The rest of this Official Report will be published progressively as soon as the text is available.

Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 24 November 2026

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): Good afternoon, colleagues. The first item of business is time for reflection, which will be led by William More, who is the head of Aid to the Church in Need in Scotland.

William More (Aid to the Church in Need): Presiding Officer, members of the Scottish Parliament, let me put a question to you: when was the last time that you stopped to think about how fortunate you are to be free?

One of the greatest privileges of my work with Aid to the Church in Need is hearing the stories of people whose faith has been tested in ways that I can scarcely imagine. There are people who have lost their homes, their livelihoods, their churches and, sometimes, those whom they love, simply because of what they believe. Yet what strikes me most is not their anger or bitterness; it is their extraordinary capacity for hope, forgiveness and love.

I often wonder whether those of us who enjoy so much freedom have something profound to learn from those who have so little. When I left my house this morning, I did not give much thought to the freedoms that I enjoy. I could go where I wished, speak openly and practise my faith without fear. Ordinary freedoms. Everyday freedoms. Freedoms that we barely notice. Yet for millions around the world, those same freedoms come at an unimaginable cost, and I believe that that should trouble us all.

This year marks the 10th anniversary of red Wednesday, which is a global campaign led by Aid to the Church in Need to stand alongside those who suffer because of their faith.

In our latest “Persecuted and Forgotten?” report, we estimate that 220 million Christians around the world—220 million people—are directly exposed to persecution. It is difficult to get our heads around a number like that, but it is important that we do not lose sight of the people behind it. They are people who, like you and me, simply want to live their lives in peace, without fear of what might happen to them because of what they believe.

Surely that is not asking too much, because we do not have to share someone’s faith to defend their right to have one.

As a Christian, I believe that every human being is created in the image and likeness of God, and at the heart of my faith is a commandment that is both simple and very demanding: love your neighbour as yourself. Surely love means more than feeling compassion—it demands something of us.

To paraphrase William Wilberforce, we may choose to look the other way, but we can never again say that we did not know. We may not be able to end persecution tomorrow, but we can refuse to look away today.

Business Motion

14:03

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S7M-02204, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, which sets out a revised business programme.

Motion moved,

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

(a) Tuesday 24 November 2026—

after

followed by First Minister’s Questions (Backbench Members)

delete

followed by Ministerial Statement: NHS Simplification

and insert

The rest of this Official Report will be published progressively as soon as the text is available.

followed by	Ministerial Statement: Independent Review of the Handling of Hepatobiliary Surgery Concerns at NHS Grampian
followed by	Ministerial Statement: The UK-EU Summit and Scotland

(b) Wednesday 25 November 2026—

after	
2.00 pm	Portfolio Questions: Justice; Health and Care
insert	
followed by	Ministerial Statement: Supporting Young People into the Labour Market: The Milburn Review
delete	
5.30 pm	Decision Time
and insert	
6.00 pm	Decision Time—[*Jamie Hepburn.*]

Motion agreed to.

General Question Time

14:04

The Presiding Officer (Kenneth Gibson): The next item of business is general question time. To accommodate as many questions and supplementaries as possible, I ask for concise questions and answers.

Tenement Maintenance (Loans Scheme)

1. **Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it would consider introducing a fabric-first loans scheme pilot for tenement maintenance in addition to existing grant schemes. (S7O-00566)

The Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Energy (Stephen Gethins): I recognise the importance of ensuring that tenement buildings are properly maintained and that owners are supported to plan for and fund repairs over the long term. The Home Energy Scotland grant and loan scheme is open to all domestic owner-occupied households in Scotland. It provides generous grant funding for energy efficiency measures, which is complemented by an interest-free loan. That is in addition to support from our area-based schemes.

