr Langan for taking my intervention; perhaps I can bring him back closer to home. What is his position on the Whitesands flood defence scheme? Does he stand with the community?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): I call Donald MacKinnon.

Jamie Langan: Am I taking another intervention?

The Minister for Agriculture, Marine and the Islands (Jim Fairlie): If you like.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): It would be normal to respond to each intervention in turn.

Jamie Langan: Absolutely. I thank Mr Hoy for his intervention—I will be coming to that very important project for the people of Dumfries later in my speech.

Was Donald MacKinnon asking to intervene?

Donald MacKinnon: No, I was not.

Jamie Langan: Oh, that is a shame—he is a fine man. He is not on the Reform benches just yet, but there we are.

I hope that, across the chamber, we can agree that, given the severe and well-documented limits on public finances, that money could be much better deployed at home to support our flood challenges, and that it is our constituents across Scotland, and not necessarily the world at large, to whom we owe that duty. However, from what I heard at portfolio question time earlier, I am not sure that that commonsense view is universally held across the chamber.

As previously mentioned, when there are serious and meaningful proposals for investment in flood resilience for communities across Scotland, that will always be welcomed. However, it is important to ensure that flood prevention projects are shaped by the communities for which they are designed and that the wishes of those communities are considered every step of the way.

That can be seen nowhere more clearly than in my region, where the Whitesands flood protection scheme in Dumfries has frustrated local residents and businesses with the significant disruption that it has caused. There are concerns about the suitability of the scheme, which was first conceived more than two decades ago, and about the impact that it will have on the character of the town centre.

Those concerns have prompted multiple petitions from residents, who have gathered thousands of signatures. However, residents' concerns and questions have not been met with the openness that they merit. In addition, the Scottish Information Commissioner has criticised Dumfries and Galloway Council's handling of a freedom of information request relating to the impact of the scheme on common good land, finding that the council had

"failed at the most basic level"

in its response. That is a clear case of local communities not being listened to.

The ongoing development of the Whitesands flood protection scheme has highlighted cost management challenges, which are far too often associated with such projects. The estimated total cost rose from £37.5 million in 2023 to £68.6 million by the end of 2025. Unfortunately, that is not an isolated example. Hawick's flood protection scheme was initially estimated at £37.4 million in

the 2016-17 financial year, before ballooning to almost £80 million by the end of 2023.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): The member must come to a conclusion.

Jamie Langan: The people of Dumfries and Hawick rightly deserve long-lasting protection from the devastating potential of serious flooding, but we must recognise that every penny of overspend is a penny that is not spent on towns such as Peebles and Newcastleton, which are waiting for significant and much-needed flood protection investment.

To conclude, Reform will always support sensible and long-term investment in flood resilience. Scotland cannot control global emissions, but we can do what is within our agency, which is to prepare our communities for any changes and ensure that they are listened to every step of the way.

I move amendment S7M-01283.4, to leave out from "as" to end and insert:

"and that its contribution to global emissions is negligible; believes that this Parliament cannot control global weather patterns and that flooding risks will persist regardless of future emissions reductions; further believes that government policy must therefore place a greater emphasis on Scotland's ability to adapt, prepare for and recover from flooding and on protecting homes, businesses and infrastructure from its effects."

16:09

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): Every year, we see devastating floods that will become more common as climate change makes extreme weather events more frequent and more severe. Global predictions point to a potentially catastrophic El Niño event in a matter of months, while the UK Government has issued warnings about the expected wild winter that is coming.

The heightened flood risk in Scotland is stark. In 2018, it was estimated that around 284,000 properties were at a medium risk of flooding. Last year, the national flood risk assessment showed that 400,000 properties are now at risk. Climate chaos is already here, and Governments need to be more dynamic in responding to that ever-growing threat. Doing so will need open and honest conversations about what can and cannot be saved; the costs of action versus inaction; and the need for leadership and change in the way we manage our land and our coasts.

I welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to the £15 million fund to improve community resilience to floods—I am sure that we will all have a shot on the flood bus outside later this afternoon. That commitment sits alongside others that the Government has made, including the £150 million that was spent during the previous session of Parliament on flood risk management projects. Those are all important investments that have made a start in supporting communities and councils to build their resilience to flooding.

The focus of funding has so far largely been on the hard-defence, downstream engineering projects. Those remain critically important, but there is a backlog in delivery, and they do not tackle the root causes of flooding. Catchment-wide restoration and nature-based solutions need to be the foundation of our approach to managing flood risk. Techniques that restore, enhance and alter natural features to help slow down water and absorb excess rainfall should be the easiest and simplest to deploy at a bigger landscape scale. Where hard projects are needed to defend communities, those nature-based approaches can help to reduce their capital cost and make them more future proofed.

Restoring riparian woodland reduces water run-off and downstream flood levels, and ensuring that rivers are connected to the natural floodplains allows them to hold water in low-risk upstream areas. Our landscapes need to become sponges, not least because the risk of fire is also growing at the same time as the risk of flood and storm. Blocking drains in peatlands and restoring wetlands transform degraded landscapes into stores for excess water during intense rainfall, and release it gradually during dry periods. Even the reintroduction of the beaver, which creates and expands wetlands, should be welcomed as a small but positive part of this overall picture.

However, the reality is that only around a fifth of our riverbanks in Scotland are currently wooded. We have straightened many rivers with artificial banks, reducing our ability to cope with floodwaters. We need to manage land differently to reduce the risk of flooding, and there is an opportunity for Government to work with farmers, crofters and other land managers to reshape our land management and agricultural support schemes to support them—the land managers—to take those long-term preventative actions on their land and make those choices to support their communities. That is something that the Green amendment highlights in this debate.

Of course, many communities are already taking nature-based approaches to flood resilience, as well as supporting individual householders, but the current funding formula for hard capital projects prioritises them based on the number of properties at risk and the population size, and that inevitably disadvantages smaller communities that are impacted by flooding. One of those communities is Aberfoyle. It has been hit repeatedly every two to three years by floods, but it looks unlikely, under

the current funding formula, that Aberfoyle will ever qualify for the capital funding that it needs to protect it, due to its population size. That is despite the fact that the River Forth, which runs through Aberfoyle, also impacts on communities downstream such as Bridge of Allan, and on the wider Carse of Stirling. However, so far, the community has been unable to get its project over the line. It is unacceptable that the future viability of communities such as Aberfoyle is being determined by a formula that does not recognise the wider social and economic impact of flooding. We are in danger of effectively losing places from the map in Scotland, with a human cost that has yet to be measured.

We know that flooding disproportionately impacts socially and economically disadvantaged communities, leaving households facing periods of displacement, repair costs and worsening mental health. Audit Scotland has warned that the current funding mechanism is no longer fit for purpose and will simply widen those inequalities unless we take action to change it.

In conclusion, I welcome this debate, but it must be the start of a new, more urgent conversation about the choices that are being made around investment, the growing threat and the changes that need to be made in the way in which whole catchments are managed.

I move amendment S7M-01283.5, to insert at end:

"; recognises the range of actions that communities across Scotland are taking to reduce their flood risk; is concerned that small communities can miss out on funding opportunities under the current model; believes that communities must have an active role in developing flood management plans; further believes that such plans must be developed on a catchment-wide scale, and calls on the Scottish Government to work with landowners to take forward nature-based solutions to flooding through public land management and agriculture support schemes."

16:15

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): According to SEPA, flooding remains Scotland's most serious climate-related threat and, sadly, it is becoming more frequent, more intense and more damaging. The impact is felt across Scotland, including in Dumfries and Galloway. In the Solway area alone, about 16,000 people and 10,000 homes and businesses are at risk of flooding, with those numbers expected to rise significantly in the decades ahead. Nationally, about 400,000 homes, businesses and essential services are now classed as being at medium risk of flooding. The associated costs are approaching £500 million a year, with communities, infrastructure, farming and the wider rural economy affected.

Although I welcome the support that the Scottish Government provides, I am concerned that funding remains limited and inconsistent. At a time when the risk is increasing, we need a dedicated long-term national resilience fund that provides communities and local authorities with certainty and helps them to prepare for the future.

Preparedness must also improve. Despite the available guidance and support, too many people still do not know what to do when flooding strikes. Raising awareness and improving community resilience must be a greater priority.

Gillian Martin: I invite Finlay Carson to visit Flo, the flood bus, which is outside the Parliament, so that he can inform his constituents on that very issue. It has reams of advice for householders.

Finlay Carson: I certainly will visit it. I will tell the people there that I was invited by the cabinet secretary—I am sure that they will be delighted.

I place on the record my appreciation for the work of our emergency services during flooding events. However, we must ensure that there is a co-ordinated framework that delivers a consistent and effective response when communities are at their most vulnerable.

Prevention is equally important. As we have heard, measures such as the creation of riparian woodland and peatland restoration can reduce flood risk. About 20 per cent of our riverbanks are currently wooded.

Any approach must strike the right balance and recognise the vital role of those who manage our land. Farmers, crofters and land managers are an essential part of flood resilience, and they need greater support to help them to mitigate flooding, protect rural livelihoods and safeguard Scotland's food security.

More broadly, the Government must move forward with technology such as gene editing, which experts in the farming industry have identified as an important tool in helping the agriculture sector to adapt to climate change. Experts from organisations including the Roslin Institute and the James Hutton Institute, along with the farming industry, have already highlighted the benefits. Gene editing is known to improve yields and protect crops against disease and climate change.

I recognise that climate change is driving the increase in flooding across much of Scotland, but we must be honest about the unintended consequences of some environmental policies. In some areas, farmers have faced increased flooding risk as a result of poorly planned species introductions and poor land management decisions. Nature-based solutions can play an important role, but they must be evidence led,

locally supported and developed in partnership with farmers and land managers. Above all, they must not come at the expense of productive farmland, rural businesses or Scotland's ability to produce food. That is why we broadly support the amendments.

Jim Fairlie: I think that there is genuine consensus on the issue, so will Finlay Carson send a message to the farming community, as I have done, to get involved with the integrating trees network, which would allow trees to be planted on farms, to slow down water, without reducing productivity?

Finlay Carson: I will whole-heartedly do so, but the Government needs to provide agri-forestry grant schemes that actually work and are not controlled by a failing information technology system. That would be a great start.

As I said, we broadly support the amendments, including those that recognise the importance of catchment-scale planning, community involvement and working with landowners.

However, any expansion of nature-based flood management must be accompanied by a clear commitment to protect good-quality agricultural land wherever possible. Where farmers are asked to dedicate land or accept restrictions for the wider public good, for the benefit of flood management, they must be properly compensated, with payments reflecting the true economic value of the land and any loss of production.

Overall, the Scottish Government must improve resilience, provide greater financial support and ensure that communities are aware of flood risk and mitigation measures. It must prioritise prevention, safety and protecting livelihoods, while recognising that farmers and land managers are essential partners in delivering effective flood management.

In supporting all amendments except the Reform amendment, we recognise that Scotland must focus on practical measures that reduce flood risk and protect communities. Those measures will succeed only if they are developed in conjunction with local communities and food producers and they strike the right balance between environmental objectives, food production and economic sustainability.

We all know that the threat of serious flooding is only months away. The time to act is now, not when the tide is already against us.

I move amendment S7M-01283.3, to leave out from "Scotland's" to end and insert:

"that Scotland is facing an increasing risk of flooding; further recognises that flooding is becoming more frequent, more intense, more damaging and more costly due to changes in the climate; highlights that the impact of flooding is felt throughout Scotland, including in urban, rural and coastal communities; further highlights that it affects homes, businesses and livelihoods across Scotland; appreciates the funding announcement made in the 2026-31 Programme for Government but questions whether further support is needed; calls on the Scottish Government to ensure that the public is aware of the risks and mitigation efforts related to flooding; urges the Scottish Government to ensure that national strategies are in place to target flood prevention and support when flooding does happen, and also urges local authorities to consult widely and transparently on proposed flood defence plans and to take full account of local views, and asks all involved to make sure that efforts to prevent, mitigate and tackle flooding are directed at all parts of Scotland facing a substantial and rising threat."

16:20

Willie Rennie (Fife North East) (LD): I feel a particular responsibility. It was almost three years ago that Amelia woke up to find her Christmas presents floating in her front room in Cupar. She was seven years old at the time. Subsequently, I made a commitment in the chamber, during a debate, that I would do all that I could to ensure that that did not happen again. I have spent the past three years being incredibly frustrated by the system and by our inability to deliver practical measures in this relatively small community to prevent that from happening.

To give credit to the local council, it has carried out some clearing of the Lady burn and it has introduced a flood resilience grant for affected households. Also, John Swinney introduced a Scottish grant scheme particularly for my constituents, for which I was grateful. However, the broader measures that are necessary to prevent flooding from happening again are simply not there. The council committed to a Cupar flood study, but it has still not reported back, and we have not been able to get the council to engage with the wider stakeholders.

As Mark Ruskell said, a wider catchment plan is the answer. I reject the view that it is all about either hard engineering or nature-based solutions. It depends on the environment and the circumstances, and we have to be flexible. I also reject the view that beavers are the answer in every community. They are not. They cause utter devastation for some, although they may be the answer for others. Let us stop suggesting that there are absolute solutions and instead take a flexible approach to finding the right solutions for communities.

We know that hard engineering can be incredibly expensive, so to float the prospect of hard-engineering schemes to some communities when we know that the money is not available and that they will never happen is cruel. We need to take a broader, catchment-based approach to finding the right answers.

Members will be able to tell that I get worked up about this. That is because it is three years on and almost nothing has changed. I fear that, this year, Amelia's house will be flooded again.

For nature-based solutions, we need to bring in multiple landowners, which is much harder than implementing hard-engineering solutions. All those landowners need to come together, but it is not necessarily in their direct interest to introduce some of the measures on their land. When they face financial pressure and constraints on their time, it can be really difficult to convince them to do something that is in the interests of the broader community. Of course, they care about the wider community, but when they are up against it, they are simply not going to do it. That is my experience in north-east Fife. Everybody, and every bit of the catchment, needs to be involved for this to be effective.

