



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Meeting of the Parliament (Hybrid)

Wednesday 1 September 2021

Session 6



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 1 September 2021

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

Portfolio Question Time

Covid-19 Recovery and Parliamentary Business

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): Good afternoon. I remind members that social distancing measures are in place in the chamber and across the Holyrood campus. I ask members to take care to observe those measures, including when entering and exiting the chamber. Please only use the aisles and walkways to access your seats or when moving around the chamber.

The first item of business is portfolio questions, and the first portfolio for questions is Covid-19 recovery and parliamentary business. If a member wishes to ask a supplementary question, they should press their request-to-speak button or, if they are joining us online, press R in the chat function at the time of the relevant question.

Covid-19 Recovery (Communities)

1. **Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how its policies and actions across Government are supporting communities to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic. (S6O-00065)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney): Recovery from the pandemic is an urgent priority for the Government. The policies that we set out in May and delivered within 100 days were for bold, ambitious and transformative measures. I assure Mr Fairlie that we are only at the beginning of the Government's programme and that there is much more that we can and will do to build a fairer and more sustainable country, as we continue to drive Scotland's recovery from the pandemic. The 80 commitments that we delivered were co-ordinated and targeted policies for demonstrable and positive change for the people, families and communities who need it most, and for our economy, public services and environment.

Jim Fairlie: In my constituency, the north Perth and city centre Covid-19 community support group was formed during the pandemic as an affiliation of community groups from across the area, including Letham4All, North Muirton community council, Tulloch Net, and many others. The group

mobilised more than 180 volunteers to help with everything from food shopping to delivering prescriptions to, quite simply, being someone to talk to.

Does the Scottish Government have any plans for sustaining and utilising the skills and resources that such community groups offer?

John Swinney: I echo Mr Fairlie's comments. I am familiar with a number of the organisations to which he referred—not least, North Muirton community council, which is in my constituency. Those organisations have provided critical services to members of the public in the city of Perth; I know that similar organisations have done the same thing in other parts of the country.

With our work with local government, we want to focus on a community-based approach to Covid recovery, and to sustain many of the good examples of community initiatives that arose during the pandemic and which can support individuals—in particular, people who are vulnerable or lonely—in our communities. That was what we envisaged when we passed the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 to enable much greater community participation and engagement, and it will be central to the Government's response in supporting organisations to make a meaningful impact on their communities.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): In communities across Scotland, many individuals are still waiting to make an appointment for a face-to-face meeting with their general practitioner. I know that the Scottish Government addressed that issue in its plan for national health service recovery, but will the cabinet secretary update us on what the target date might be for getting back to some degree of normality for those who want to meet their GP face to face?

John Swinney: It is important to note that the process of meeting the needs of individuals during the pandemic has required many public servants, including general practitioners, to work in different ways, and they have all risen to that challenge. Some of the new models of operation are ones that we do not want to lose once the pandemic is over. Accessing public services through video consultation, which many GPs have started to use, is a beneficial way of ensuring that the maximum number of people get treatment when they require it.

Face-to-face consultations of course have a significant role to play, and general practitioners around the country are working hard, as is envisaged in the NHS recovery plan, to maximise the amount of face-to-face consultation that is undertaken. However, I would not want that to happen at the expense of our continuing to use

the advances in technology that have enabled us to deliver healthcare and other services during the pandemic.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): The cabinet secretary will recognise that carers are a key section of our community. They are struggling, and many of them are still isolating as case numbers rise to record levels. In some cases, care packages were withdrawn at the start of the pandemic, respite care was stopped and carers were left to cope alone. When will all those services be restored? Where is the remobilisation plan for social care?

John Swinney: Those issues are covered in the NHS recovery plan and in the wider steps that we are taking to recover public services, which in many respects are being progressed by our local authority partners.

Partners are trying to re-establish services as safely and sustainably as possible. In a sense, Jackie Baillie answered part of her question in her own words, when she referred to the challenge of rising case numbers and the anxiety that that will cause individuals who have health vulnerabilities.

We are working in close partnership with a variety of organisations to make sure that we restore services to meet people's needs, but restoration of services has to be commensurate with how safe it is to do so in the context of the pandemic. Of course, the First Minister will have more to say on that when she addresses Parliament this afternoon.

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): There is a major issue with care in the community. I do not know how the Government can prioritise people, but in Fife, for example, the number of people on waiting lists for a care package has spiralled out of control. Will the Government look at how it can intervene? Fife Health and Social Care Partnership says that it simply cannot recruit the carers that it needs to provide the care that is required. The current situation is storing up a major problem, as we move into winter.

John Swinney: Mr Rowley has put his finger on a very significant issue—the availability of personnel to undertake certain essential tasks in our society. Across a range of sectors—Mr Rowley has understandably highlighted the situation in the social care sector—we are all hearing that there are simply not enough people coming forward for recruitment in certain occupations. The reduction in the number of people available, which is a consequence of the removal of freedom of movement as a result of Brexit, is undoubtedly having an effect.

We are working with health and social care partnerships to maximise the opportunities for recruitment, and we will continue to discuss such

issues with local authorities and health boards as we support the recovery of care services, which is essential to ensuring that we meet the needs of individuals in our society.