Paul Sweeney: I thank the minister for that response, but this goes beyond energy schemes. In Glasgow alone, more than 46,000 pre-1919 tenements need structural, weather-tightening and restoration work, and Glasgow's private sector housing grant often does not cover the full funding gap, so households are stuck in limbo and tenements continue to deteriorate. For example, in Shawlands, eight flat owners face bills north of £100,000 each on a £1.5 million repair programme, with the shortfall left uncovered. Relying solely on grants strains scarce public funds, but the state is then left uncompensated when property values rise after the repairs are eventually completed, so this is a lose-lose situation.

Will the minister consider piloting a revolving fabric-first loan scheme to be delivered via local authorities and heritage trusts on patient terms, such as 1 per cent over 50 years, and secured against property titles, so that costs are recovered and residents become custodians rather than the final point of liability?

Stephen Gethins: I thank Paul Sweeney for raising the issue, which is important in Glasgow and elsewhere. We will continue to be guided by the findings of the independent short-life working group on tenements when considering any future legislation that might improve energy efficiency or drive the installation of clean heat systems. Those are the areas in my portfolio with which I am engaging, but if Mr Sweeney would like to write to me about the fabric-first matters, I will be happy to consider them.

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh North Eastern and Leith) (SNP): I welcome the minister's answers, Paul Sweeney's questions and the Cabinet Secretary for Housing and Social Justice's comments on the matter in the chamber last week. Tenement law reform and reform of the Property Factors (Scotland) Act 2011 are key points for those of us who represent urban Scotland. I would be grateful if the minister, together with the cabinet secretary, would consider bringing MSPs with a particular interest in the issue—such as me, Paul Sweeney and Graham Simpson—round a table early in the new year to talk about how we maintain, repair and enhance tenements across Scotland.

Stephen Gethins: I mentioned Glasgow, but I know that this is a keen constituency interest for Ben Macpherson in northern Edinburgh as well, and I am very happy to engage with the cabinet secretary on that matter and the points that he raised.

Sanne Dijkstra-Downie (Edinburgh Northern) (LD): Residents of 134 flats in Saltire Street in Edinburgh face a second winter without a working heat network. Their communal heating system has come to the end of its life and is likely to be beyond repair. It is not the only development with a co-owned heat network, where residents face very significant costs to replace an ageing, leaking system. Given that heat networks provide opportunities for decarbonisation and, more importantly, given the essential need to keep residents warm in winter, will the Scottish Government consider a loan scheme for such repairs?

Stephen Gethins: I know that the issue is important to Sanne Dijkstra-Downie, given that she also represents an Edinburgh constituency. She will be aware, because we have engaged on this, that I will introduce our heat in buildings bill this year, and I look forward to engaging with colleagues from other parties, as I have already, on how we can best do that, and also on the heat delivery plan. Heat networks are an important part of that mix.

Holly Bruce (Glasgow Southside) (Green): Part of the crumbling tenement that Paul Sweeney described belongs to one of my constituents and the building remains in jeopardy due to financial difficulties. The tenement's future still hangs in the balance, even with buy-in from all neighbours to go ahead with expensive structural repairs and despite having substantial support from Glasgow City Council. What more can the minister, the cabinet secretary and the Scottish Government do to support those owners who face immediate financial pressures, and will the minister commit to writing to them to outline all the options that are available so that they can finally move back into their homes?

Stephen Gethins: Holly Bruce is right to point out that this is a particular constituency interest for her. In terms of my portfolio, I am looking at energy efficiency, heat in buildings and the heat delivery plan. I will progress that work with colleagues, but I am also happy to engage, along with colleagues, with the cabinet secretary on some of the issues that Holly Bruce raised.

Alternatives to Animal Testing

2. **Martyn Day (Falkirk East and Linlithgow) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what consideration it has given to investing in innovative alternative methods of scientific testing that do not use animals. (S7O-00567)

The Minister for Agriculture, Marine and the Islands (Jim Fairlie): The Scottish Government is committed to high standards of animal welfare and supports the efforts to replace, reduce and refine the use of animals in research. Although regulation of animal experimentation is reserved, United Kingdom-wide programmes provide the relevant funding framework. We welcome the UK Government's replacing animals in science strategy and we will work with it to help to ensure that Scotland's institutions are well placed to develop and adopt innovative alternative methods that replace the use of animals.