The trouble with the current system, including the new grant scheme that was announced today, is that the scheme is reactive. It depends on those individual owners coming forward and applying for the grants, navigating the system and implementing the scheme up front, often at considerable cost to themselves.

We need a more co-ordinated system that says to everybody in the catchment area, "This is the plan. This is what we want you to do on your farm or on your land. We are telling every other farmer that this is what we want them to do on their land." Only a catchment-wide scheme will be effective in communities such as Cupar. If we just leave it to individual farmers to apply on their own, that simply will not be enough.

Gillian Martin: Mr Rennie will be aware that full catchment pilots are taking place on the South Esk and the River Dee. It is important that, once those pilots are complete, the lessons are disseminated to areas across Scotland.

Willie Rennie: I do not accept that. It is three years since the flooding in Cupar. How long do we have to wait for lessons to be learned elsewhere? North-east Fife is different from those areas. It is prime agricultural land, so the lessons will be dramatically different. We know what the solutions are and the different measures. We know about trees in the hinterland, the quality of soil and making sure that we have trickle dams and delay ponds. We know all that stuff, so what are we waiting for?

If the cabinet secretary stands up at the end and tells me that we are going to have a catchment co-ordinator for the River Eden, as I would like, I will give her a big hug. That is the solution that I want.

Gillian Martin: [*Made a request to intervene*.]

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): I am sorry, but we are really tight for time. You must conclude, Mr Rennie.

Willie Rennie: I have got only half of my speech done. I will conclude that point in my closing speech.

It is really important that we get this done, because people cannot wait any longer. All that they see is bureaucracy and difficulties. We need something that works.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): Mr Rennie, can you move your amendment, please?

Willie Rennie: I have already done so. I did it earlier.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): Well—

Willie Rennie: Do you want me to do it again?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): Yes.

Willie Rennie: I move amendment S7M-01283.1, to insert at end:

"; believes, however, that the mix of financial support can be complex and fails to recognise the economic value of land; further believes that the SEPA permissions process can be demanding, confusing and a barrier to action, and calls for the value of grants to reflect the economic value of land and for the appointment of catchment coordinators to work with communities and land owners to develop a plan of action."

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): I ask all members who want to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak button now. We are very tight for time, so members should bear that in mind when taking interventions.

16:26

David Barratt (Cowdenbeath) (SNP): I draw attention to my entry in the register of members' interests and to my roles as a hydrologist and a councillor in Fife.

When we talk about building a flood-resilient Scotland, it is important that we recognise that flooding is not a problem simply for communities at the bottom of the catchment but is catchment wide. Increasingly in a changing climate, the issue requires us to think differently about how we manage our land, rivers and public services. One in eight properties in Scotland is now at risk of flooding, and the number is set to rise as climate change continues.

I will start with the example of Rosyth, in my constituency, which has suffered flooding for decades and is a classic example of what happens when we build on top of natural systems rather

than around them or, better still, with them. In Rosyth, wetlands and areas of flood plain were built over, watercourses were straightened and culverted, and natural drainage was altered to accommodate development. Those decisions might have made sense at the time, but climate change is adding another layer of pressure by bringing more frequent and intense rainfall events. Infrastructure that was designed for conditions of the past is increasingly being overwhelmed. That is why I welcome the Rosyth river restoration project, which is funded through the Scottish Government's water environment fund. The project is looking at the Whinny burn and the Brankholm burn not simply as drainage channels but as part of a wider river system that can support biodiversity, improve water quality, contribute to flood resistance and provide benefits to the wider community.

No single intervention, organisation or funding pot will solve all of this; we need to look at the whole system. I have a particular interest in the issue, having studied for a masters in sustainable catchment management at the University of Dundee. One of the central lessons is that what happens upstream invariably affects what happens downstream. I have frequently told colleagues that hydrology is not that complicated. Water flows downhill and, if you get in the way, you might flood. How water reaches our communities is key. How we manage soils, woodland, peatland, agricultural land and drainage affects how water reaches our rivers. Rather than asking simply how we defend communities from flooding, we should ask how we manage our catchments so that water is slowed down, stored and managed more naturally. The evidence increasingly shows that flood protection schemes are only part of the solution.

Mark Ruskell: David Barratt brings some unique expertise to this debate. However, I want to ask about his expertise as a councillor. Does he believe that Fife Council has the capacity and expertise that it needs to do the catchment-wide co-ordination that Willie Rennie and I have talked about? If the council does not have that capacity and expertise, who does? Is it Forth Rivers Trust, some other Government agencies, SEPA or a super-environmental body that might be cobbled together under the public service reform programme? There is a huge gap at the moment.

David Barratt: I agree, and I do not believe that Fife Council has the capacity to deliver all of that, which is why there needs to be partnership. As it happens, my master's programme was set up due to the Scottish Government identifying that there was a skills shortage, with not enough hydrologists out there. That master's programme is no longer there, and I think that we need to restart it.

The evidence increasingly shows that flood protection schemes are only part of the solution. We need a broader toolkit that includes natural flood management, blue-green infrastructure and better land use decisions. There are already excellent examples of that approach in Scotland, including the Tweed Forum and the South Esk Catchment Partnership. Those projects work because they operate at the scale at which nature actually functions, which is the catchment.

Nature does not recognise local authority boundaries, nor does it recognise the distinction between SEPA and NatureScot. That is why the evidence that was heard by the Climate Action Committee a couple of weeks back is so important. SEPA highlighted the importance of having a single-front-door approach and a more place-based approach, while NatureScot and SEPA also highlighted the value of catchment-scale working. The evidence recognised that water quality, soil health, agriculture, biodiversity and flooding are not separate issues but are interconnected.

Therefore, I am delighted that the implementation plan will include the pioneer catchment projects, which will test new ways for environmental organisations to work together across river catchments. That is exactly the kind of approach that we need, and we need to build upon it. I also welcome plans for a national flood advisory service, which will help to ensure that expertise and best practice are shared consistently across Scotland.

The real opportunity from public service reform is perhaps not simply to create a new organisation or reporting structure but to create different ways of working so that the communities that face flooding do not need to navigate organisational boundaries. There is an opportunity to create a genuine one-door, catchment-based approach that complements hard defences with solutions that work with nature rather than against it.

If we want to have a flood-resilient Scotland, we cannot simply build higher walls downstream; we must also make better decisions upstream. That is how we build more flood-resilient communities and a more flood-resilient Scotland, as well as having healthier rivers that are better prepared for the challenges that the climate will bring.

16:32

Katherine Sangster (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab): As I drove through some flooded roads to get to the Parliament today, I reflected on the irony of us debating flooding. There is no doubt that climate change is real and that it is here now. Flooding is impacting communities across Scotland, and it is vital that the Government works

alongside local councils and communities to deliver effective infrastructure.

I welcome the Scottish Government's acknowledgement that successful flood protection depends on partnerships between communities, local authorities and the national Government. Flood protection and the impacts of climate change are issues that are too important to become subject to polarised debate in our communities. They should never be used as wedge issues, and I am optimistic about the consensus that we have heard in the Parliament today.

I want to talk about the feeling in my community, because Musselburgh faces a particularly complex flooding challenge. As a coastal town that is situated at the mouth of the River Esk, it is vulnerable to both coastal and river flooding. Residents acknowledge that climate change increases the flooding risk, and they accept the need for a flood protection scheme. At the same time, they recognise the River Esk as a defining feature of the town, and they want to preserve its history, identity and character.

Because of Musselburgh's unique geography and heritage, developing an effective flood protection scheme is inherently complex. The Scottish Government has stated that flood resilience should take a place-based approach that involves communities in shaping solutions for their local areas. Unfortunately, many residents in Musselburgh feel that that aspiration has not been fully realised. The flood protection scheme has attracted 500 objections, a local public inquiry has started, and the cost of the design has spiralled to more than £130 million.

The scheme's original designs and plan were developed under the framework of the Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Act 2009, which did not impose funding caps on individual flood protection schemes. The Scottish Government, working with COSLA, has now introduced a £35.6 million funding cap on the Musselburgh flood protection scheme. That sits alongside the requirement to have a construction contract in place by February 2028 in order to stay in cycle 1.

Therefore, we have a scheme that is way over budget, lots of man-hours have already been committed, and there is a long road ahead—and councillors are facing pressure to make decisions in a constrained framework while the town remains unprotected.

The ongoing public local inquiry demonstrates the consequences of not securing sufficient community buy-in early in the process. Residents are not opposed to flood protection; rather, they want to be confident that they will have the most suitable scheme for their area and one that uses the nature-based and other solutions that we have spoken about today.

It is crucial to recognise the public investment that has been committed to flood protection across Scotland and the tangible benefits that it has brought for communities. However, the experience in Musselburgh emphasises the need for sufficient flexibility in such schemes. To be successful, flood protection schemes must account for local geography, heritage and community. Meaningful community engagement throughout the process will lead to better schemes.

Therefore, I urge the Scottish Government to recognise the complexity of the issue, particularly in communities such as Musselburgh. I would welcome greater engagement from the Government to help to facilitate a solution that protects residents from flooding while securing the support of local communities and the local authority. We must have a collaborative approach to the scheme. It is essential that we create a scheme that effectively protects the town and preserves its heritage.

I urge the Scottish Government to reflect on and learn lessons from what has happened in Musselburgh, to ensure that there is adequate flexibility in the legislation and to ensure that communities are included and represented in flood protection schemes from the very beginning. In protecting Scotland from flooding, we must keep communities at the heart of the process.

16:36

Laura Mitchell (Moray) (SNP): I welcome the opportunity to speak in this important debate. As the cabinet secretary, other members and stakeholder briefings have all set out, flooding is Scotland's biggest adaptation challenge, so today's debate is of real significance to people and communities across Scotland, including in my Moray constituency.

As many members will know, Moray has been no stranger to severe flooding events down the years, involving the Spey, the Lossie and the Findhorn. Thanks to investment from the Scottish Government, substantial flood alleviation infrastructure has been delivered in communities across my constituency, including in Elgin, Forres, Dallas, Rothes and Newmill. That investment has protected thousands of properties and prevented an estimated £86 million-worth of damage.

Just this month, £1 million of Scottish Government funding was announced for further flood resilience works across Moray, which will support work to progress the Seatown flood protection scheme, coastal defence work at Lossiemouth, surface water plans for Rothes and flood risk assessments for Kinloss. In my

constituency, a number of innovative schemes have been delivered that are protecting people and properties.

As the climate changes, rainfall intensity increases and we see the effects of coastal erosion, flooding continues to be an existing and future threat in communities across Moray and across the country. Today's publication of the Government's flood resilience implementation plan is certainly to be welcomed. It is right that it focuses on people, places and processes, and that it recognises that building the required resilience will involve local authorities, public bodies, partners and communities delivering on a clear programme of practical actions together. It is vital that they do so together, because, as the plan says, no single organisation can deliver the adaptations that are required and build the resilience that the country needs on its own.

The £15 million flood resilience fund that was launched this summer will help to support those communities in Scotland that are most at risk of flooding. I certainly welcome the fact that the funding is available not only to local authorities but to local community groups, because, for any resilience plan to be successful, local communities must be considered as key partners.

I want to say a little about the people and the places that are identified in the plan. As the cabinet secretary said, and as the plan makes clear, a core part of the Government's flood resilience strategy is ensuring that people are prepared for increased flooding. That must mean being prepared for the before, the during and the after. For me, it is crucial that we deliver on all those objectives, especially for our most vulnerable residents. That means giving people the information that they need before a flood happens, having support in place so that the most vulnerable people are not left isolated, and helping to get communities back on their feet as quickly as possible.

In its briefing for today's debate, Scottish Land & Estates highlighted that rural communities are especially vulnerable to prolonged cut-off from key services after extreme weather events. I have certainly seen the impact of that in my Moray constituency over the years, and I am sure that the cabinet secretary has in hers, too. If we are to build truly resilient communities, that must include everyone.

We know that flood resilience has to begin upstream in the way that we manage our land. The Government recognises the critical role of managing agricultural land, riverbanks, flood plains, forestry and drainage to reduce the risk downstream. Over the past few weeks at the Rural Affairs Committee, we have heard about the significant role that peatland restoration and forestry both have to play in our adapting to a more volatile climate. They are not just important for biodiversity; they are key to building more resilient landscapes. The benefit of those interventions is that they also improve our resilience to other extreme weather events, including droughts and wildfires.

We cannot prevent every flood, but the plan that has been set out by the Government is key to being prepared for every flood: reducing the damage that flooding can cause, improving support and warning systems, and building resilience networks across our community. In the face of more extreme and unpredictable weather, and as our biggest climate adaptation challenge, we need all partners to put their shoulder to the wheel to ensure that the plan succeeds.

16:41

Helen McDade (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform): I thank the minister for her motion. We can all agree that, when flooding impacts on homes, families and businesses, the results are often devastating. In my region, in Perthshire, for instance, towns and rural areas have experienced a number of flooding events over the years. Many houses and businesses have been flooded more than once, which has caused serious problems with obtaining insurance. Between 2015 and 2026, there have been at least half a dozen serious floods in Perthshire.

Going back further, in 1993, there was the great Tay flood, as it is known: one of the most severe recent floods in Perthshire. The River Tay rose by 6.48 metres—which I think beats the previous one mentioned—and, within a matter of hours, more than 2,000 homes were either partially underwater or badly affected by seepage. The incident caused £40 million-worth of damage and led to £25 million of flood defences being built. Since then, there have been times when the flood defences have not managed to hold the water back entirely, but the defences have helped, so there is a place for hard defences. They are very expensive, however, as Willie Rennie mentioned.