Covid-19 Recovery (Inverclyde)

2. Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how its policies and actions across Government will support Inverclyde to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic. (S6O-00066)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney): The Scottish Government has provided Inverclyde Council with £7,651,250 to support businesses in the area during the Covid-19 pandemic. As part of the economic stimulus package in 2020-21, we provided an additional £100,000 to Inverclyde Council from the regeneration capital grant fund to ensure the delivery of the new Craighend resource centre in Greenock.

Inverclyde Council has also been awarded up to £504,804 of funding from the regeneration capital grant fund in 2021-22 to support delivery of services for Inverclyde Shed's meet, make and share project, which is also in Greenock.

In addition, Scottish Enterprise is working with the area to deliver regional business support plans and to support regional company-growth pilots.

Stuart McMillan: The cabinet secretary is well aware of the challenges that Inverclyde faces, some of which it faced even before the pandemic. Skills Development Scotland's recent report, "Regional Skills Assessments West Region", which was published in July 2021, states:

"Inverclyde is not forecast to meet pre-pandemic employment levels in the period up to 2031".

My area needs additional assistance to arrest our population decline and to deal with our ageing population demographic. In the light of that, is there anything further that the Scottish Government would consider doing to support Inverclyde to recover from the pandemic?

John Swinney: The Government is very open to further discussions with the local community and the local authority on what steps can be taken. A great deal of planning has already been undertaken through the work of Glasgow City Region, which is, in essence, taking forward a range of projects that will have an impact on Inverclyde. The Government will be open to further dialogue beyond the propositions that are advanced in that proposal.

Glasgow City Region supports three projects in Inverclyde, which will promote growth in the area. The issue of population decline that Mr McMillan raised is one of the central issues in the focus of

that work, and the Government stands ready to support Inverclyde Council and local partners in the most effective way that we can in order to advance some of the priorities that will assist in addressing population decline.

Covid-19 Recovery (Local Authorities)

3. Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP):

To ask the Scottish Government how its policies and actions across Government will support local authorities in their recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. (S6O-00067)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney):

To date, we have provided Scottish local authorities with an additional £1.5 billion in direct support through the local government finance settlement, over and above the regular grant payments for Covid recovery. It is important that we deliver a bold and ambitious recovery plan for Scotland. My priority within Government is to work collectively and collegiately to ensure that that is the case.

I recognise the important role that local authorities have to play in that respect, and I am leading engagement to strengthen our partnership with local government in order to support recovery and to maximise every possible benefit for our citizens.

Kaukab Stewart: Will the cabinet secretary outline how the Scottish Government will engage with the hospitality industry in particular, and ensure that support is put in place to recover from the effects of Covid and the loss of business?

John Swinney: We have provided a tremendous amount of support to the hospitality sector to enable it to shoulder much of the strain that has come during the period of restrictions. We are now operating in a context in which the hospitality sector is able to trade in a fashion that is fairly close to normal, and we welcome the contribution that the sector can make to the economy.

A number of ministers have been involved in a range of discussions with the hospitality sector. I have been involved in discussions principally with the Glasgow city centre hospitality community, with whom Kaukab Stewart will be familiar from her constituency interests and responsibilities. That community is very much focused on supporting the recovery of the city centre to enable more footfall and, as a consequence, to boost the work of the hospitality sector.

The Government is happy to engage further with the sector on positive steps that we can take to address the concerns and aspirations of the hospitality community.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): What steps will the Scottish Government take to ensure that unrestricted Covid recovery funds for councils are spent on appropriate Covid recovery matters and with well-thought-out plans that ensure that funds get to the people and communities that need them and deliver value for money for the United Kingdom taxpayer?

John Swinney: There is an interesting philosophical point in the question that Mr Kerr asked. There is a view—which has been pretty predominant within Parliament—that, when we distribute funds to local authorities, it is for local decision makers to decide how that money is spent. For the Government to come along and second guess decisions that have been made at local level would, I think, possibly attract—*[Interruption.]* Mr Kerr is suggesting that that is not second guessing; however, I am not quite sure what would be happening if the Government was scrutinising funding decisions that are taken by local authorities. Indeed, I think, to be frank, that local authorities would rail against such a stance being taken by the Government.

I am happy to explore the points that Mr Kerr raised, if he is suggesting that the Government should intervene in those matters. If that is the Conservatives' latest position, I will explore that. However, fundamentally, I believe that a partnership with local government is a reliable and effective way to ensure that communities are well supported in the process.

Covid-19 Recovery Consultation

4. Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it plans to encourage people to engage with and respond to the Covid-19 recovery consultation. (S6O-00068)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney):

On 17 August, the Scottish Government launched a 12-week public consultation to review the legislative powers that have supported our response to Covid. It is a full public consultation that is open for views through to 9 November and aims to support Scotland's recovery from Covid.

The consultation has been widely publicised on social media, and a dedicated web page with supporting information has been established. We have ensured that the 30 topics that the consultation covers have been brought to the attention of key stakeholders, and we are considering how best to include the voices of disabled people in the consultation process, following representations on that issue during the passage through Parliament of the Coronavirus (Extension and Expiry) (Scotland) Act 2021. I am pleased to say that the consultation has already

attracted a lot of interest, and that more than 1,600 responses have been submitted so far.

Fulton MacGregor: During the pandemic, swift progress was made to set up remote jury centres. It is important that services can continue to operate in a way that does not impede access to justice. Can the cabinet secretary outline the Scottish Government's proposals for helping our justice system to renew and recover from the pandemic?