Our focus is therefore on using devolved powers to strengthen Scotland's research capability and create an environment in which Scottish scientific excellence is recognised and is able to attract available funding and support the generation of the new knowledge and insights that underpin scientific progress.

Martyn Day: I have long argued for greater use of human cells and tissues in research to spare animals from suffering. Researchers at the University of Dundee have used human cells to recreate the placental barrier on a chip, which allows them, without using live animals, to study how substances cross that barrier. Will the minister bring Scottish universities together to identify which animal procedures they could replace first, and will he commit to supporting laboratories to make that change?

Jim Fairlie: I very much recognise the point that Martyn Day makes. As I have set out, regulation of animal experimentation is reserved, but we will consider the UK Government's replacing animals in science strategy. Of course, we will work with Scotland's scientific and research community and UK partners to identify what devolved levers are available to us for implementing the strategy in Scotland and how that issue may best be addressed.

Farming (Young Entrants)

3. **Duncan Dunlop (South Scotland) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to support young people into farming. (S7O-00568)

The Minister for Agriculture, Marine and the Islands (Jim Fairlie): We are determined to back the next generation of farmers and crofters and to open up opportunities to young people who might otherwise struggle to enter the industry. We have retained the national reserve and the young farmer payment. We are investing

£1.8 million in pre-apprenticeships and £300,000 annually in practical training, alongside the farm advisory service mentoring.

Through our farming opportunities for new entrants group, we work regularly and directly with the industry to co-develop policy on access to land, creating opportunities across almost 9,000 hectares of public land. Our Scottish land matching service also helps to unlock land and succession opportunities.

Duncan Dunlop: I thank the minister for that response. With two thirds of Scottish farmers now aged over 55, NFU Scotland has repeatedly warned of a growing workforce crisis, especially around bringing new entrants into the sector, yet the Royal Highland Education Trust, which does brilliant work in reaching nearly 100,000 pupils a year, faces funding cuts while rigid animal movement rules block it from bringing calves and lambs to schools in order to engage and inspire the next generation of young farmers. What steps will the Scottish Government take to ease those movement restrictions, fund further agricultural education in schools and do more to boost vital rural apprenticeships, to engage an even wider cohort of young people?

Jim Fairlie: I have already laid out that the Scottish Government is doing a hell of a lot to make sure that we give young people every opportunity to take part in the opportunities that arise through farming. On the rigid movement rules, I remind Mr Dunlop of what happened prior to the foot-and-mouth disease outbreak: we could not trace animals, and, when there was an outbreak, that caused an absolute catastrophe. The movement rules are there for a very good reason, which is why we continue to have them in place.

The Scottish Government helps to support RHET, and, as far as our ministerial and cabinet secretary responsibilities go, we also support it by working with it at every opportunity.

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): In the past week alone, this Government has, in effect, shelved its permanent grassland ecological focus area proposals until 2030, following sustained opposition from the industry. That comes on top of concerns over the Government's handling of the proposed 400-day calving interval changes. Does the minister accept that it is not a lack of ambition that is discouraging young people from entering farming but a total lack of confidence in a Government that has repeatedly announced agricultural policies only for them to be delayed, abandoned or rewritten after the industry points out the flaws?

Jim Fairlie: I have to say that it is brave for a Tory to come into this chamber and talk about the problems that have been created in the agriculture sector. [*Interruption*.] It was a Tory Government that brought in the policies that absolutely collapsed support for the sector in the United Kingdom. We have continued with direct support, we continue to have a £40 million calf scheme, and we continue to look after farming in a way that the Tories could only dream of. I will continue to work in the way that I am doing right now.

Laura Mitchell (Moray) (SNP): How many new entrants and young people have been supported into farming by the Scottish Land Matching Service and opportunities for farming on public land?