Going further back, to the 13th century, there was the great Perth flood in 1210. Relentless rain and high tides on the River Tay forced King William the Lion and his court to flee by boat. We do not know whether the current defences would have allowed him to stay safely in Perthshire, but that example shows that flooding is not a new problem.

We perhaps have a lot more problems now, because people will build homes on flood plains. It is essential that we learn lessons and do not do that. That takes me back to a former job that I had—in 2001, I put out a press release that said "Don't build on flood plains." Developments are

often proposed on land, such as parkland or rough grazing, that has never had buildings on it previously. That is for a very good reason: the community knew that the land flooded every so many years.

Monica Lennon: I am glad that Helen McDade has mentioned the important issue of flood plains. Does she agree that it is worrying that some of her Reform colleagues who got elected to local councils in England abolished flood risk committees?

Helen McDade: I have not seen those flood risks, and I have not seen what the member is referring to. We all need to consider flood risk management everywhere. We are dealing with Scotland, and there is pressure for land for new housing here. We do not need to look as far as England to find instances where people have suggested building schools on flood plains—which was in Dingwall, although I do not remember whether it went ahead. We have our own problems to deal with, and I suggest that we continue to look at what is before us and try to make sensible decisions.

Several members, including Donald MacKinnon, Mark Ruskell and the minister, have mentioned the place for nature-based solutions, which we need to look at on both sides of the fence. A lot of clear felling of forestry takes place. In the town where I live, I watch as much of the hill that is above us is clear felled, and then I watch a lot more floodwater coming down to flood the Co-op once again—I do not think that it can have insurance. On the other hand, as has been mentioned, restoring peatland can help to moderate flooding as it contains water before slowly releasing it.

Land management is a crucial part of minimising the risks, so we need a land-use strategy and planning policies that recognise that flooding needs major consideration. I welcome the minister's commitment to nature-based solutions and look forward to reviewing the Government's strategy, with her assurance that adaptation and resilience are at its heart.

16:45

Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): I open with the words of one of my constituents:

"I thought my husband had been swept away. I didn't think I was going to see him alive again."

I heard those words from her two weeks after storm Amy. I was sitting in a village hall, listening to the stories of people whose lives had been turned upside down as a result of that catastrophic weather event. Questions were asked and, through them, we heard anger, tears and frustration, but positive sparks were also there because of how community members had pulled together to support one another. There was a need to find things that they could do to ensure that if—or when—it happens again, they know what to do.

When catastrophic events occur, it is also a time when communities and organisations come together but, sadly, we tend to revert to our normal way of life afterwards, with little change being made. We can no longer do that. United Nations Secretary General António Guterres used his speech yesterday to warn us of that, when he said:

"The climate crisis went from distant warning to daily reality."

How well Scotland adapts to such realities will be central to our future prosperity and, if I might make a local reference, how well Argyll and Bute adapts to them will be central to its own future.

The Scottish Government's flood resilience strategy and framework are welcome and will help to build a safer, more resilient Scotland, by targeting support to where it is needed most. The £15 million fund to improve the resilience of communities is also very helpful, but, as Willie Rennie has said, that money could be spent solely in Argyll and Bute, if my inbox is anything to go by. For example, businesses in the Lochavullin industrial estate in Oban are flooded regularly. In Islay and Bute, and in many other places, the foundations of roads are undermined by extreme weather, because much of Argyll's road network hugs the coastline. In Dunoon, a lack of clarity about whose responsibility it is to clear culverts and maintain drains has resulted in damaged roads and flooded properties.

What can be done? As Donald MacKinnon referenced, Audit Scotland's report, "Flooding in communities" provides some solutions, such as ensuring that people, communities, councils and others have all the information that they need, by setting out clear roles and responsibilities. It suggests that we need clear timelines for the delivery of the national flood resilience strategy to ensure that flooding services are delivered by councils and the Scottish Government effectively and efficiently. The Scottish Government needs to provide clarity and certainty about how much funding is available for major flood schemes, which I hope would be multiyear. As my colleague David Barratt highlighted, we need to ensure that there are enough people with the right skills and experience to support tackling flooding.

I can relate those solutions to conversations I have had and work that I have been doing to support communities across Argyll and Bute, where there is an engaged community around Loch Awe. I have convened round-table meetings that have brought together stakeholders including the community, power companies, developers,

Argyll and Bute Council, SEPA and the Scottish Government. We have made some progress but, to be honest, with so many competing stakeholders and given the effects of commercial confidentiality, progress has been slow. I am grateful to everyone who has engaged but, at some point, there needs to be recognition that people are living there and that things cannot just be done to them. For example, perhaps loch levels that worked when they were originally set are no longer fit for purpose. I suggest that there is a lack of clarity about who is responsible for decision making, and I believe that tackling that should be directly connected with our public service reform aims.

A phrase that the First Minister used in discussing the programme for government describes, in my opinion, the situation that we have with flood protection:

> "too small to be strategic and … too big to be local."—[*Official Report*, 1 September 2027; c 32.]

I agree with the points that Willie Rennie and Mark Ruskell made about smaller communities, and I hope that Public Health Scotland's work will involve meaningful dialogue with the smaller communities that I represent.

As the Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Rural Affairs mentioned, the Isle of Luing is vulnerable to coastal erosion and storm damage. The coastline is built up in part by disused slate, which is susceptible to rapid erosion. The community has had big ideas about reinforcing that barrier, but it also wants to restart the island's slate-mining industry, providing new jobs, stimulating the local economy and reducing depopulation. I am pleased that, as the cabinet secretary referenced, the community secured £2.1 million from the Scottish Government's regeneration capital grant fund. That is hugely positive and it is a brilliant example of local people finding local creative solutions and partnering with national bodies to achieve change.

I agree with what the Green amendment says about nature-based solutions. As species champion for the Celtic rainforest, I note that investment in it could become the sponge that Mark Ruskell mentioned.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): You must conclude.

Jenni Minto: This is a Scottish Gaelic proverb about flooding: "Chan eil tuil air nach tig traoghadh", which means, "There is no flood that will not subside." I hope that, by taking a leaf out of the book of Argyll and Bute communities, alongside investing wisely and acting now, we can ensure that Scotland is better prepared for the increasing flood risk and that our communities, economy and environment will be more resilient to the impacts of climate change.

16:51

Kate Nevens (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green): From Musselburgh to North Berwick, from Longniddry to Dunbar and from Portobello to Cramond, my region is home to some amazing coastal communities with rich social, cultural and natural heritages. Like my colleague Katherine Sangster, I will use my time in this debate to pay particular attention to the coastal communities of East Lothian, which are calling on us to take action on the impact of the climate crisis.

In 2020, storm Ciara caused a huge amount of damage to the harbour in North Berwick, leading a local official to declare it the worst storm in 100 years. Residents of Dunbar are worried about there being a repeat of what happened in 2024, when crashing waves created a sinkhole the size of a delivery van in a local street. Residents of Musselburgh have expressed concerns about potential relocation plans for residents who are at risk of flooding and how they might interact with the wider housing emergency, and about the current lack of a public health assessment of toxic landfill sites that may be at risk of coastal erosion.

A recent project by Climate Hubs Scotland and Climate Ready South East Scotland shows huge levels of concern among East Lothian residents about coastal erosion and sea level rise. Looking through the amazing story map that the project has produced—I recommend that everyone has a look at it—I read stories in which residents express deep sadness about the changing landscape across the region, which is caused by coastal erosion, flood damage, storms and high rainfall. One person said:

> "I am concerned as there seems to be very noticeable changes in a relatively short period of time. This does not feel like a gradual change, more like a distinct shift."

I was struck by residents calling for urgent action in their communities, but also recognising that what they are seeing on their doorsteps is situated within the global climate crisis. One person, talking about how we should be responding to multiple instances of flooding in Musselburgh, said that what they wanted to see first was a

> "fast and complete end to fossil fuel use".

We need to support East Lothian Council, and local authorities across the country, to respond, by offering them more funding to manage flooding, but also by diversifying funding so that it is made available for smaller community-led actions and nature-based solutions as well as for engineered schemes. I would like to see an urgent review of the guidance that is provided to local authorities on

flood protection schemes, because I am hearing from councillors that it is massively out of date.

We need to better involve communities in informing us about what flood resilience means to them. We need to work with communities to shape our responses, give clearer guidance to local authorities on what public engagement should look like, and ensure that participation happens at very early stages so that we can avoid delays such as those to the hearings in Musselburgh.

We should make sure that, at the very early stages, we are talking to disabled people and other marginalised groups in the community, who are likely to be impacted disproportionately and in different ways. We need to recognise that those groups are also key actors in the climate emergency planning and capacity building.

There really is no time to lose. As is the case in East Lothian, our communities across Scotland are already seeing the devastating impacts of the climate crisis. We must act now on behalf of the communities that are facing the greatest risk.

16:55

Heather Anderson (Dundee City West) (SNP): I declare an interest as an elected councillor on Dundee City Council.

Climate change is not a future event. The climate is already changing, and our focus now must be on trying to limit the scale of the increase in temperature to 1.5°C and to mitigate the damage that that will cause.

We should no longer be building for the weather as we know it; all our new-built and natural infrastructure must be able to adapt to the weather that we will be living in. Unfortunately, the United Nations Environment Programme now expects the most optimistic scenario to be a warming of 1.8°C, but that is only if we stick to meeting our net zero targets. I want to explain to our Reform colleagues that 1.5°C was never a target; it is a global limit on how much warming we can cope with and still be able to work well on this planet.

The Climate Change Committee's latest assessment states that an average winter is likely to be more like a particularly wet winter in the past.

Helen McDade: If we achieved net zero today, when does Heather Anderson think that that would have an impact? Years ago, WWF said that it would take 50 years for that to be achieved. We have to look at adaptation. Net zero would not stop climate change, and people should not be told that, if we stopped it now, that would prevent these events from happening, because that is not true.

Heather Anderson: I will try to explain it again. We are trying to limit global warming to 1.5°C because, if it goes beyond that, the global scenario will get much worse and will be much more difficult to manage. There will be tipping points. We will not stop climate change; it is happening. We are trying to limit the level of damage that we will have to cope with by not making the situation worse. I hope that that is a clear enough explanation.

The Climate Change Committee also said that the intensity of the heavy bursts of rainfall that we will experience will be 60 per cent higher than in the 1990s. Flash flooding will be the new normal.

Dundee City Council's risk and vulnerability assessment modelled what would happen in Dundee if the temperature increased by 2°C or 4°C. At 2°C, the risk to people, communities and buildings from flooding would increase to a very high level. Businesses would be disrupted, and two schools plus health facilities, including a nursing home, might be in the projected flood zone.

Dundee is defined by water. Not only are we situated on the banks of the Tay, but the city is marbled with watercourses such as the Dighty and the Scouring Burn. As David Barrett said, in the past, we were not very good at managing water; we just culverted it, and that is coming back to bite us.

The Dighty used to support more than 50 jute and textile mills along its banks. In October 2023, when the Dighty burst its banks during storm Babet, roads and bridges were damaged, 150 houses were flooded and flash floods swept across the city. The damage cost Dundee City Council around £1.5 million. Remeandering the Dighty further upstream is now vital so as to prevent repeated flooding downstream.

The Scouring Burn, which is named after the industrial act of washing textile yarn and linen in water, is now culverted, along with 12 other watercourses that flow under our Dundee streets. When flash flooding hit the west end earlier this year, the most pronounced damage was along the historic route of the burn, down the Blackness Road.

I will share an interesting fact with members: 88 per cent of Dundee's sewers carry both rainwater and sewage, which is the highest concentration of combined sewers in Scotland. Given the 13 subterranean watercourses that run under our feet, the risks of flooding from intense rainfall in Dundee are significantly increased.

Luckily for us in Dundee, we have Dr Rebecca Wade. Dr Wade is a senior lecturer at Abertay University, and she trains civil and environmental engineers on how to adapt for climate change and how to manage water.

Even more luckily for us, some of the people she has trained are now leading the Water Resilient Dundee partnership. That team knows how to mitigate flooding and, what is just as important, it knows how to keep surface water out of the already overloaded sewer system. The team's work so far includes the installation of small sustainable drainage systems—or SuDS—including the one at St Mary's community centre in the north of Dundee. It is absolutely brilliant. It involves collecting rainwater from the roof and drains of the community centre and directing it into a series of SuDS planters. They look like planters to me, but they are actually design-engineered rain gardens that soak up the excess water, filter it, prevent it from going into the drains and sewers, and then irrigate the specially selected plants that are growing there. Flood prevention and pollinators—two for the price of one, just because the engineers are smart.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Clare Adamson): The member must conclude.

Heather Anderson: The team has also introduced rainwater gardens under Craigie Street pocket park, and, because it involved the local community, nobody minded about the roadworks.

With Scottish Government support, we now have an amazing 2.5 mile-long active travel route, combined with flood defences, running from Monifieth to Broughty Ferry. Along with sand dune restoration along the beach, the new active travel route is providing 450 residents and businesses with flood protection against a one-in-200-year storm-surge event.

The short to longer-term weather forecast is scary, but, if we use our knowledge, skills and ingenuity to work with nature, we can mitigate some of the damage that we have already caused. It is vital that we do not continue to make the situation worse. I welcome the production of the plan and I am very glad that we are finally recognising nature's role.

I will sit down now, Presiding Officer.

17:01

Craig Hoy (Dumfriesshire) (Con): As our amendment makes clear, flood mitigations must have the confidence and support of the public. It goes without saying that there are strong and deeply held concerns among my constituents about the Whitesands flood protection scheme in Dumfries. My constituents recognise the need to tackle flooding, but they also expect a project of such a scale, given its cost, to be pursued with openness, proper scrutiny and transparency, and they expect their emails to get an answer.