I should say that I am just out of a meeting of the Criminal Justice Committee, at which we had a really useful session with the justice ministers.

John Swinney: The consultation invites views on 30 specific legislative proposals that have the potential to support Covid recovery, including proposals for justice system reform to ensure that the tangible benefits of modernisations and practices that have been adopted during the pandemic can be maintained, where that is appropriate. I stress, "where that is appropriate."

Proposals will also cover the response to the impact of Covid on Scotland's justice system specifically where backlogs have, unavoidably, built up. There is an opportunity in the consultation to address a number of the aspirations that are inherent in Mr MacGregor's question, and the Government looks forward to engaging with members of the public on those points.

Covid-19 Recovery (North-east Scotland)

5. Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how its policies and actions across Government will support the north-east to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic. (S6O-00069)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney): We are actively supporting economic recovery in the north-east and have provided close to £100 million to businesses and additional funding of almost £150 million to councils to help to achieve that. We are also investing £157 million in the Aberdeen city region deal and the Moray growth deal, and more than £14 million to develop the skills that are needed to support regional economic recovery. Alongside that, we have recently confirmed our intention to commit £500 million of capital to support the just transition of the region and Moray, to support energy transition and to create jobs and maximise their future economic potential.

Gillian Martin: I thank the cabinet secretary for that answer and I welcome absolutely everything that he listed. There is an opportunity, in Covid recovery, to address a number of Government objectives. Inequity in the ability to access fast low-emissions public transport is one that has long

been an issue in my constituency and the wider eastern corner of north-east Scotland.

Will the Government, in its commitment to reopen analysis of the Dyce to Ellon rail line, look at the wider societal, environmental and economic benefits of such a rail link and base its decisions on wider criteria than simply projected passenger numbers? Will it commit to working with the people in my constituency and the neighbouring constituency on the case for the line, taking into account the workforce changes since Covid and the need for the jobs market to be accessible to people in rural areas who are seeking work?

John Swinney: I am very happy to commit the Government to engage on that basis. The strategic developments to which Gillian Martin has referred are significant in the north-east of Scotland, and they provide the opportunity to contribute to achievement of the Government's obligations on net zero emissions. We look forward to engaging on those points, which will be the subject of further analysis as we develop the projects.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There are a couple of supplementaries. I would welcome brief questions and succinct answers.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): I met Fraserburgh Harbour Commissioners on Monday. The commissioners detailed in their master plan ambitious and exciting expansion plans, which could significantly support the north-east's recovery from the pandemic and give even more reason to send trains up there, as well as to improve the roads. Does the Scottish Government support Fraserburgh Harbour Commissioners' ambitions, and will the cabinet secretary back their expansion proposals?

John Swinney: The Government engages on a range of projects around the country. Resources are challenging—I think that everybody knows that—but I certainly welcome the proposals to which Liam Kerr refers. My ministerial colleagues will be happy to engage on any proposals that come forward.

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): Remobilising our national health service will be critical to our Covid recovery in the north-east, and ensuring that we have the staff in place to do that will be vital.

Will the Deputy First Minister help that process by supporting the district nurses in Dundee who, three years ago, were regraded from band 6 to band 7 but have not had the process honoured by NHS Tayside? Does he agree that the situation is disgraceful, after those nurses' selfless service during the pandemic? Will his Government intervene to ensure that the upgrading is honoured immediately?

John Swinney: As Mr Marra will be aware, the issue is the responsibility of NHS Tayside to determine. The board must make decisions that are appropriate based on all the advice that is available to it. I will certainly draw Mr Marra's representations to the attention of NHS Tayside as a consequence of our exchange today.

Covid-19 Recovery (Parliamentary Procedure)

6. Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will commit to ensuring that any legislation it introduces to support the recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic does not seek to allow regulations to be made or changed without being subject to the affirmative parliamentary procedure. (S6O-00070)

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (George Adam): I thank Alexander Stewart for asking the first question that I will answer as a minister.

The Government is currently consulting on 30 public health, public services and justice system proposals that have the potential to support Covid recovery. Given the range of topics and potential scenarios that are covered by the consultation, the Government cannot commit to the standard affirmative procedure applying in all circumstances in bills that we introduce following the consultation.

However, I assure the member that we will consider carefully how we ensure that the Scottish Parliament is able effectively to scrutinise regulations that the Scottish Government brings forward in future. Of course, any bill that the Government introduces will be subject to parliamentary scrutiny and there will be the opportunity for the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee and other committees of the Parliament to consider fully the procedures that apply to delegated powers.

Alexander Stewart: Under the current coronavirus legislation, regulations do not have to be proactively put before the Scottish Parliament if the Scottish ministers consider that they need to be made urgently. Does the minister agree that it is not acceptable to enact, or approve without a vote, regulations that affect everyone's lives? Will he rule out the inclusion of provisions in that regard in any legislation under the temporary coronavirus powers?

George Adam: As the situation with the pandemic has changed, ministers have had to take swift action in relation to legal restrictions and requirements, and the emergency coronavirus regulations have been required to take effect quickly. That is the case not only when restrictions require to be imposed quickly, but when they require to be lifted because they are no longer necessary. The procedure allows for a swift

response to put restrictions in place and to lift them when they are no longer needed. There is a time and a place for us to take action to make things better for the people of Scotland.