Jim Fairlie: I welcome Laura Mitchell's question, because it allows me to talk about the 130 new entrants into farming on public land covering almost 9,000 hectares. In 2025, I brought together public landowners to ask them to give opportunities to young entrants right across the country. That has resulted in a number of things happening, including the very recent announcement of new entrants.

Grangemouth (Investment Zone)

4. **Amanda Bland (Central Scotland and Lothians West) (Ind):** To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to ensure that the Grangemouth investment zone delivers immediate and long-term benefits to Central Scotland and Lothians West. (S7O-00569)

The Minister for Business and Fair Work (Tom Arthur): The Grangemouth tax site forms part of the Forth Green Freeport rather than one of our investment zones. The Scottish Government is working closely with the green freeport and local partners to maximise its impact as quickly as possible for communities across Central Scotland and Lothians West. That includes regular meetings between officials and partners, an annual performance review, and monitoring delivery against a range of commitments that are made in the green freeport's business case, including on jobs and investment.

Alongside that, a £25 million Grangemouth just transition fund is supporting new investment in low-carbon projects at the industrial cluster, and we are progressing investment opportunities with the United Kingdom Government and Scottish Enterprise through the Grangemouth investment task force, which was convened following project willow. We are also working with regional partners to maximise the benefits of the Falkirk and Grangemouth growth deal.

Amanda Bland: The refinery has closed, around 400 jobs have been lost and a further 377 jobs are potentially at risk at Syngenta. Meanwhile, the £200 million national wealth fund commitment has yet to be

deployed. People in Grangemouth cannot wait indefinitely for promises. Will the minister set firm deadlines for securing new investment, bringing industrial facilities into operation and delivering replacement jobs? Given that land remediation has been identified as a barrier to releasing the £200 million, what specific action is the Scottish Government taking on that? Who is responsible for removing the barrier and by what date will it be resolved?

The Presiding Officer: There was more than one question there, but have a go, minister.

Tom Arthur: I will try to distil it to the central question, which was about the £200 million national wealth fund commitment. Of course, the UK Government made that commitment, which we welcomed, but it is still to deliver on it. The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Tourism and Transport—my colleague Stephen Flynn—and I have pressed the UK Government on that matter, and we will continue to do so. That said, we remain committed to working constructively.

As I touched on in my original answer, investment is being made available through the Grangemouth just transition fund and the Falkirk and Grangemouth growth deal. However, I recognise the points that the member raises. They are important for Grangemouth, for her region and for Scotland as a whole, and we are committed to constructive partnership working.

Martyn Day (Falkirk East and Linlithgow) (SNP): Labour's Government promised Grangemouth's workers and communities £200 million to secure the site's future. However, months later, there is no clarity on when funding will arrive, how it will be spent or what jobs it will support. What discussions has the minister had with UK Government colleagues regarding the delivery of the £200 million? What further action is the Scottish Government taking to secure the long-term industrial future of the site?

Tom Arthur: The matter has been raised with the UK Government. Not that long ago, I was in a meeting with my colleague the cabinet secretary and UK Government ministers at which the cabinet secretary pressed that point again. It is frustrating. As I said, we want to work constructively with the UK Government. We have seen UK Government intervention elsewhere in the UK and we want to see it in Scotland as well. However, I recognise and share the frustration that the member expresses that, having made that commitment, the UK Government is still to fulfil it. I urge the UK Government to continue to engage with us and to unlock that investment, so that it can start benefiting people in Grangemouth and the wider region.

Stephen Kerr (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The "Grangemouth Industrial Just Transition Plan" contains a commitment to the development of a supply chain plan. We have excellent manufacturing and engineering businesses in Stirling, Clackmannanshire and west Fife. Has Scottish Enterprise established what those businesses are capable of delivering? What practical work is being done to bring those businesses together with prospective investors at Grangemouth and to help them to win contracts?