Recent findings from the Scottish Information Commissioner have made those expectations more important. The commissioner found serious failings in Dumfries and Galloway Council's handling of information requests relating to the scheme, including questions relating to the legal status of common good land. That matters enormously because public confidence depends on people being able to understand how decisions relating to the scheme have been reached and on the council giving clear and consistent answers.

There are important questions that Dumfries and Galloway Council must now address. It must clearly and willingly explain the legal position surrounding the use of common good land that is affected by the project and show that the proper processes have been pursued at all stages.

Local businesses also deserve clarity, because traders have raised concerns about disruption and the potential loss of revenue during construction. They need to know what assessment the council has undertaken of those impacts and what arrangements for compensation, if any, will be available.

With such substantial public expenditure involved, residents deserve a clear and up-to-date account of the project's costs, risks and potential liabilities. Those are reasonable questions about public money, public assets and the future of Dumfries town centre. I will be meeting the council's chief executive next week, and I appeal to the council to take the opportunity, belatedly, to answer those questions fully, openly and transparently.

I also ask the Scottish Government to answer a question that I have put to it in the past. How will it deal with any cost overruns in relation to the project? Will it meet its fair and proportionate share of costs or will any cost overruns fall to my constituents? Given the amount of taxpayers' money that has been committed to the project at the Whitesands, my constituents deserve answers, transparency and a commitment to openness as it moves forward, if indeed it does.

17:04

Dawn Black (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP): This is a really important debate for my constituents in Angus North and Mearns. Flooding and coastal erosion are not abstract risks or distant possibilities for them; they are already affecting homes, businesses, public services and local infrastructure, and have shaped how communities plan for the future, how families feel about the security of their homes and how local economies recover after extreme weather.

In October 2023, storm Babet devastated Brechin, as the South Esk river breached its banks

and inundated the River Street area. Families were forced from their homes, businesses were damaged and lives were turned upside down. For many residents, recovery has not been quick or simple; it has involved uncertainty, disruption and difficult decisions about what comes next.

Today—three years later—Angus Council considered the future of flood-damaged properties in a special meeting. It is vital that the future of the community, not simply cost, is prioritised. I am very glad that the council has voted unanimously for a flood scheme uplift, demolition of uninhabitable houses and a new open space. As I said, it has taken three years for it to get to that point. The situation in Brechin shows why long-term transition planning for communities at greatest risk is so important, and why that planning must be done with residents, not to them.

Montrose faces a different but equally serious threat from coastal erosion along its dune system. Rising sea levels and more intense storms could create new flood pathways and place low-lying areas of the town at risk. The dunes are not only a landscape feature; they are a natural defence for the town. If they are weakened or breached, as has been predicted, the consequences for homes, businesses, transport links and community life will be profound—it is not too dramatic to say that Montrose would no longer exist as we know it. That is why I welcome the £440,000 of Scottish Government support from the coastal change adaptation fund for work at Montrose links, including nature-based solutions such as dune restoration and beach nourishment. Those measures matter because they work with the natural environment instead of against it.

However, short-term action must sit alongside practical long-term strategies that give coastal communities confidence that their future is being taken seriously. Elsewhere in Montrose, surface water flooding has long affected areas such as Borrowfield. Scottish Water's investment to upgrade the wastewater network is therefore a welcome step for residents who have experienced repeated sewer flooding—that work is now under way. It is a reminder that flood resilience is about not only rivers and coasts but the everyday infrastructure underneath our streets, which must be able to cope with heavier rainfall and more frequent extreme weather.

Further north, Stonehaven's flood protection scheme has helped to address repeated flooding from the Carron Water and now protects 370 homes, two public utilities, countless businesses, a school and an emergency service site. I thank the Scottish Government for the substantial contribution that it made to the cost of that scheme—that is the type of investment that could make a real difference to communities that have lived with repeated flood risk. However, those communities still have coastal overtopping and surface water risks, which shows that flood protection schemes must sit alongside wider investment in drainage, sewer infrastructure, natural flood management and community resilience.

Taken together, Brechin, Montrose and Stonehaven show why the national flood resilience strategy's three pillars—supporting people, creating resilient places and improving the processes that underpin flood resilience—matter. Supporting people means recognising the emotional, financial and practical impact of flooding; creating resilient places means investing before disaster strikes; and improving processes means ensuring that communities, public bodies and decision makers can act quickly and effectively. The pillars also show the scale of the challenge that climate change presents.

In some areas, we will need stronger defences and greater resilience; in others, we might face difficult decisions about where development can safely take place and how communities will adapt to changing environmental conditions. Those decisions must be honest, evidence-based and rooted in fairness, so that the burden does not fall most heavily on those least able to carry it. I welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to invest a further £15 million in flood resilience measures, targeted at the communities that need support the most, as well as the additional £14 million allocated to the coastal change adaptation fund to help local authorities, including Angus Council and Aberdeenshire Council, respond to rising sea levels and coastal erosion.

It is vital that communities across my constituency can benefit from that support, and that funding is directed to practical measures that make a visible difference on the ground. That work will succeed only through partnership between the Scottish Government, Scottish Water, SEPA, local authorities and communities.

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): Can you wind up, please?

Dawn Black: Yes, I am coming to the end, Presiding Officer.

I commend Mark Ruskell's contribution, especially on nature-based solutions and mitigation, as well as David Barratt's, Heather Anderson's and Laura Mitchell's—and some of what Finlay Carson said.

The Presiding Officer: We move to winding-up speeches.

17:09

Willie Rennie: Dawn Black's contribution summed up the complex range of issues that we are facing in different parts of the country, and she concluded that there is no single solution to any of this. Although I favour Mark Ruskell's sponginess in the hinterland, I also believe that, on some occasions, as Finlay Carson pointed out, we need to clear the rivers of some of the trees, including willows, that fall into them, and of some of the silt. There is no one solution. We need to use the variety of expertise that we have to find the right solution for each community.

In a couple of numbers, I will show part of the problem. In my part of the world, a farmer would gain £1,000 per hectare, net, for growing spring barley in a field. If the farmer were asked to turn that field into a flood plain, he would get £500 per hectare, which is half the price. What farmer would ever agree to such a thing, even if it was right for the wider community? That is why my main point is that the Government needs a funding system that is flexible enough to reflect the economic value of land and produce in different parts of the country, because there is no one-size-fits-all solution.

Mark Ruskell: I agree with Willie Rennie's approach to catchment co-ordinators, but does he not see that, if we take the single approach of looking at the economic value of land, we could end up with some perverse decisions? For example, we might end up protecting a Royal and Ancient Golf Club course over communities—people and houses. Although economic value is one metric, we also need to look at what constitutes communities and why we need to protect those.

Willie Rennie: I do not know whether Mark Ruskell is suggesting that we flood the Old course, but we will move on from that snide remark about one of the best golf courses in the country.

The trouble with Mark Ruskell's analysis is that, if the decision has to be made by the landowner—the farmer—he will not agree to the change unless we get the finances right. That is what I am suggesting. We need an understanding of the need for the right solution for different parts of the country, yet we spend millions of pounds on big hard-engineering schemes, in a siloed budget approach in which we spend big money in different areas, whereas smaller amounts of money in some communities could make a big difference.

My next point is that that silo mentality is a huge problem. Government action on the climate is separate from Government action on agriculture, which is different from council action on protecting individual houses, which is different from NatureScot's approach to, say, the beavers, which is different from SEPA's approach—which is very much a reactive sitting in judgment on individual applications—and that is a different approach from community organisations that involve volunteers. We do not have a co-ordinated system.

The next issue that we need to address is farmers' distrust of SEPA. They will not apply to SEPA for permission for different schemes if they can help it, because they have had bad experiences of SEPA in the past. When they get it involved, they have a really challenging time. We therefore need a different approach from SEPA—less bureaucratic, more supportive and less complicated. The four levels of application process that have to be gone through to get any work done on a river are really difficult.

If the Presiding Officer will forgive me, I will say that my dream—I hope that the cabinet secretary is listening—is that we will have a catchment plan for the River Eden and other rivers across the country that face flooding problems, and that we will have catchment co-ordinators and co-ordinated funding. If we can get all of that sorted, my friend Amelia in Cupar will be happy.

17:14

Tim Eagle (Highlands and Islands) (Con): This has certainly been an interesting debate. I do not know whether Willie Rennie lost any Christmas presents himself in 2023—that may be where some of his anger is coming from.

I do not know whether it is just me or whether other members in the chamber who work on the land do the same, but I seem to remember years on the basis of what the weather was like in the winter. I remember 2010 being the year of the snow, when all the buildings fell down, but I also distinctly remember 2015. In my head, I remember it as the Godzilla year, because I am sure that one of the papers mentioned the Godzilla El Niño. That was the last time that El Niño was very big, and members may remember that there was massive flooding across large parts of Scotland. In the south, one of the rivers burst its banks, and the *Press and Journal* said that Deeside looked like it had been at war. It was a massive issue.

This is a pretty topical debate because, from my understanding of the recent press coverage, there is a very significant El Niño building across the southern hemisphere, and we might find that it has an impact this year. That is why funding is welcome, but we need to ensure that it is delivered on the ground.

Willie Rennie talked about a co-ordinated system. I do not necessarily disagree with that; we need a joined-up approach between public bodies and the landowners and farmers on the ground. However, I will make two points. First, that

absolutely requires that public bodies—councils, SEPA or whoever it might be—hear from, and genuinely listen to, those who work on the land, many of whom have significant experience.

I have to be honest and say—although I know that some members will not agree—that there is a wee bit of institutional arrogance in some of our public bodies, which do not respect the knowledge and experiences of those who have often worked within river systems for years.

Laura Mitchell mentioned the great work in Moray. I think that some of that work is exemplary—of course, it was delivered under a Conservative-independent council administration—

Laura Mitchell: Funded by the Scottish National Party Government.

Tim Eagle: With the great help of the SNP—that is exactly the point. There was great cross-party work on that.

We can do good work in this area, but Willie Rennie is right that we need to push forward, because the risks are getting bigger and bigger.

I will make one comment. I have worked with the community in Garmouth for several years, ever since I was a councillor, on some of the issues in relation to the River Spey. The community has faced a barrier with regard to Moray Council's delivery of projects, and for years it has worked with experts to find relatively low-cost ways of working with the river's natural processes to prevent further erosion. If everyone had listened to the community early on, we might have been able to prevent the loss of the historic Spey viaduct, which we are now working to try to fix.

I know that the cabinet secretary will not know about the specific works in that area, but I would be happy to let her in if she could give me any indication that the new funding that is in place might support the community.

Actually, I do not know that I have time to do that, but we can come back to the issue. Nonetheless, I want to know whether the community really can, with that funding, get involved in delivering projects exactly like that.

17:17

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): In January this year, Aboyne, in my region, saw dangerous levels of rainfall: 227mm, which is more than 400 per cent of the monthly average. In Aberdeen, it was more than 270 per cent. That has had devastating consequences for business, communities and our environments, with farms flooded and crops destroyed; residents spending weeks drying out their homes and battling insurance companies; and bird life such as puffins dying, as they cannot hunt in the stormy conditions.

Extreme weather events are becoming more frequent and more severe. As Mark Ruskell highlighted, last year, the national flood risk assessment report revealed that 400,000—one in eight—homes, business and vital services are in areas that are at medium risk of flooding. That figure is projected to reach 634,000 by the year 2100. Those are direct consequences of the climate emergency. Our communities need us to take that seriously.

I pay tribute to the save our sands Montrose campaign, which is a small community campaign to highlight the significant coastal erosion that the town is facing. Decades of dredging and sand removal have contributed to the current loss of at least 7m of coastline a year. The campaign has been instrumental in getting £2 million for coastal defences, including stone groynes to trap sand and stop erosion. However, that is a short-term measure; a Dynamic Coast study predicts that a further 120m could be lost in the coming decades. That £2 million is just a fraction of what we will need to protect the north-east coast as we adapt to the climate-changed future.

In contrast, some communities—such as residents in Castleton, west of Glamis, who were flooded multiple times during the 2023-24 winter—have had absolutely no state support for adaptation, and some have struggled to get compensation through their insurance providers. We cannot simply accept that some communities will be lost to flooding because we will not mitigate or adapt or because we choose to exclude them from the support that is available. Willie Rennie, Dawn Black and others are right to say that we must be honest with communities about what they can expect.

Of course, we know that part of our response to flooding requires skilled and experienced workers, including those from the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. The Scottish Greens have repeatedly called for proper resourcing of the SFRS to expand the front-line climate emergency response and ensure that all fire stations are equipped for responding to flooding, wildfires and extreme weather.

As we have heard from many speakers, investment in nature restoration projects will support nature to recover from the nature emergency and reduce flooding. Restoration of rivers and lochs supports natural flood defences. Beaver dams can smooth out and lower peak flows during heavy rainfall. Upper catchment tree planting reduces downstream flood risk by slowing run-off, increasing soil infiltration—or

sponginess—and intercepting rainfall. Ecosystem wetting is good for flood prevention and for wildfire risk mitigation.

In our towns and cities, we must tackle the scourge of urban creep. Research by Maggie Carter at the University of St Andrews on green-space cover in Dundee shows that areas that have lost the most green space are at the highest risk of flooding, with those areas also being in some of the most deprived parts of the city.

We need flood-sensitive land management as standard, planning systems that take flood risk seriously, and co-ordinated community-based action across Scotland.

It is clear that climate change is increasing the frequency and intensity of flooding. We must be honest with communities about what support they can expect. We must ensure that that support is used in collaborative and co-ordinated ways in order to create as many resilient communities as possible and restore the flood defences that nature has given us. We must recognise the importance of both climate adaptation and mitigation because, without concerted effort that uses every appropriate tool, we cannot hope to stem the tide.

17:21

Max Bannerman (Highlands and Islands) (Reform): Flooding and coastal erosion have hit communities hard right across the Highlands, Nairn and Moray. Highland Council looked at its whole coastline and found 29 high-risk locations. Nairn came top—number 1. What does being number 1 get it? Not a seawall but another plan, and the council says that even that is

"dependent on the availability of resources".