Covid-19 Pandemic Public Inquiry

7. Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will outline the timescale for the independent public inquiry into the handling of the Covid-19 pandemic. (S6O-00071)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney): The Scottish Government will establish a Scottish public inquiry under the Inquiries Act 2005 by the end of this year in order to scrutinise decisions that were taken during the course of the pandemic so that lessons are learned for future pandemics. The Scottish Government is currently inviting views on the inquiry's draft aims and principles, which will shape the terms of reference. Discussions are also going on with the United Kingdom Government on the planned UK inquiry in order to ensure that all areas that need to be considered are covered in a way that gives confidence to bereaved families and others.

Annabelle Ewing: Given the importance of the issues involved, is it anticipated that there could be staggered reporting as the inquiry progresses, by way of interim reports, such that important lessons can be learned and recommendations made in a timely manner?

John Swinney: Annabelle Ewing makes a reasonable point, but the process of and timescale for the inquiry will be matters for the chair of the inquiry, who will operate independently of ministers.

We can, of course, set out some of our expectations as a consequence of our discussions with interested parties. A very good example of how phased reporting can illuminate issues that an inquiry is wrestling with is provided by the inquiry into historical abuse, which Lady Smith chairs: a number of case studies have been reported and the approach has provided clarity and certainty for many individuals who have suffered in that regard. There are models that can operate in the spirit that Annabelle Ewing envisages, and I will consider the issue as we establish the terms of reference.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 8 is from Siobhian Brown, who joins us remotely.

Covid-19 Recovery (Spending Decisions)

8. Siobhian Brown (Ayr) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what assurances it has had from the United Kingdom Government that decisions on spending on the recovery from the

Covid-19 pandemic will be taken in Scotland. (S6O-00072)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney):

The United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020 has undermined any assurance around decisions on Covid recovery spending in devolved areas being taken in Scotland. The act's spending powers cover a wide range of areas, including some that relate to Covid recovery. Any such spending could bring the prospect of unco-ordinated spending and policy incoherence, which could hinder, rather than support, Covid recovery. The way that the UK Government has used the powers so far offers little assurance—rather, it has been the opposite.

Siobhian Brown: Does the cabinet secretary agree that it is crucial that no more devolved powers are stripped from the Scottish Parliament and that decisions on Covid recovery spending in Scotland should be placed firmly in the hands of the Scottish Parliament?

John Swinney: I agree with that point. The Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament have made it crystal clear that the UK Government's 2020 act is unwelcome legislation that undermines the Scottish Parliament's powers. It is crucial that the Scottish Parliament's powers are respected. Those powers were supported by people in a referendum in 1997 and they have subsequently been enhanced by various legislative instruments that have been passed. Our decision-making structures should not be undermined or eroded by the UK Government.

Net Zero, Energy and Transport

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next portfolio is net zero, energy and transport. A number of members have already indicated that they want to ask supplementary questions and we are breaking new ground by having four different ministers answering questions in this session, so I would be grateful for brief questions and answers whenever possible.

Pavement Parking Prohibition

1. **Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government when it expects to implement the provisions on pavement parking prohibition in the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019. (S6O-00073)

The Minister for Transport (Graeme Dey): Officials are continuing to consult local authorities to develop the secondary legislation and parking standards guidance and to consult the public on areas that are contained in the legislation. In addition, local authorities require about 12 months to undertake assessments to consider whether they wish to exempt, subject to the criteria, any

areas of pavement from the prohibition. As such, the majority of the secondary legislation is likely to be in place by 2022.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: It is now almost two years since the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 received royal assent. What funding is the Government providing to aid the implementation of the provisions to ban pavement parking? What assessment has been done of any funding that it has provided to date?

Graeme Dey: As the member is aware, implementation of the parking elements was hindered by Covid and Brexit, but work is now well under way. An initial £1.6 million of funding for assessments has been distributed to councils alongside the draft chapters of the parking standards guidance document.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 2 is from Colin Beattie, who joins us remotely.

Net Zero Emissions (Community Groups)

2. **Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what further guidance and support it will provide to community groups to help them meet the goal of net zero emissions. (S6O-00074)

The Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport (Michael Matheson): We must engage communities across the country in our journey to net zero. Communities are being supported via the climate challenge fund as well as through the developing network of climate action hubs and towns. We are also launching a number of national initiatives in the run-up to climate week.

Our new website netzeronation.scot aims to help the public and communities to understand how they can play their part in tackling the global climate emergency, and it provides resources for community action. The website also signposts to further practical and financial support that is available to communities through other initiatives.

Colin Beattie: In my Midlothian North and Musselburgh constituency, there are well over 250 community groups with varying sizes and levels of activity. What financial support might be made available to those groups to assist them on their journey to net zero?

Michael Matheson: A number of Scottish Government funding packages are available to communities. For example, the Penicuik Community Development Trust in the member's constituency was awarded just under £116,000 in the current financial year from the climate challenge fund for its Penicuik carbon challenge project, which offers free support to help residents

and groups to reduce their carbon footprint by tackling waste.

The funding that is available to support communities on their journey to net zero includes the Scottish Government's community and renewable energy scheme, which provides advice, loans and grant funding. Up to £5.25 million is available in the current financial year to support local community groups to develop renewable energy projects, supporting the growth of community and locally owned energy projects. There is also the Energy Saving Trust programme, which delivers a range of initiatives such as the e-bike grant scheme and provides support to community-based organisations to move to active travel. Further community support is available through the love local campaign, which is being rolled out nationally.