Tom Arthur: The member raises an important point about the supply chain. When we make those headline investments, we need to cascade down. On his specific question about the work that Scottish Enterprise is undertaking, I do not have the detail. However, the point about whether there has been a mapping exercise on who can benefit is reasonable, so I give an undertaking that, with officials, I will take that away, engage with Scottish Enterprise and get back to the member in writing. Obviously, I am happy to follow up with further detail, should he wish.

Public Service Reform (Funding Allocations)

5. **Calum Kerr (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what impact public service reform will have on the allocation of funding across different local authority areas, particularly in terms of how this funding takes account of local circumstances. (S7O-00570)

The Minister for Public Finance (Hannah Mary Goodlad): The local government finance funding formula currently provides an objective assessment of need using 131 different indicators, including population, deprivation and rurality, as well as a range of other considerations. All the indicators are updated each year to ensure that every local authority receives its fair share of the total funding that is available. Whatever the future of local government looks like, we anticipate that the funding model will be underpinned by a needs-based formula that reflects differences in demographic circumstances.

Calum Kerr: Since 2001, Midlothian's population has grown by more than 24 per cent, which has been driven by significant levels of new house building. However, the way in which the local government funding distribution formula works means that funding provision lags behind such growth. As the Scottish Government progresses public sector reform and moves towards new regional and community authorities, will the minister confirm whether reform offers an opportunity to close that gap, so that growing areas such as Midlothian receive the funding that is needed for the schools, roads and facilities that communities rely on?

Hannah Mary Goodlad: I recognise Mr Kerr's long-standing support for his region and his local town—it was a brilliant experience to visit Peebles with him. The funding formula takes into account a range of factors, but it is primarily based on population and always uses the latest available data. If the population grows faster in one council area than in other local authority areas—as the member reflected—its council will, all other factors being equal, receive an increased share of the available funding. The Scottish Government is always open to suggestions of ways to improve the funding formula, but any proposals must come through the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities in the first instance.

Ensuring that authorities are financially sustainable is a critical objective of local governance reform. The starting point will be to determine and agree on how responsibilities should be divided between future governance structures—national, regional and local—that will inform the most appropriate funding methods.

Craig Hoy (Dumfriesshire) (Con): Is the minister aware that driving on some roads in Dumfries and Galloway is like driving on the surface of the moon? Although some of that is down to inefficient resource allocation by the Scottish National Party-run council, it is also down to years and years of underfunding of rural areas by the SNP Government. As the minister looks towards public service reform, will she now commit to reviewing the funding formula, which is not fit for purpose for rural areas? That should include ensuring that Conservative-held areas such as the blue wall get their fair share in funding allocations.

Hannah Mary Goodlad: Long-held colour alliances can fall, and blue walls can turn. We had an immovable orange island for 80 years and it turned to yellow, so I would not get too hung up on colours.

I find it amusing that the Tories would like to fund local governance and the public sector more. I look forward to seeing Craig Hoy's suggestions and to his getting fully involved and stuck into this Government's proposals on local government funding and structure, and also public sector reform. As we heard in the Parliament last week, he clearly supports our moving away from a 12-month perspective to multiyear funding, but that power rests with Westminster.

Highlands and Islands (Regional Air Services)

6. **Kristopher Leask (Highlands and Islands) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government, in light of its engagement with stakeholders and MSPs, what actions it will be taking forward to improve regional aviation in the Highlands and Islands. (S7O-00571)

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Tourism and Transport (Stephen Flynn): I thank Mr Leask for giving me the opportunity to outline to members the activities that I have undertaken since taking on this role. I have engaged with stakeholders—both internal to the Government and external—and had proactive engagement with members, and we have also had many debates and discussions in the Parliament. I assure Mr Leask that, on the back of those stakeholder engagements, I am giving active consideration to the next steps, and I hope to be in a position to update the Parliament in early course.

Kristopher Leask: I thank the cabinet secretary for his engagement with me and others on this ongoing issue. A month ago, the cabinet secretary committed to taking further action, and I welcome the steps that he has outlined and that we will hear more about them in the future. Much of the issue comes down to inconsistency across regional routes, with no agreed standard or Government assurance of service in place. Does the cabinet secretary agree that an early action that we should take is to develop an equivalent to minimum routes and services methodology for regional air services?