It is the same story on the river. A flood study for the River Nairn was due in the previous planning cycle. It did not start until 2022, the final year.

The Government's motion talks about partnership, and I am all for that—I think we are all for that in this chamber. However, I hope—Jenni Minto alluded to this in her speech—that the Government also looks to public service reform, because communities need delivery.

There has been quite a lot of consensus in the chamber today. Willie Rennie's two speeches were very apt and on point, and I do not disagree with what he said. I never thought that I would say this, but Mark Ruskell made some valid points, too, and we do not really disagree with any of what he said. Other members have made similar speeches that addressed the issues in their communities, and I welcome what they have said.

Willie Rennie: Just for completeness, does Mr Bannerman disagree with some of the stuff that his colleague Jamie Langan said about climate change?

Max Bannerman: That is a nice try, but I do not disagree with my colleague Jamie Langan. He was correct in what he said.

I want to challenge the Government on two points. Why does money keep going on reviews instead of construction? That ties in with the public service reform element that I want to touch on today.

Gillian Martin: Will the member give way?

Max Bannerman: I will continue and make some progress.

As Laura Mitchell and Tim Eagle said—I apologise to the chamber for making yet another Moray point—Moray knows that flood schemes work. The schemes in Elgin, Forres and Rothes have been built and are protecting homes today. However, look at what is still waiting. This month, Moray Council set out how it will spend almost £1 million of Scottish Government flood funding. Portessie flooded three times in five years and was told that it was too small to qualify for national flood funding. A £3.65 million scheme went before councillors in 2015, alongside a scheme for Dallas. The Dallas scheme was built by 2017, but Portessie was given money to review the viability of its scheme. Now, 11 years on, the scheme is still being reviewed.

In Lossiemouth, options for the Seatown scheme went to the public in 2018. The local flood plan pencils in construction for 2026 to 2028, so we hope that money will be available to cover the whole of that period. However, it is now 2026 and this year's money is going on modelling and design. As for Rothes, the money is for updating a surface water management plan—another plan. I think that, if he were still an MSP, my constituent Sir Edward Mountain would have something to say about that. It is a case of review, remodel and replan—it seems to be everything except build.

We must ask whether the plan will actually deliver. Let us look at the record. The 2015 to 2021 flood plan included 42 flood protection schemes. By the end of 2024, only 16 were finished—fewer than four in 10. I hope that the cabinet secretary will not blame that on Covid, because the plan was more than four years old before the pandemic arrived.

Delay has a price. The bill for the unfinished schemes has almost trebled, from £337 million to £985 million. Every year of delay is paid for, in essence, twice—once by the taxpayer and once by local people who have to bail out their sitting rooms.

Our amendment makes the simple point—Willie Rennie might even agree with it—that there will be flood risk whatever happens to emissions. The test for the Government is not to provide another strategy, review or consultation, but to put concrete in the ground in Nairn, Portessie, Lossiemouth and Rothes. When the cabinet secretary closes the debate, I hope that she will give those communities further clarity on the Government's plans.

The Presiding Officer: I call Gillian Martin to wind up the debate. [*Interruption*.] Oh, sorry—I call Monica Lennon first.

17:26

Monica Lennon (Glasgow) (Lab): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I thought that I had been cancelled.

I am pleased to close the debate on behalf of Scottish Labour. We have heard a lot of consensus—perhaps a surprising amount—on how we can build a flood-resilient Scotland in a changing climate. We had to have this debate, because the Audit Scotland report that my colleague Donald MacKinnon and others referenced set out a number of important recommendations to address gaps in resources, skills, capacity and leadership. It is reassuring that the majority of members accept that flooding in our communities is a significant climate change risk for Scotland.

On the Audit Scotland report, I am very concerned that the funding mechanisms for major flood protection schemes are not fit for purpose, so we will look closely at the Government's plans. We have heard some encouraging words, but it would be good to hear from the cabinet secretary, in her closing speech, how many of Audit Scotland's recommendations have been implemented and how many are still being worked on.

As we have heard from colleagues across the chamber, it can take too long to complete flood protection schemes and the costs can become astronomical. That is an important point because, as Mark Ruskell said, we know that 400,000 properties in Scotland are deemed to be at risk from flooding.

Colleagues made important points about their local areas. We heard from Laura Mitchell, Willie Rennie—we heard a lot from Willie Rennie—Katherine Sangster and Jenni Minto. I will come back to Willie Rennie in a second. It is clear that this is not an abstract debate; flooding is affecting our communities right now. For example, Katherine Sangster had to commute to the Parliament today through flash floods.

That brings me to the point that Finlay Carson and others made about the importance of our communities being informed and having access to good information. I raised with the cabinet secretary the point about inequality and the disproportionate impact on those with the least resources. Kate Nevens talked about the impact on disabled people and marginalised groups, and she said that, as well as raising awareness and providing information, we need earlier participation.

It was interesting to hear Helen McDade speak about her concerns about inappropriate development on flood plains. I was surprised that she had not heard that her Reform colleagues in England had scrapped flood risk committees on the first day that they came into power. I hope that, if Reform ever got close to running local government in Scotland, it would never do anything like that. She was not aware of the details, so perhaps she will go away and look at that.

Helen McDade: Due to the magic of technology, I can now point out that Reform merged that committee with the environment committee—I think that Monica Lennon is talking about Lincoln—and has stepped up how often the environment committee meets. It did not abolish looking at flooding; it merged the committees on various environmental issues.

Monica Lennon: I would encourage Helen McDade to dig a little bit deeper and look at what people in Lincolnshire and Derbyshire have said.

When we look at the Reform Scotland manifesto, we see that there is nothing in it to address flood resilience or the adaptation measures that it calls for in the chamber today. The manifesto says, "Let Scotland flourish!" However, it sounds as though the party is happy to let Scotland flood, because not a penny would go into any schemes that would protect our communities.

The cabinet secretary opened the debate by acknowledging that flood risk is a today problem. [*Interruption*.]

The Presiding Officer: Excuse me. Let us hear Ms Lennon.

Monica Lennon: The cabinet secretary was right to talk about the very real impact on households and businesses, which is why I raised with her the disproportionate impact on lower-income households and disadvantaged communities. We need to hear more about that. Asking us to visit a bus outside Parliament in the next half hour will not give us the information that we are looking for. However, we will try to do that.

We will support Willie Rennie's amendment. We are, in principle, very supportive of catchment co-ordinators, although I am not sure how many we need or where we will find them. He said that he wants his dreams to come true, and we do not want to get in the way of Willie Rennie's dreams coming true. I am not sure that the hug he offered the cabinet secretary is quite the carrot that he hopes it will be, but we will try to help him out with that.

As well as hearing about colleagues' constituencies, it was good to learn that David Barratt is the Parliament's in-house hydrologist. That will be quite useful. He was right to talk about the sharing of best practice.

We will try to work constructively with the Government. There are issues on which we still need reassurance, but we have lodged an amendment today that seeks that reassurance. It is clear that we need different solutions across the country. Some of them will be nature-based and others will involve hard infrastructure, but we cannot allow the costs to get out of control. If we accept the reality of climate science and work together, we can make Scotland safer and more resilient.

17:32

Gillian Martin: This has been a really interesting debate. I am glad that we have had it now. I had a few announcements to make in my speech that coincided with the timing of the debate, but the fact that we are having it before winter means that we are talking about resilience and strategic work to protect our communities from flooding. Very often, we have these debates in response to an event. We will have such debates again, and I do not want to tempt fate, but today we have been able to talk strategically about our approach.

I want to talk about some of the contributions, particularly the initial speeches and those in the open debate. If one theme has emerged—and not just because of Willie Rennie—it is taking a catchment-scale approach. It is almost as if the terms of the debate have moved towards a more focused discussion of river management and catchment-scale action. It is good that so many members spoke about that, because work is being done in that regard.

Willie Rennie maybe did not understand what I meant when I spoke about learning the lessons from the pilots in the South Esk and the Dee. By that, I meant the collaborative work, particularly between agencies and land managers, rather than anything to do with the geography. A few members alluded to the importance of that. Finlay Carson mentioned the role of farmers, crofters and land managers. A few people, including Willie Rennie, mentioned that farmers often have a mistrust of some of the agencies. It is important that we are able to prove through these pilots that some of that mistrust has been overcome and that barriers have been removed. In fact, the pilots will allow people to see that that partnership working can be effective.

Finlay Carson: I am glad that the cabinet secretary appreciates the importance of agricultural land and flood plains in flood mitigation. Is it time to consider agricultural support that recognises the value of that land, rather than waiting for farmers to have to prove that they have been placed at an economic disadvantage because their land has provided flood protection further downstream?

Gillian Martin: Obviously, we are undertaking a programme of work on agricultural support payments. We have heard an assumption that farmers and land managers will not give over land for the sake of any nature or flood protection schemes. However, I have visited a farm just north of Dingwall that has done just that, without wanting compensation for the land. That involved the remeandering project in the River Peffery. The farmer there could not be a more evangelical proponent of the nature restoration fund, which was used for that project, and the benefits of it. He at no point said to me, "I lost value from my farm." He was evangelical about the advantages of being involved in that and having that community spirit.

Willie Rennie: [*Made a request to intervene*.]

Gillian Martin: It is important to recognise that there are farmers and landowners who want to give over land. However, I take Mr Rennie's point that they need to be recognised for that, if that is what Mr Rennie wanted to raise in an intervention.

Jamie Langan does not believe that climate change exists, but he still wants climate adaptation funding—go figure, as they say.

Jamie Langan: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention on that point?

Gillian Martin: Absolutely.

Jamie Langan: I made the point that I do not think that Scotland has the agency to mitigate a global issue—I believe that it is real.

Gillian Martin: Well, this is a moment in time. I am glad to hear that Jamie Langan has a different approach from that of some of his colleagues who do not believe that it is real.

David Barratt said that no one intervention, body or funding stream is the answer. That is apparent from the breadth of debate today. There are so many opportunities for intervention that will protect our communities from flooding. Mark Ruskell

talked at length about remeandering projects and peatland restoration.

Obviously, I have talked about flood prevention funding streams, including the ones that I launched today. However, the nature restoration fund is also a key intervention. It might be there to restore nature but, in some areas, it also has an important flood mitigation role. I mentioned the River Peffery scheme, which is protecting homes and businesses in Dingwall.

Monica Lennon asked for more detail. I am sorry if I offended her by telling her to go to the bus, but I told the people who operate the flood bus that I would advertise it, and I wanted to make sure that I did so. Monica Lennon wanted more detail on the Government's response to the Audit Scotland report on flooding. Work is already under way on many of the recommendations. That includes work with COSLA to manage the cycle of flood protection scheme funding and develop new governance and processes for funding major flood protection schemes. We have provided £970,000 to SEPA to allow it to purchase wave buoys to improve Scotland's coastal flood warning system, and more money for a database of flood and coastal protection. We are also looking at airborne light detection and ranging—LiDAR—surveys, building on the work that we have done on LiDAR surveys in Scotland, which have already had more than £1 million of funding.

Monica Lennon: There is an important point about families who are struggling with the cost of living and who cannot afford insurance. For people who live in an area that has been affected by flooding, insurance can go up. Does the cabinet secretary recognise that it is a serious issue and that we need to see more from the Government on it?

Gillian Martin: I hope that my remarks did not take away from how seriously I take the issue. If anything was meant by the member's use of the word "serious", I would say that I feel very seriously about the issue. I was glad to hear the interventions that were made about the fact that disabled people are more impacted by climate change and its effects. That point was made by Kate Nevens as well.

Our partners in the Scottish Flood Forum also have information on Flood Re, which is a scheme that can help people who find it difficult to get insurance for whatever reason. People can get advice from that on how to get insurance.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): [*Made a request to intervene*.]

Gillian Martin: Forgive me, but I want to make progress on referencing members who contributed to the debate.

I appreciate what Katherine Sangster said about flooding and flood protection not being used as a wedge issue because it is too important for that. She said that communities must be

"at the heart of the process."

They must be at the start of the process, too, so that issues do not snowball.

We have seen successful flood protection and intervention. I loved the moment of partnership working and consensus between two representatives: Laura Mitchell, the constituency MSP for Moray, and her Conservative counterpart, who talked about the partnership working between the council there and my party.

Helen McDade mentioned building on flood plains. We will all have examples in our constituencies of such decisions that have been made—I certainly do in mine. Monica Lennon's intervention on Helen McDade was important—there was a bit of back and forth—because people will make decisions next year on who they want to run their councils. It is important that members can challenge other parties in the Parliament where there are inconsistencies. If something has been done in another Administration by a party, perhaps in another part of the UK, we want to make sure that that will not happen in Scotland. That was an important intervention and exchange.

Jenni Minto made a point about the level of funding when she said that the flood resilience funding could be spent in Argyll and Bute alone. Yes, I know—it could be spent in any member's constituency—but members also made the point that there need to be smaller pockets of money that are available for community schemes. A great deal of money is being given to local authorities through the settlement that was agreed with COSLA. However, separate to that, there are also smaller interventions that can be made by community groups, and several members mentioned that they need to have the ability to do so.

Kate Nevens made a point about coastal erosion and the coastal change adaptation fund, which we need to consider in the round. There is additional money that is available for flood prevention and protection, as well as £14 million for the coastal change adaptation fund. Again, far more than that has cumulatively been committed to the nature restoration fund, which can also have those impacts, alongside the money that we are putting into peatland restoration. There are several streams of funding that will have multiple outcomes, including building on flood adaptation.

The Government will support the Green amendment. There were a couple of other amendments that I came close to accepting—I was hoping to have time to go through each one—if it were not for a few words. For example, it was a shame that I could not accept the Conservative amendment, but I am afraid that there was just one phrase that I took issue with. I hope that members will find it in their hearts to support the Government motion.