There are a range of different funding streams that community groups can access. I encourage any community group that is looking for advice on them to look to the netzeronation.scot website for further information, or to the Scottish communities climate action network website, which also contains a considerable amount of information on the area.

Net Zero Targets (Small and Medium-sized Businesses)

3. Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the net zero secretary has had with ministerial colleagues regarding action to support small and medium-sized businesses to reduce their carbon emissions, as part of wider efforts to reach net zero targets. (S6O-00075)

The Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport (Michael Matheson): I regularly meet ministerial colleagues to discuss the collective action that is being taken across the Scottish Government to support our net zero ambitions.

In advance of the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP26—we have made targeted commitments to drive opportunities for Scottish businesses and supply chains—for example, through an additional £2 billion of infrastructure investment over the current parliamentary session to stimulate demand and create jobs in the transition to net zero. As part of our climate emergency skills action plan, we will build a toolkit to help small and micro businesses develop the skills and knowledge that they need to adapt to the demands of the transition to net zero.

We are also working across the Scottish Government to finalise plans for the Scottish climate week, which will run from 13 to 19 September and will support small and medium-

sized enterprises across Scotland to hold events or take forward climate action with their teams.

Brian Whittle: The cabinet secretary may be aware of research by accountancy firm Grant Thornton UK LLP that suggests that roughly only half of businesses have a net zero strategy, despite strong recognition among the business community of the value of strong environmental performance. With such a high proportion of Scottish businesses in the SME sector, will the Scottish Government put a higher priority on supporting that kind of innovation in SMEs in relation to net zero instead of constantly targeting the few big businesses that Scotland currently has?

Michael Matheson: Everyone has a collective responsibility to play their part in helping to achieve Scotland becoming a net zero nation by 2045, whether that be at an individual, community or business level, as an SME or a major corporation. They all have a part to play in helping to support us in achieving that target, and we are already taking a range of actions. I have mentioned the net zero nation campaign, which is presently being rolled out in order to inform individuals, communities and businesses about the actions and opportunities that they can take forward in achieving net zero.

Those are all part of the on-going plan, but it is equally important that we help businesses to seize the opportunities that will arise as we become a net zero nation through the new technologies that will have to be developed and the deployment of those new technologies across domestic and non-domestic premises. All of that will provide opportunities for SMEs across the country to play their part in the range of work that we are taking forward, such as the skills academy and in other areas around green skills.

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): According to research that Citizens Advice Scotland published earlier this year, Scottish businesses were less likely than businesses across the United Kingdom to have introduced decarbonisation measures. Will the Government adopt all the recommendations in that report? Can the cabinet secretary say how much funding is available for the toolkit that he mentioned?

Michael Matheson: Monica Lennon's question relates to the answer that I just gave to Brian Whittle. It is important that all parts of our community, including businesses, play their part in helping us to meet our net zero nation aim. That is why the on-going communication plan covers engagement with business organisations, helping to support them to inform their members about the work that they can take forward in order to become net zero businesses.

The reality, from my engagement with businesses at both the SME and corporate levels, is that they recognise that becoming net zero will be a key part of their business and that people want to see businesses playing their part in achieving net zero. That is why we have funding streams through a number of programmes that can support businesses to get loans and grants to assist them in decarbonising their operations. A big part of that will be about making sure that we build on that work as we progress.

I do not have a specific figure for the toolkit, but it is an important part of what the business community has asked us for in order to assist and support those businesses that do not have plans in place just now to take the necessary action.

Rest and Be Thankful Landslips (A83)

4. **Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government how much it has spent, and plans to spend, over the next four years, on the mitigation of landslips at the Rest and Be Thankful on the A83. (S6O-00076)

The Minister for Transport (Graeme Dey): Since 2007, we have invested £87 million in the maintenance of the A83, including more than £15 million in landslide mitigation works to provide additional resilience at the Rest and Be Thankful, such as debris netting, bunds and improvements to drainage.

Subject to the annual budget process and spending review, our current plan is to spend a further £8.8 million over the coming years on short-term mitigation measures. There is also budget set aside for progression of the medium-term and long-term works in Glen Croe, which shows our absolute determination to invest in the road in the short, medium and long terms to help keep Argyll open for business and enable residents and visitors alike to travel to and from the area.

Jackie Baillie: The minister has acknowledged that £15 million has been spent and a further £8 million is in the pipeline, and £1 million has recently been spent on extending the catch pits at the Rest and Be Thankful. Does he think that that will be enough to withstand a large landslide of, say, 100 tonnes of debris? If so, why does Transport Scotland keep on closing the road when it rains? Does he believe, therefore, that now is the time for all alternatives to be explored in order to maintain access to Argyll?

Graeme Dey: As Jackie Baillie well knows, because we have met to discuss the issue, there are no certainties about this; we are in the hands of mother nature. I know that Jackie Baillie would not sit there and suggest to me that we should not conduct those measures—we need to do so in

order to minimise the risk there. A great deal of effort goes into ensuring that any risk associated with the route is minimised. I absolutely agree with her, and I hope that I can give her some assurance if she does not have it already. A parallel process is taking place: every mitigation possible is being deployed and, at exactly the same time, work is going on to develop proposals for the medium and long terms in order to provide the outcome that we all desire.

Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): Can the Scottish Government give an assurance to residents, businesses and visitors of Argyll and Bute that the mitigation work that is currently under way is not to the detriment of a long-term solution? Can the minister share with Parliament the timeline for finding that solution?