Stephen Flynn: As ever, Mr Leask comes to the chamber and offers a thoughtful and helpful suggestion. I can give him a firm commitment that, as part of our next steps, we will take into consideration that suggestion and others that he has put to the Government in the course of recent months.

Julie MacDougall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Reform): The Air Service Training firm at Perth airport went into administration last year. There was a massive opportunity to fill this huge gap in aviation skills training with the £8.1 million from the Tay cities region deal that was set aside for establishing the aviation academy for Scotland, but that was lost due to other similar projects falling through. That money has since been redirected to other unrelated projects, all of which happened due to a complete lack of intervention by the Scottish Government.

How can the Government claim to be improving Scotland's aviation sector when it did not even bother to rescue it in John Swinney's backyard?

Stephen Flynn: Of course, Ms MacDougall did not refer to the tens of millions of pounds that the Government puts towards Highlands and Islands airports, the tens of millions of pounds that we put towards public service obligations and, indeed, the air discount scheme that islanders benefit from. If she wants to criticise this Government, she would do herself a decent service if she also recognised the work that we have done to ensure that there is proper regional connectivity in Scotland.

The rest of this Official Report will be published progressively as soon as the text is available.

Data Centres (Community Dialogue)

7. **Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to ensure that it engages transparently and through respectful dialogue with communities concerned about the impact of data centres. (S7O-00572)

The Minister for Public Finance (Hannah Mary Goodlad): The Scottish Government is engaging closely with communities concerned about the impacts of data centres while we develop our strategic approach, which will be published in December.

Patrick Harvie: We know that people are worried about the local impact of data centres and about the wider artificial intelligence industry. We also know that their growth will push their bills up even further, and a Scottish Enterprise report shows that the economic benefits have been hugely overstated.

Why, then, is the same agency actively encouraging the use of non-disclosure agreements while certain Scottish ministers have insulted community campaigners in the media and even told them to stop contacting the Scottish Government about it? How on earth did the Scottish National Party get this one so wrong?

Hannah Mary Goodlad: I recognise the legitimate concerns of communities, and I also note that this Government is open to investment. I trust our planning system and its ability to handle complex integrated projects such as AI data centres. Moreover, I trust our local planners, the length and breadth of this country, whose work is diligent and detailed.

Offshore Wind (Fishing Industry)

8. **Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what impact it anticipates offshore wind developments will have on the Scottish fishing industry. (S7O-00573)

The Minister for Agriculture, Marine and the Islands (Jim Fairlie): The Scottish Government absolutely recognises the importance of Scotland's fishing industry, and we are committed to minimising the impacts of offshore wind development through careful planning, engagement and mitigation. Our marine planning and consenting processes are informed by environmental and socioeconomic assessments, including assessments of the potential impacts on fishing activity. Those impacts are considered in the strategic assessments accompanying the "Draft Updated Sectoral Marine Plan for Offshore Wind Energy", which was published in 2025. We continue to engage with both sectors to minimise impacts and support their sustainable coexistence.

Liam Kerr: In early October, Parliament voted to support an amendment, in the name of James Adams, which said that financial compensation should be provided for fishing businesses impacted by offshore wind developments. Over the past nearly two months, what has the minister done to implement the will of Parliament? When will such a scheme be finalised and put in place?

Jim Fairlie: The Scottish Government supported that amendment because we absolutely agree on the principle of ensuring that fishermen are protected and compensated, although that is a private matter at the moment.

However, I also agreed to meet Mr Adams, together with fishing community representatives, and I think that such a meeting is in the diary somewhere; if it is not, I will make sure that one is arranged. The ongoing engagement between the sectors is absolutely essential, and the Government will do everything that we can to convene those meetings.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes general question time. I apologise to the many members whose questions I was unable to take due to time constraints.

The rest of this Official Report will be published progressively as soon as the text is available.