At the risk of getting a hug from Willie Rennie, which he promised, I will do what I can to look into mainstreaming the work that has been done on catchment support. That point came through clearly from multiple members, and it will be one of the main points that I take away from this debate.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on building a flood-resilient Scotland—delivering action for communities in a changing climate.

Business Motion

17:42

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S7M-01295, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 29 September 2026	
2.00 pm	Time for Reflection
followed by	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by	General Questions
followed by	First Minister's Questions (Backbench Members)
followed by	Scottish Government Debate: Empowering Communities and Strengthening Local Democracy
followed by	Committee Announcements
followed by	Business Motions
followed by	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.30 pm	Decision Time
followed by	Members' Business
Wednesday 30 September 2026	
2.00 pm	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
2.00 pm	Portfolio Questions: Social Justice and Housing; Economy, Tourism and Transport
followed by	Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party Business
followed by	Business Motions
followed by	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.30 pm	Decision Time
followed by	Members' Business
Thursday 1 October 2026	
1.30 pm	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
1.30 pm	General Questions
2.00 pm	First Minister's Questions (Party Leaders)
followed by	Scottish Government Debate: Scotland's Priorities for the UK Budget
followed by	Business Motions
followed by	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.00 pm	Decision Time
followed by	Members' Business
Tuesday 6 October 2026	

2.00 pm	Time for Reflection
followed by	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by	General Questions
followed by	First Minister's Questions (Backbench Members)
followed by	Scottish Government Business
followed by	Committee Announcements
followed by	Business Motions
followed by	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.30 pm	Decision Time
followed by	Members' Business
Wednesday 7 October 2026	
2.00 pm	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
2.00 pm	Portfolio Questions: Deputy First Minister Responsibilities, Finance and Local Government, Parliamentary Business and Veterans; Public Service Reform, Europe, External Affairs and Energy
followed by	Scottish Government Business
followed by	Business Motions
followed by	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.30 pm	Decision Time
followed by	Members' Business
Thursday 8 October 2026	
1.30 pm	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
1.30 pm	General Questions
2.00 pm	First Minister's Questions (Party Leaders)
followed by	Scottish Government Business
followed by	Business Motions
followed by	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.00 pm	Decision Time
followed by	Members' Business

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 28 September 2026, in rule 13.7.3, after the word "except" the words "to the extent to which the Presiding Officer considers that the questions are on the same or similar subject matter or" are inserted.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:43

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): The next item of business is consideration of two Parliamentary Bureau motions. I call Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motion S7M-01296, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, and motion S7M-01297, on membership of the Committee of the Regions's United Kingdom contact group.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Visitor Levy (Miscellaneous Amendment) (Scotland) Regulations 2026 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees to nominate Pauline Stafford as a full member and David Green as an alternate member of the Committee of the Regions UK Contact Group.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

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

Decision Time

17:44

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

However, before we move to those questions, I will comment on what happened in the Parliament yesterday. At decision time yesterday, I expressed my surprise at the actions of Reform UK members in leaving the chamber during the afternoon's debate, after their leader's speech. Today, I will set out my expectations in relation to participation in chamber debates.

First, it is important to emphasise that our standing orders are quite clear that there are no constraints on the topics that can be debated in the Parliament. Throughout the Parliament's 27 years, members have deliberated on a very wide range of issues, and I consider that to be central to healthy democratic debate.

Secondly, I expect elected members to behave in good faith regarding parliamentary business. A function of the Parliamentary Bureau is to propose the business programme motion, which is then considered by the entire Parliament.

If a member or party has a concern about the proposed business programme, the Parliament's procedures provide for such concerns to be expressed at the bureau and when the motion is moved. Members can also vote against a business motion in the chamber.

I consider the actions of Reform UK members in leaving the chamber during yesterday's debate, given that they had said not a word against the proposed motion at the bureau or in the chamber—indeed, they had even lodged an amendment to the motion for debate the previous day—to be a gross discourtesy to everyone in Parliament, and deeply disappointing.

I expect parties and members to express any objections that they may have to debating or statement topics through the procedural mechanisms that are available to them, rather than by engaging in the behaviour that we saw yesterday. I therefore want to make it clear that I will not tolerate this chamber being used for such stunts, and anyone who chooses to do so will find that the likelihood of their being called or of their amendments being selected is greatly diminished. I hope that that is well understood by all. Now that it has been said, we can move on.

The first question is, that amendment S7M-01283.2, in the name of Donald MacKinnon, which seeks to amend motion S7M-01283, in the name of Gillian Martin, on building a flood-resilient Scotland—delivering action for communities in a changing climate, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

There will be a short suspension to allow members to access the digital voting system.

17:46

Meeting suspended.

17:48

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We move to the division on amendment S7M-01283.2, in the name of Donald MacKinnon.

The vote is closed.

Irshad Ahmed (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. Your vote has been 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)
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)
Currie, Victor (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Dijkstra-Downie, Sanne (Edinburgh Northern) (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)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Harley, Adam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (LD)
Hoy, Craig (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
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)
Lennon, Monica (Glasgow) (Lab)
Lindsay, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)

Long, Joe (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
MacCallum, Morven-May (Highlands and Islands) (LD)
MacDougall, Julie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
MacKinnon, Donald (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab)
Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Massey, Duncan (North East Scotland) (Reform)
McDade, Helen (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
Offord, Malcolm (West Scotland) (Reform)
Rennie, Willie (Fife North East) (LD)
Sangster, Katherine (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Schmulian, Kim (Glasgow) (Reform)
Simpson, Graham (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Simpson, Mark (North East Scotland) (Reform)
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, 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)
Flynn, Stephen (Aberdeen Deeside and North Kincardine) (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)
Roddick, Emma (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
Smith, Alyn (Stirling) (SNP)
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
Stafford, Pauline (Bathgate) (SNP)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thewliss, Alison (Glasgow Central) (SNP)
Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

Abstentions

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)
McKee, Cara (West Scotland) (Green)
Moodie, Laura (South Scotland) (Green)
Nevens, Kate (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S7M-01283.2, in the name of Donald MacKinnon, is: For 51, Against 54, Abstentions 14.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S7M-01283.4, in the name of Jamie Langan, which seeks to amend motion S7M-01283, in the name of Gillian Martin, on building a flood-resilient Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Bannerman, Max (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Beresford, Senga (South Scotland) (Reform)
Bland, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Currie, Victor (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Kerr, Thomas (Glasgow) (Reform)
Kirkwood, David (South Scotland) (Reform)
Langan, Jamie (South Scotland) (Reform)
Lindsay, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
MacDougall, Julie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
Massey, Duncan (North East Scotland) (Reform)
McDade, Helen (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
Offord, Malcolm (West Scotland) (Reform)
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)
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)
Bruce, Holly (Glasgow Southside) (Green)
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Campbell, Michelle (Renfrewshire North and Cardonald) (SNP)
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
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)
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Fagan, Joe (South Scotland) (Lab)
Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
Flynn, Stephen (Aberdeen Deeside and North Kincardine) (SNP)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Con)
Gethins, Stephen (Dundee City East) (SNP)
Ghani, Zen (Glasgow Cathcart and Pollok) (SNP)
Gibson, Patricia (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
Goodlad, Hannah Mary (Shetland Islands) (SNP)
Gray, Neil (Airdrie) (SNP)
Green, David (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (LD)
Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
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)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen and Cambuslang) (SNP)
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
Hoy, Craig (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
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)
Kinross-O'Neill, Kayleigh (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green)
Kumar, Simita (Edinburgh South Western) (SNP)
Leask, Kristopher (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Lennon, Monica (Glasgow) (Lab)
Linden, David (Glasgow Baillieston and Shettleston) (SNP)
Long, Joe (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
MacCallum, Morven-May (Highlands and Islands) (LD)
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)
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)
Roddick, Emma (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Sangster, Katherine (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Smith, Alyn (Stirling) (SNP)
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
Stafford, Pauline (Bathgate) (SNP)
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thewliss, Alison (Glasgow Central) (SNP)
Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Young, Jenny (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S7M-01283.4, in the name of Jamie Langan, is: For 16, Against 103, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S7M-01283.5, in the name of Mark Ruskell, which seeks to amend motion S7M-01283, in the name of Gillian Martin, on building a flood-resilient Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S7M-01283.3, in the name of Finlay Carson, which seeks to amend motion S7M-01283, in the name of Gillian Martin, on building a flood-resilient Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

Sanne Dijkstra-Downie (Edinburgh Northern) (LD): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Apologies—I would have voted no.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. Your vote has been 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)
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)
Hoy, Craig (Dumfriesshire) (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)
MacDougall, Julie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
Massey, Duncan (North East Scotland) (Reform)
McDade, Helen (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
Offord, Malcolm (West Scotland) (Reform)
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, 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)
Flynn, Stephen (Aberdeen Deeside and North Kincardine) (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)
Lennon, Monica (Glasgow) (Lab)
Linden, David (Glasgow Baillieston and Shettleston) (SNP)
Long, Joe (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
MacCallum, Morven-May (Highlands and Islands) (LD)
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)
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)
Roddick, Emma (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Sangster, Katherine (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)

Smith, Alyn (Stirling) (SNP)
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
Stafford, Pauline (Bathgate) (SNP)
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thewliss, Alison (Glasgow Central) (SNP)
Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Young, Jenny (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S7M-01283.3, in the name of Finlay Carson, is: For 26, Against 94, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S7M-01283.1, in the name of Willie Rennie, which seeks to amend motion S7M-01283, in the name of Gillian Martin, on building a flood-resilient Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

Graham Simpson (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. Your vote has been 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)
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)
Currie, Victor (Highlands and Islands) (Reform)
Dijkstra-Downie, Sanne (Edinburgh Northern) (LD)
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)
Griffin, Mark (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Harley, Adam (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (LD)
Hoy, Craig (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
Kerr, Stephen (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Kerr, Thomas (Glasgow) (Reform)
Kirkwood, David (South Scotland) (Reform)
Langan, Jamie (South Scotland) (Reform)
Lennon, Monica (Glasgow) (Lab)
Lindsay, Amanda (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Long, Joe (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
MacCallum, Morven-May (Highlands and Islands) (LD)
MacDougall, Julie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
MacKinnon, Donald (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (Lab)
Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Massey, Duncan (North East Scotland) (Reform)
McDade, Helen (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
Offord, Malcolm (West Scotland) (Reform)
Rennie, Willie (Fife North East) (LD)
Sangster, Katherine (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Lab)
Schmulian, Kim (Glasgow) (Reform)
Simpson, Graham (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Reform)
Simpson, Mark (North East Scotland) (Reform)
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)
Bruce, Holly (Glasgow Southside) (Green)
Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Campbell, Michelle (Renfrewshire North and Cardonald) (SNP)
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
Day, Martyn (Falkirk East and Linlithgow) (SNP)
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Kelvin and Maryhill) (SNP)
Duane, Iris (Glasgow) (Green)
Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
Flynn, Stephen (Aberdeen Deeside and North Kincardine) (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)
Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
Hagmann, Katie (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
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)
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)
Roddick, Emma (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Smith, Alyn (Stirling) (SNP)
Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
Stafford, Pauline (Bathgate) (SNP)
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
Thewliss, Alison (Glasgow Central) (SNP)
Todd, Maree (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S7M-01283.1, in the name of Willie Rennie, is: For 51, Against 68, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S7M-01283, in the name of Gillian Martin, on building a flood-resilient Scotland—delivering action for communities in a changing climate, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament recognises Scotland's increasing risk of flooding as a result of climate change and the significant impacts flooding can have on communities, businesses and the environment; further recognises the need to continue to adapt to these changes at pace; welcomes the commitments in the Programme for Government to additional investment in flood resilience and coastal adaptation and the progress being made through partnership working among local authorities, the third sector, communities and wider partners to improve flood resilience; acknowledges the broad range of actions and continued public investment in flood protection schemes, nature-based solutions and community preparedness; recognises the need to support those most vulnerable to flooding with adaptation and recovery; agrees that building a flood resilient Scotland is essential to protecting people, homes and livelihoods; recognises the range of actions that communities across Scotland are taking to reduce their flood risk; is concerned that small communities can miss out on funding opportunities under the current model; believes that communities must have an active role in developing flood management plans; further believes that such plans must be developed on a catchment-wide scale, and calls on the Scottish Government to work with landowners to take forward nature-based solutions to flooding through public land management and agriculture support schemes.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that Parliamentary Bureau motions S7M-01296 and S7M-01297, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Motions agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the Visitor Levy (Miscellaneous Amendment) (Scotland) Regulations 2026 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees to nominate Pauline Stafford as a full member and David Green as an alternate member of the Committee of the Regions UK Contact Group.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Childhood Cancer Awareness Month

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S7M-01166, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on childhood cancer awareness month. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises that September is Childhood Cancer Awareness Month; understands that around 320 children and young people in Scotland are diagnosed with cancer each year, and that cancer is the leading cause of death by disease for that age group; further understands that children and young people with cancer have unique needs and experiences compared with older adults, including in relation to diagnosis, treatment, mental health, research, and the financial impact of cancer for them and their families; notes that the current strategy, Collaborative and Compassionate Cancer Care: The Cancer Strategy for Children and Young People in Scotland 2021-2026 reaches the end of its lifecycle in 2026; notes what it sees as the significant financial impact that cancer has on children and young people and their families, including the cost of travelling to treatment, with research from Young Lives vs Cancer showing costs averaging £700 every month, of which £250 is spent on travelling to treatment, and that one in 10 report missing or delaying treatment because of travel costs; commends the work of Young Lives vs Cancer and other third sector organisations supporting young cancer patients across Scotland, and notes the belief that Childhood Cancer Awareness Month is an opportunity for the Parliament to reflect on the unique, practical, emotional and financial impact of cancer on children and young people in Scotland and their families.