Graeme Dey: As I have just said to Jackie Baillie, there is a parallel process that includes the current mitigation work, the medium-term development work and the long-term work. We are currently in the phase of gathering data in order to inform the best choice of specific route. That should be concluded by the end of this year. At that point, all being well, we will have a clearer picture of the workable options.

We will then move to the development of a final proposal for a medium-term solution. There are, of course, many unknowns, such as ownership of the land depending on the route, engineering requirements and ground condition, but we are working with all haste on that. I do not want to give hostages to fortune, but it is feasible that, towards the end of next year, we will have a firm, shovel-ready proposal to take forward. That is where we hope to be at that point.

Net Zero (Housing)

5. **Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab):** I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of members' interests, as I am the owner of a rental property in North Lanarkshire.

To ask the Scottish Government what analysis it has commissioned of the likely costs to homeowners and landlords of reaching net zero emissions in housing by 2045. (S6O-00077)

Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights (Patrick Harvie): Scottish Government analysis suggests that the total capital costs of converting our building stock to zero emissions by 2045 is in the region of £33 billion. That includes the installation of zero-emissions heat and energy efficiency measures in both domestic and non-domestic buildings. It does not take account of the business-as-usual investments that households and businesses would need to make in order to replace fossil-fuel boilers as they reach the end of their lives, nor the

additional investment that is likely to be needed in wider energy infrastructure. The Government has commissioned a range of further research to understand the wider costs that are associated with the heat transition, and that work will be published once it is finalised.

Mark Griffin: Recent announcements on the decarbonisation of all properties across all tenures in the wider Glasgow city region put the cost at £9 billion to decarbonise their heating and make them energy efficient. Two thirds of those properties—300,000—are owner-occupied. While some owner-occupiers will be able to afford to make a contribution, we know that many, including in my region, will not. Can the minister set out the Government's plans to support low-income owner-occupiers who have little savings, the expectations on those owner-occupiers and the support that the Government will provide to enable them to participate fully in the journey towards 2045?

Patrick Harvie: No one doubts that that is a mammoth challenge for us all, which will have a wide range of impacts on people in different tenures and economic circumstances. The Scottish Government already makes support available—for example, through the home energy Scotland loan scheme, which involves interest-free unsecured loans of up to £38,500 per home to enable owner-occupiers to install energy efficiency and heating measures and a cashback scheme that provides eligible households with up to £13,500 towards zero-emissions heating systems and energy efficiency measures. A range of other schemes are also in place, including area-based schemes, which have been extended to include zero-emissions heating, and the Scottish Government has also introduced a top-up grant to support that process.

The member is well aware that we will continue to research the scale of the challenge and the steps that both this Government and the UK Government need to take. The actions of the latter will be necessary to make zero-carbon heating systems affordable by comparison with fossil-fuel ones.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will allow a brief supplementary question from Liam Kerr.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): The cabinet secretary recently told me that it would cost £17,000 per property to upgrade off-gas-grid homes from EPC bands E to G to EPC band C. There are around 500,000 off-grid homes, more than 100,000 of which cannot be fitted with a heat pump; so, even if it were just those upgrades, it would cost more than £1 billion—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That is not brief, Mr Kerr.

Liam Kerr: What analysis has been done of that process and who will be expected to pay?

Patrick Harvie: I have already indicated a significant range of measures by which the public purse helps to meet those costs. Obviously, the public purse cannot meet all of them, nor should homeowners do so. We all have to rise to the challenge.

In relation to heat pumps, most of us recognise that not one single solution is right for every property in every location. We do not intend to take a mandatory approach to imposing a single solution for all properties. As with Mr Griffin, I am sure that the Government will want to keep Mr Kerr and all parties informed of further work in that area.

ScotRail Service Reduction

6. Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to reported proposals by ScotRail to no longer run 300 train services from May 2022. (S6O-00078)

The Minister for Transport (Graeme Dey): I will provide a full picture of the ScotRail proposal. I am sure that Colin Smyth is not deliberately trying to give the impression that service levels overall have been reduced. The fact is that, under these proposals, we would see an increase of 100 services per day on the current level. By way of example, the Glasgow to Carlisle via Kilmarnock and Dumfries line, in the member's region, would benefit.

The review seeks to create a national rail service that meets the country's needs and travel patterns. ScotRail has examined, pre-Covid, an expected future demand and developed a proposed timetable that seeks to match service patterns with uptake, with scope for additional future capacity, while recognising the need for financial and environmental sustainability.

The proposed timetable is a new starting point, not the end point. It has been designed to accommodate pre-pandemic levels of demand while removing much of the unused capacity on the network. As more people return to using rail, further services for which there is a demand will be introduced. The public consultation provides an opportunity for ScotRail customers and businesses to help shape a reliable and responsive timetable change, and I encourage people to make their views known.

Colin Smyth: I am sure that the minister does not want to mislead people by implying that the overall number of services will not be reduced compared to the pre-pandemic level, because that is exactly what the proposals are about. Frankly, we will not get people back on our trains by taking their train away. I ask the minister this specifically:

will the Scottish National Party-Green Government rule out reducing the overall number of rail services compared to pre-pandemic levels when that new timetable is introduced in May 2022?

Graeme Dey: It is, frankly, baffling that a member of the Scottish Parliament can sit here and call for a never-ending increase in services, with no consideration for the cost. The direction of travel that was set by this Government pre-pandemic saw services increase and stations open up—that is the journey that we are on. We are currently—*[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Listen to the response, please.

Graeme Dey: As a parliamentarian, I have yet to encounter any set of draft proposals that is perfect or, indeed, that is not ultimately amended in some form as the associated processes work through. It is therefore important that people work through the consultation. However, in doing this work, we have to be realistic because we cannot run services that are little utilised. As we build back, we need to match services to demand and build from there. Alongside all of that, we will be delivering a raft of improvements, such as decarbonisation of the network, new stations and a modal shift for freight from road to rail.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We have a quick supplementary from James Dornan.

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): Can the minister tell us what has changed in rail services in Scotland since the SNP came into power in 2007?

Graeme Dey: A very great deal—and for the better—is the answer. Under this Government, communities and businesses have benefited from significant investment across Scotland's railways. We have seen that in the number of seats on trains, the stations that have reopened and decarbonisation. As I said earlier, that is the direction of travel. To characterise it more fully, prior to the pandemic there were 190,000 more seats on our trains compared to 2008.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We have a very brief supplementary from Graham Simpson.

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): Minister, is this a taste of things to come when ScotRail is nationalised?

Graeme Dey: That is exactly the kind of question that I would have expected from Mr Simpson. The direction of travel that has been set by this Government is clear: investment in rail, decarbonisation of rail and a great deal of support for rail. That is where we are going.

Water Scarcity Reporting

7. Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to ensure that water scarcity reporting is accurate and reflective of all areas of Scotland. (S6O-00079)

The Minister for Environment, Biodiversity and Land Reform (Màiri McAllan): The Scottish Environment Protection Agency is responsible for the forecast, monitoring and reporting of the situation facing Scotland's water resources; it produces a weekly report on that. Of course, on the ground, information from local authorities is crucial in understanding the impact that drought is having on water supplies. That is why a dedicated reporting line has been set up, enabling local authorities to provide real-time information to the Scottish Government and SEPA. The Scottish Government very much values the monitoring and assessment work that goes on in that regard.

Elena Whitham: It was alarming to have constituents contact me during the summer to advise me that their private water supplies were lower or dry and that we were at a standing start for supplying emergency drinking water. I would like to have noted my thanks for the assistance from the Scottish Government to my many constituents who are not on the mains water supply due to the rurality of their properties. I ask that the minister commits to ensuring the robustness of water scarcity reporting so that both spheres of government can react to the real humanitarian crisis when indicators suggest that private water supplies are at risk.

Màiri McAllan: I understand Elena Whitham's concerns and, as someone who relies on a private water supply, I understand the concerns of those who have experienced water scarcity. In recognition of those scarcity events this summer, the Scottish Government acted quickly to fund a scheme for the provision of supplies of bottled water. That scheme is on top of an existing, non-means-tested grant of £800, which is already available to owners and users of private water supplies, to make improvements to their system. The national water scarcity plan sets out clearly how water scarcity levels are determined by SEPA and how those are informed, using a scientific approach and current research.

Glasgow City Council (Connectivity Commission Recommendations)

8. Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what support it plans to provide to Glasgow City Council to implement the recommendations in the report by the Connectivity Commission, including funding for the proposed metro system. (S6O-00080)

The Minister for Transport (Graeme Dey):

Pauline McNeill will be aware that that work was commissioned by Glasgow City Council and it will be for the council to determine whether it wishes to implement the Connectivity Commission's recommendations.

However, we are progressing the second strategic transport projects review, which is considering the case for a Glasgow metro, and the Scottish Government is working collaboratively with Glasgow City Council on that. Decisions on future funding will be made after STPR2 is concluded and as part of the Scottish budget process.

Of course, the Glasgow city region local authorities have more than £1 billion in their growth deal infrastructure fund, of which the Scottish Government committed £500 million, to use for investment in infrastructure such as the Glasgow metro.

Pauline McNeill: The minister is aware that it is one of the biggest projects that Glasgow intends to support in order to transition to sustainable transport—it is a really important project. However, press reports indicate that the private finance that the leader of the council is seeking looks uncertain. Does the minister share my concerns that the funding needs to be nailed down and that Glasgow City Council's intention to at least partly fund the metro system with private finance raises questions about whether the necessary progress will be made in a reasonable timescale? I accept that the work is a collaboration, but I hope that the Scottish Government can assure me that it will take a strong interest in it. Glasgow is Scotland's largest city. We desperately need a project that will help us transition to net zero, and that looks like it could be the one.

Graeme Dey: Briefly, the fact that the project features in STPR2 is a recognition of its national importance.

Covid-19

14:53

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): I remind members that social distancing measures are in place in the chamber and across the Holyrood campus. I ask that members take care to observe those measures, including when entering and exiting the chamber, and that they use the aisles and walkways only to access their seat and when moving around the chamber.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. You will be aware that important Government announcements should be made first to the chamber before they are given to the press. At 14:40 this afternoon, in advance of the statement to the Parliament that the First Minister is about to make, key details—in particular, proposals to introduce vaccine certification—were posted on social media by the BBC. I am sure that you agree that that is a discourtesy to Parliament. Will you investigate whether that has been a breach of standing orders by the Scottish Government?

The Presiding Officer: I thank Murdo Fraser for his point of order. I have not had an opportunity to view the information to which he refers, but it is certainly my expectation that any and all statements be made in the first instance to the Parliament wherever possible. That would seem to be the case on this occasion, so I will look further into the issue.