17:56

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): As all members in the chamber are aware, September is childhood cancer awareness month. I will start by recognising the progress that has been made on childhood cancers over the years. In 1975, when records began, childhood cancer five-year survival rates in the United Kingdom were below 40 per cent. Today, that number is 87 per cent, and, with optimism about what can be achieved in the future and with political will, improvements can still be made. I hope that there will be more than enough political will expressed in the chamber this evening to do just that.

I commend the work of Young Lives vs Cancer, the Teenage Cancer Trust and many other cancer charities and clinicians in their determination to improve services. I also recognise the contribution that the Government's strategy, "Collaborative and Compassionate Cancer Care: cancer strategy for children and young people 2021–2026", has made. The demands of childhood cancers are distinct from those of adult cancers. The strategy recognised the failings at the time and the inequality in care between health boards, leading to an inequality of outcomes. Driving forward a national strategy and national standards meant that everyone in Scotland was able to take advantage of the latest diagnostics and treatments, including specialist treatments offered from London and occasionally further afield in the US. I start, therefore, by congratulating the Government, but I also want to push it on when the next strategy will be published and what it will contain.

The centralisation of service provision has had benefits for outcomes, but it has also had drawbacks. Children and families now need to travel to facilities in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen—that puts unwelcome strain on family finances, and cancer in children does not discriminate. For some families, the average travel costs in the UK are £250 per month. Those costs are too much to bear, leading to the alarming statistic that one in 10 families with children receiving cancer treatment have missed appointments because they could not afford the travel costs. That figure is based on a UK average of 350 miles; in Scotland, it is 400 miles, so the cost is even greater.

Those from the least deprived backgrounds are able to ensure that their child has access to the best healthcare in the world, but for families in our most deprived communities, the means to access timely, high-quality care is not always forthcoming, because money may not be readily available.

We are told that one in three families cut back on food; one in five take on debt; and nearly one third fall behind on household bills. We cannot let money be a barrier to young people accessing cancer care. The young patients family fund is a reimbursement benefit—if people do not have the taxi fare to begin with, there is no help for them. All the cancer charities, including the Edinburgh Children's Hospital Charity, are calling for cash-first options for families to receive young patients family fund support. That would remove barriers to ensure that everyone can access support, regardless of personal circumstances.

In addition, the young patients family fund is currently available only to families of children who are undergoing in-patient care; however, for childhood cancer treatments, chemotherapy and radiotherapy are most often given as out-patient procedures. The fund stops at 16, but the treatments for young people are the same until they are 25. I therefore urge the Minister for Mental Wellbeing, Public Health, Sport, Alcohol and Drugs to expand the fund to cover treatments for out-patients, and to extend the age limit.

Indy McBreen, from Irvine in North Ayrshire, was diagnosed with acute leukaemia in July 2023, when she was aged two. She received treatment

at the Royal hospital for children in Glasgow, 40 miles from home. Indy's dad has recounted their experiences, saying:

"We live around 40 miles from The Glasgow Royal Hospital for Children where Indy's main treatment centre is and have attended there every week for the past two years, sometimes 3-4 times per week. As for the travel expenses, it's definitely something that has been a problem, particularly during the early stages of treatment. It was less of an issue when Indy has been an in-patient because we have the Young Patients Family Fund in NHS Scotland which (mostly) covered travel and subsistence expenses while she was in hospital."

However, when Indy had out-patient appointments on consecutive days, the family had to be supported by Young Lives vs Cancer to stay in Marion's house, the charity's accommodation in Glasgow. Most of the time, they were not eligible for support from the fund. The last thing that a parent wants going through their head when they are supporting their child who has cancer is whether or not they can afford a taxi. Parents should not have to ask themselves whether they will need to choose between eating today or getting their child to an appointment, and yet that is the reality for far too many.

The 2021 national strategy for cancer treatment for children did make improvements in cancer care, because it rightly started from a place where it openly and honestly accepted that there were problems. We are told that a new childhood cancer strategy is in the works from the Government. When it appears, it must again recognise existing problems openly and honestly, without pointing to what already exists but is not actually working. It must recognise that inequality of access to high-quality care by postcode is now also inequality by income, and that the existing young patients family fund model does not work for the most deprived households. That is the barrier to delivering world-class cancer diagnostics and treatment to the children who need it.

Of course, the clinical treatment of cancers in children is just one aspect of their care. Where the physical toll of battling cancer takes a front seat, the mental load can often be ignored. A new cancer strategy for children and young people should ensure that there is provision that is flexible enough to meet the complex and varied needs of children who are going through cancer treatment. An advantage of centralised cancer care is that auxiliary care and support can also be co-located. There is no excuse for that not to be delivered effectively, but that is something that families and third sector organisations say is still lacking. I therefore call on the Scottish Government to see that that will also be addressed in the new strategy.

In closing, I look forward to the publication of the new cancer strategy for children and young people—whenever it comes; I would appreciate comment from the minister on that—but it must include removing barriers to access to treatment for families and changing the criteria for accessing the young patients family fund.

18:04

Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): I am grateful to have the chance to speak in the debate and I thank Jackie Baillie for securing it. I want to speak because of a courageous and inspiring boy from Clydebank, Caleb Stirrat. At only three years old, Caleb was diagnosed with a brain tumour and was given a less than 50 per cent chance of survival. Shortly after completing treatment at the age of four, Caleb relapsed and was placed in palliative care.

Faced with unimaginable distress and the worst news that a parent could ever hear, his parents, Karen and Andy, fought incredibly hard for Caleb to receive a trial drug. Caleb is now 10 years old and, despite setbacks and living with long-term side effects, he is still fighting and living his life to the fullest, each and every day, with the love and support of his parents and triplet sisters.

Having gone through that experience, his parents noticed at first hand the gaps in services and the need for better support for families. As a result, the family set up Caleb's Trio of Hope in 2022. The charity provides a wide range of support to families who are living with a palliative care childhood cancer diagnosis. That includes bereavement support to families, and food shop and fuel vouchers for families on treatment, given how costly it can be for family members, who often have to give up work to care for the child. It also provides grants for family days out and special treats on the ward.

All that work is undertaken by volunteers, with no Government funding whatsoever. The family do all that while still supporting Caleb through his journey and raising their two girls.

With the cost of living crisis still ever present, and with the energy price cap rising on 1 October, their services remain in demand to this day. I am grateful for the work that Caleb's Trio of Hope has done to support parents and families who are going through the hardest time of their lives, but none of that would be possible without the immense strength and bravery of Caleb, his dedicated parents, Karen and Andy, and the support of his sisters, Poppy and Alyssia. Caleb is an inspiration to us all, and I know that the family would appreciate it, as would I, if the minister would acknowledge their work in closing the debate.

The motion mentions that

"320 children and young people in Scotland are diagnosed

with cancer each year",

and that they

"have unique needs and experiences compared with older adults".

Over the summer recess, I met with Young Lives vs Cancer to discuss various challenges that young people face when receiving a diagnosis of cancer. Beyond the diagnosis itself, we discussed the unique travel challenges that they face, as they have to travel to a small number of principal treatment centres to get the dedicated age-appropriate care that they need. As has been mentioned, on average they travel twice as far and spend twice as much as older adults. That is a UK-wide issue, but, on average, patients in Scotland travel further.

It was welcome, therefore, when the Scottish Government introduced the young patients family fund in 2021 to provide reimbursement for travel, food and accommodation costs for families of in-patients under 18. That has made a real difference for those who can access it, but I see a strong case for the criteria to be expanded to consider young adults aged up to 25 and those receiving day-patient care.

Too many courageous children are battling cancer and, as we know from Caleb's story, their journey is not straightforward and can leave a lasting impact. Childhood cancer awareness month provides us with a unique chance to look at how we support those children and raise awareness, but, most importantly, we must look at how we can do more and get help to families at their time of greatest need.

18:08

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank Jackie Baillie for bringing the debate to the chamber. I am not at all surprised that my colleague has asked for chamber time for this important debate. She understands how crucial it is that we mark childhood cancer awareness month this September, and that we continue to raise issues that affect this group of young people. Her opening remarks focused on the progress and what has been delivered successfully to this point, but it is important that we continue to push in the way that we have.

As we heard, around 320 children and young people—that is, those under the age of 25—in Scotland are diagnosed with cancer every year. In addition, around 130 of those children are under 15. Those figures tell us that we have significant numbers of children and families living with cancer, and I know that, as parliamentarians, we all want to work together, across parties, to do what we can to ensure that those families get the best treatment and the best services. That is why debates such as this one are so important.

I highlight two issues in particular, which have already been raised this evening. One is the need for a continuation of the strategy for childhood cancer, and the other is the financial strain on families who are supporting a child with cancer. We can all see that childhood cancer comes at a unique time during a developmental stage of life. It disrupts the life of the whole family—parents, siblings and grandparents—and a child's interaction with friends. It may disrupt a child's life way into the future because their interactions with friends have been interrupted at that early stage.

Having cancer is a highly emotional time for any person. I ask members to remember when they were young—they might have been worrying about what they were going to wear or what friends they were taking to a party. We can only imagine the mental health impacts and significant long-term effects on health and on emotional health that living with childhood cancer can have. That is why we must get the strategy right.

It is welcome that Scotland has a dedicated strategy for children and young people, but there is still no public commitment to a successor strategy when the current one ends this year. Without that, there is a risk that young people's distinct needs will be overlooked within a general, all-age approach that is built around the cancers of older adults. Like other members, I hope that the minister will give us some good news in that regard.

I also indicated my concern about financial hardship. In this place, we are very aware of the cost of cancer. We know that, for anybody who has cancer, their costs increase, such as treatment, travelling and energy costs. Children and young people with cancer and their families face extra costs, which, as we have heard, average about £700 every month.

As we have heard, the largest single cost is travel, which is, on average, £250 every month. In Scotland, young cancer patients and their families travel on average 400 miles every month for treatment, which is higher than the UK average. Around one in 10 report missing or delaying treatment because of travel costs. That really speaks to the existence of inequalities, and we in this place cannot have that. We have to understand those inequalities: the fact that people from the most deprived backgrounds in Scotland may be delaying cancer treatment for their children because of the costs.

The young patients family fund is there, and we appreciate that, but its criteria are restrictive. I echo Marie McNair's words—there is a case to develop that aspect further, and we really need to

have a look at it. We know that there has been some change in other areas, across the UK in general and in Wales, and I would find it helpful if this Parliament could work together to get that over the line.

In closing, I thank Jackie Baillie once again for bringing this important debate to the chamber. I hope that, based on what we hear tonight, we can all work together to improve these services and in particular to mitigate any financial hardship that is felt by those young people and their families.

18:13

Helen McDade (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform): I thank Jackie Baillie for bringing the debate to the chamber, and I thank Young Lives vs Cancer and other charities that have provided information on this important topic.

Like Jackie Baillie, I welcome the dramatic rise in survival rates since the 1960s and 1970s. Now, eight in 10 children with cancer are cured, which is fantastic, considering that the survival rate was two in 10 back in those days. However, since the early 2000s, there has been an increase in children's and young people's cancer in the UK of 8 per cent, which is not a small figure. It is important that we look at that and consider what we can do about it.

The rate was increasing in the decades before that, so it is a concerning trend. It leads us to the fact that one in 370 children and young people will have had cancer by the age of 20. I think that many of us who have not looked at the issue in detail and have not been affected by it would probably have been surprised to learn that it is the leading cause of death by disease for children and young people, with about 250 deaths a year.

We must get a significant increase in research for those particular cancers. Some cancers are more predominant, and we must get research into children's cancers specifically, as they are not the same as adult cancers. Genetic predisposition and environmental factors are also to be considered, and I hope that the minister will consider looking at that. Better diagnosis cannot entirely explain the rise, which is acknowledged by the cancer charities.

Like Jackie Baillie and others, I ask that the family fund is reworked to give funding up front to families and children who are currently going through that experience, and to fund regular day attendance.

Families need to have confidence in the hospitals where children are treated. The environment must be of the best quality. Families that I have spoken to are fulsome in what they say about the best nursing and medical care that they receive. I commend the staff for the care that they give, and for dealing with the emotional toll that they have as a result of their job and also, sometimes, as a result of working in a difficult environment.

We must look at all of those factors to improve the lives of those children while they are being treated, and to ensure that fewer children go through that in the future. I ask the minister to consider research as well as the environment that the children are in.

18:16

Kayleigh Kinross-O'Neill (Edinburgh and Lothians East) (Green): I thank Jackie Baillie for bringing this debate to the chamber to mark childhood cancer awareness month.

The impact of cancer in young lives is more than medical. I agree with a lot of what has already been said. We know that the impact goes beyond the individual and the physical. As we have heard, it is the biggest killer, by disease, of children and young people in Scotland. It is generational, and it is a community and a personal tragedy. That cannot be understated. I echo the thanks to everyone affected and I dearly appreciate those who have shared their experiences to better public policy, raise awareness of specific issues, and support others going through similar struggles.

We have heard a bit about the issue already. However, in my contribution I will expand on the silent cost of cancer and illness. I thank Young Lives vs Cancer for their research and work. In a cost of living crisis, disabled and ill children are often the forgotten group. A lot of people assume that there is a myriad of financial support out there for families, carers and organisations; that, once you get that diagnosis, everything falls into place, and the only thing that you have to worry about is your kid's health. Unfortunately, however, that is not true.

Research from Young Lives vs Cancer showed that 83 per cent of households in Scotland see their income decrease as a result of having to travel for cancer treatment. If you are self-employed, for example, you can lose all of your income. As Jackie Baillie mentioned, one in three families cut back on food, a third fall behind on household bills, and who knows what other families are giving up for their sick child.

I have not had cancer, but I spent years of my life in hospital as a child. I remember some of the quirks of the situation and what my parents had to give up. My dad, for example, would have to take days off work and drive me to Yorkhill from Motherwell. Back at home, my mum had to take my brother around in taxis.

I was also a very easily bored child, which meant that they had to bring in a new book at least twice a week. In the hospitals, however—especially in the region of Edinburgh and East Lothian that I represent—the only shops are often M&S, which are not cheap in the long term. You might also see parents have to keep their mobile data switched on in the wards in order to communicate with others outside.

As has been stated, there is the young patients family fund or, for brevity, the YPFF. That fund is great, but it is not going far enough. As we have heard, previous budgets have not been used and one possible reason is that the eligibility criteria are simply too tight. At the moment, the fund is only for in-patients, which means that any patient getting day treatment cannot access the fund. That means that, for example, a family travelling from Inverness to Edinburgh for one appointment would not be able to access it, including if they needed to stay over the night before in order to attend a very early appointment. Modelling shows that expanding the fund will not cost the Government any additional resource. It would effectively use the funds and support patients and families who would otherwise have to fight for other public resources anyway. I want us to go further together.

The barrier of finance relates to the up-front costs of travel, accommodation and amenities, as has been mentioned. Yes, the fund helps, but the money is not able to be handed over; it must be claimed back. In an emergency, if a family from Inverness were to be helicoptered into Edinburgh and expected to stay there in the middle of August, during the festival, how would they find appropriate accommodation that cost under, say, £500 a night? It would be difficult for them to be out of pocket, even if they were later reimbursed.

The Scottish Government can change that. The funding is there, and the organisations want the system to work in the way that has been set out—they just need the okay for that to happen.

I join Young Lives vs Cancer and members from across the parties in calling on the Scottish Government to expand the fund's eligibility criteria to include day patients and young people up to 25 and to provide support with bespoke travel costs. Following campaigning by Young Lives vs Cancer, a dedicated travel fund is being introduced in England and work has begun on a travel and accommodation fund in Wales. This is not new.

I reiterate my ask that the Government expand the fund, consider providing equitable support with the cost of travelling for treatment and change to a cash-first approach. In a time of tight budgets when there is the need for future proofing, that is a clear way of reducing appointments, reducing claims for other support, such as social security benefits, and getting the national health service ready to support more people with complex requirements to access the healthcare that they need.

18:21

Tim Eagle (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I thank Jackie Baillie for lodging what is an incredibly important motion. When I saw it, I thought, "I need to come to the debate and talk about this."

I do not have any specific casework on the subject. I am glad of that, because I want to know that, if a child gets cancer anywhere in the Highlands and Islands, they will be treated with the dignity, respect, care and compassion that they need. I commend everybody involved in that process, from the doctors and nurses to the various charities on the ground.

I am acutely aware that rurality often brings its own challenges. All that I am doing is repeating what other people have said, but I am conscious that, in various parts of the Highlands and Islands, the travel demand is huge and the cost pressure is massive for families. That is not always easy, given the difficulties with travel connections at times and with providing the money in advance.

I repeat exactly what is said in the motion. I know that there are issues in urban areas, too, but I ask the Government to consider the issues in rural areas. We should make sure that, when people need to access transport, the transport is provided and they can afford to use it, because we want the very best for our children.

18:22

Sanne Dijkstra-Downie (Edinburgh Northern) (LD): Some dates are forever etched in your memory. On 4 June 2018, my husband phoned me from the sick kids hospital and said the words, "You have to come in; they have found a tumour''—words that no parent wants to hear. I quickly bundled me and my younger child, who was just three at the time, into a taxi. My body was suddenly icy cold, and I had a sense of deep dread in my stomach.

I will never forget the moment when I saw my six-year-old sitting up on a hospital bed in the accident and emergency department. She looked the same from the outside, which was weird to me, because, in the intervening half hour, nothing was the same. Everything had changed after hearing those few words—"they have found a tumour''.

While your mind races to adjust to this new reality—you are now the parent of a child who is seriously ill—a tonne of stuff comes at you. You have to make decisions that you never thought that

you would have to make, such as the kind of port to install for administering chemo. You have to get to grips with treatment schedules, arrange extra childcare for a sibling and learn about blood transfusions, sickness medication, calorie monitoring, temperature spikes and hair loss.

It felt like standing at the foot of a mountain, looking up at this daunting rock face. You know that you have to climb it, but you do not know what the path looks like, whether you are equipped for the journey or when, or even if, there is a view at the top—but climb you must.

Suddenly, there are risks everywhere. Everyday things such as riding a bus can land your child in hospital for days with a chest infection. A fall at the wrong time in the chemo cycle can cause a serious internal bleed.

The constant vigilance that you feel, as a parent of a child with cancer, during treatment and in the years after, is something from which I took a long time to recover. In some ways, I am still recovering from it. Our now annual oncology appointment, which is tomorrow, still causes me anxiety. My experience has taught me that mental health support for families could be much improved and I would dearly like to see that being part of a new dedicated cancer strategy for children and young people.

Such a strategy, as others have said, should also cover the cost of travelling to treatment. We live in Edinburgh and were fortunate that our trips to hospital were relatively straightforward but, even for us, the taxi bill added up. That was nothing compared to the experience of others, such as the family from Orkney that I met when, earlier this month, I visited Ciaran's house, the home from home that is provided by the charity Young Lives vs Cancer, which also supported us. The cost of childhood cancer is significant, not only because of the potential loss of family income but because of the practical cost, with travel to treatment being a big part of that.

Having a proper cancer strategy for children and young people that is not part of a general approach for patients of all ages is important. Childhood cancer affects the whole family, not only the child, and the strategy should reflect that. It should be developed together with the third sector and, more importantly, with children and their families. I know that I, and other parents, would be keen to take part in that process.

Over the course of a year my child collected many beads of courage, one for every medical event or milestone. Today, I am wearing the purple heart that signifies the end of their cancer treatment. I wish that every family could receive that purple heart at the end of their journey but, sadly, not all journeys lead there and not all families get to see the top of that mountain.

The Government cannot stop all childhood cancers from happening, but it can help to make the journey for families a little lighter.[*Applause*].

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Katy Clark): I call the minister to respond to the debate.

18:26

The Minister for Mental Wellbeing, Public Health, Sport, Alcohol and Drugs (Maree Todd): Gosh, how do I follow that? I thank Sanne Dijkstra-Downie for her powerful and personal reminder that the issues we discuss here in the chamber are serious and that they impact immensely on families right across Scotland.[*Applause*]

I thank my colleague Jackie Baillie for bringing the motion to the chamber and thank members for their thoughtful contributions. It is my honour to stand with them here today to support childhood cancer awareness month.

Receiving a cancer diagnosis is devastating at any age, but it is unimaginable what that must feel like for a child or young person and for their family. Before I say more, I acknowledge the contributions of many colleagues today and, before I forget, say that I am very grateful that Sanne and her family are at the purple heart stage of their journey.

It was an absolute pleasure to hear from Marie McNair about Caleb, his care and the work that he and his family are doing to improve the situation for those who come after him. I will pick up on the other issues raised as I carry on.

Although, thankfully, the number of children and young people diagnosed with cancer in Scotland each year is low and the survival rate is high, the impact on those who are affected is absolutely profound. If we are to continue supporting positive outcomes, it is vital to ensure that children and young people have access to the best age-appropriate treatment and care to maximise their outcomes and quality of life.

I am unbelievably proud that Scotland is the only UK nation to have a dedicated cancer strategy for children and young people. I am delighted that the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Care has confirmed that the current strategy will be renewed as the Scottish Government continues prioritising children and young people who have cancer and I can confirm that work is already under way. I understand that there has already been engagement with the Teenage Cancer Trust and Young Lives vs Cancer. There will be more such engagement and I reassure Jackie Baillie that we welcome members' input. Unfortunately, I cannot

confirm a precise date for its publication, but we hope to have a renewed strategy early next year.

The children and young people strategy sets out a national framework for the delivery of equitable access to specialist age-appropriate cancer treatment and care right across Scotland and has delivered many successes, including the launch of the national paediatric radiotherapy service at the Beatson cancer centre in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde. The creation of that dedicated service was made possible by Scottish Government investment of more than £460,000 of recurring funding to support it. The service ensures that all children, up to age 16, who require photon beam therapy radiation as part of their cancer treatment have access to a dedicated and age-appropriate setting, in line with gold standard international guidance.

The Scottish Government established the managed clinical network for children and young people with cancer. The network supports NHS boards to deliver co-ordinated high-quality cancer services for children and young people, working with the third sector, patients and their families. It will continue to deliver for children and young people, and the Government looks forward to working with the network and others to develop the next strategy.

We know that research into diagnosis or new treatment is important for the kinds of cancers that children and young people are more likely to be diagnosed with, as is access to clinical trials. The chief scientist office directly funds research projects and fellowships, and it welcomes applications for research into cancers that impact children and young people. Through the NHS Research Scotland infrastructure, we provide support for clinical studies taking place in NHS Scotland. We will continue to jointly support early-phase clinical trial work of the adult and paediatric experimental cancer medicine centres.

Developments in genomic medicine have changed the landscape for diagnosis, management and treatment. We recognise that there are opportunities to enhance patient outcomes, support access to clinical trials and accelerate research by expanding and co-ordinating access to genomic testing for children.

I move now to the thorny issue of transport. As a member who represents the Highlands and Islands, I well understand the burden of travel that many of the people I represent have to cope with in order to access high-quality treatment. Supporting children and young people through cancer treatment can undoubtedly place a financial burden on families, who are often adjusting to reduced employment and incomes to support their families.

A number of members have mentioned that NHS England has made a commitment of £10 million in its national cancer plan. I understand, however, that it has not rolled that out yet. I am grateful that we have the young patient family fund in Scotland. It is not exclusive to individuals with cancer. Although that is what tonight's debate is about—they are undoubtedly vitally important and they experience a real burden of costs associated with their treatment, as Ms Kinross-O'Neill highlighted in relation to her experience—that situation does not solely affect individuals with cancer. In 2025-26, the YPFF provided more than £3.1 million in support to the families of more than 5,430 young in-patients, and nearly 10,000 claims were submitted for eligible hospital visit expenses across all in-patient care. We keep the operation and eligibility of the YPFF under regular review, alongside the wider financial support that is available to patients and families through the patient travel expenses reimbursement scheme. Any decisions on potential changes to the YPFF will be considered in that context, recognising that accessibility is an important factor.

I remind members that we have a Highlands and Islands travel scheme, which reimburses the travel costs of everyone in the Highlands and Islands who is required to travel. We have to travel more often and further for accessing care.

Jackie Baillie: The minister will of course remember that, when that fund first started, it had a balance, if you like, of £5 million available for people. That has dropped by £1.8 million, because of the tightness of the eligibility criteria. Surely restoring the fund to the level that it was once at was would enable many more people to benefit from it, with no additional cost to the Scottish Government. Surely that is something that the minister would agree with.

Maree Todd: The YPFF is not a fixed pot of money. It is demand-led funding. The Scottish Government has ensured full funding against demand in every year since the fund's launch on 26 July 2021.

We have other financial support schemes for transport to support. NHS boards are responsible for ensuring that arrangements are suitable to enable necessary treatment and can be provided in a patient-centred way. We are committed to reviewing the patient travel expenses scheme to ensure that it works well as we bring transport and health planning closer together. That will include bringing local bodies together at a regional level to consider our options for improving transport to health.

Further, we have ensured that entitlement to child and adult disability benefits is based on an individual's range of needs rather than on a

specific diagnosis of a condition. That means that people can apply at any time, as needs happen.

When it comes to improved psychological support, I recognise that children and young people with cancer have unique psychological support needs. They are looking at life through a different lens from that of their peers and are adjusting to physical changes that are caused by cancer and by treatment, and they must have access to age-appropriate psychological support to help them to navigate that critically important period of their lives. Through our mental health and wellbeing strategy and continued investment in health and mental health services, we are providing the strategic framework and support for NHS boards to deliver care that meets local needs. The 2026-27 budget includes almost £22.5 billion for health and social care services, helping to ensure that boards have the resources that are needed to meet growing demand and improve access to support. We expect boards to prioritise psychological support for children and young people who are affected by cancer, working in partnership with the third sector and other services where appropriate.

I am grateful for Sanne Dijkstra-Downie's reminder about how cancer affects the psychological health of the entire family, and I would be more than happy to meet her to discuss how we can rise to meet that need. It is an important point, which was well highlighted. I know from my own family experience that when a family is experiencing stress—which, undoubtedly, a child's cancer diagnosis produces—that affects everyone in that family.

Michelle Campbell (Renfrewshire North and Cardonald) (SNP): I am very grateful for what we have heard so far in the minister's reply. The contributions have been very evocative.

I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of members' interests as a mental health nurse in the NHS. My intervention is about mental health investment. As a clinician, I have seen that progress and investment and how that has developed. However, there may be additional needs for staff to pick up on and understand. Will the minister describe further how the Government is supporting that training need?

Maree Todd: We continue to deliver recurring funding for specialist clinical psychologist posts for supporting teenagers and young adults, to provide expert tailored support for their specific needs and experiences. If more training is required among the wider multidisciplinary team, I will be more than happy to pick up with Michelle Campbell what type of training might be suitable and to ensure that that can happen.

Although it did not really come up in the debate, there is a clear focus on timely and accurate cancer diagnosis for children and young people. Primary care clinicians might see just once or twice in their career a child or young person who is presenting with symptoms of cancer—thankfully, that is how rare the situation is. We therefore have in place a number of programmes to try to speed up that aspect of treatment.

I extend my thanks to all members for their contributions to the debate, as well as to everyone who is involved in improving outcomes for children and young people who are living with cancer. I thank again in particular Sanne Dijkstra-Downie for her powerful and personal contribution, and I say on behalf of all members in the chamber that we wish her and her family well. [*Applause*.]

Meeting closed at 18:38.

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