The next item of business is a Covid-19 update in the form of a statement by Nicola Sturgeon. The First Minister will take questions at the end of her statement so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:55

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Today, I will update Parliament on the state of the pandemic in Scotland, discuss the recent surge in cases and give our best assessment of the current situation. I will also outline the additional action that we are taking to try to slow transmission and reduce the spread of the virus.

I will start with the latest daily statistics, albeit in summary form, as they were published around an hour ago. There were 6,170 positive cases reported yesterday, which is 11.5 per cent of all tests carried out. There are 629 people in hospital with Covid, which is 44 more than yesterday, and 59 people are in intensive care, which is five more than yesterday. Sadly, a further nine deaths have been reported in the past 24 hours, taking the total number of deaths under the daily definition to

8,127. As always, my condolences are with everyone who has lost a loved one.

On vaccination, 4,108,804 people have received a first dose, and 3,691,066 have now had both doses. That includes 95 per cent of people over the age of 40 who are now fully vaccinated, as well as 71 per cent of 30 to 39-year-olds and 51 per cent of 18 to 29-year-olds. However, 74 per cent of 18 to 29-year-olds have had a first dose, so we expect the proportion becoming fully vaccinated to continue to increase in the days ahead. Finally, almost exactly half of all 16 and 17-year-olds have now had the first jab. Vaccination in that age group started relatively recently, and work to increase uptake further is on-going. All 16 and 17-year-olds who have not yet had a first dose should have received a letter yesterday inviting them to an appointment.

As members are aware, we still await advice from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation on vaccinating all 12 to 15-year-olds, and I hope that the evidence will allow the JCVI to give a positive recommendation very soon. If that is the case, we stand ready to implement that recommendation.

I will talk more about the importance of vaccination later, but I will first address the surge in cases that we have experienced over recent weeks. Case levels are 80 per cent higher now than they were last week, and are five times higher than they were four weeks ago. Test positivity has also risen, from around 5 per cent at the start of August to 11.5 per cent today. As we indicated at the time, it was always likely that, as restrictions were lifted, we would see cases rise. The virus is highly infectious, so as people mix together more, it will take the opportunity to spread. Indeed, cases are rising across all of the United Kingdom and in many other countries.

However, in Scotland, unlike in England and Wales, schools have been back for some time, and we expected that that would create a further pressure not only as a result of increased interactions in schools, but because we know that there are certain ways—school drop-offs, for example—in which adults tend to mix more when schools are back. Despite expecting to see some increase in cases, the scale of the increase in recent weeks has been extremely concerning. There is no doubt that that underlines the fact that the delta variant is significantly more transmissible than previous strains.

Just as vaccines have changed the game for us in a very good way, delta has changed it in a very challenging way. That has been evident to us in the past few weeks. That is why we have been reminding the public in recent days that, if we are to avoid any re-imposition of restrictions—even in

a limited way—as we all want to do, we must all play our part to slow transmission.

We have been urging everyone to comply with all the basic mitigations that are still in place, such as the use of face coverings, and to carefully follow all public health advice. If we all do that—later, I will again set out exactly what we are asking people to do—I am hopeful that we can turn the corner without having to re-impose any restrictions. However, I stress that the next few days will be crucial in our assessment, and it is inescapably the case that we must turn the corner and see the sharp increase in cases level off and then come down.

I will explain again why that is important, even with vaccination levels as high as they are. It absolutely remains the case that vaccination has significantly reduced the link between cases of Covid and serious health harm from Covid. The proportion of people with the virus who end up in hospital is much lower now than it was pre-vaccine. Indeed, that is why the record number of new cases that has been reported in recent days has not caused a record number of hospital admissions. That is very positive, but it must not make us complacent.

Although the link between new cases and serious health harm is now much weaker, it has not been completely broken—either here or anywhere else in the world; like us, many countries are grappling with the delta variant. We can see that clearly in the recent data. On Friday 20 August, 312 people were in hospital with Covid; today, there are 629. The number of people in intensive care has risen more slowly, but it has risen. On 20 August, it was 34; today, it is 59. Of course, hospital figures do not capture all the health harm caused by Covid. For example, they exclude people who do not require hospital treatment but still go on to suffer long Covid.

There is a matter of basic arithmetic at play. If the recent surge in cases was to continue—if, for instance, cases were to rise to 10,000 or more a day, which is something that I hope will not happen but is by no means impossible—that would have serious consequences. A lot of people would fall seriously ill and, obviously, some people would die. Also, the national health service would come under even more severe pressure.

To reiterate, that is a matter of basic arithmetic. At the start of the year, daily reported cases peaked at around 2,600, and, at that time, which was pre-vaccine, around 13 per cent of cases were ending up in hospital. Today—this is good news—around only 2 to 3 per cent end up in hospital. However, 2 to 3 per cent of 10,000 cases a day will cause similar pressure on our NHS as 13 per cent of 2,600.

This pressure is building at a time when many staff have been flat out for more than 18 months and when the NHS is working hard to deal with the backlog of other cases that has been caused by the earlier waves of the pandemic.

The situation that we face is fragile and serious. We must stem the rise in cases. Obviously, it would not be responsible for any Government in the face of the virus and the harm that it can still do to rule out reintroducing any restrictions. Indeed, in my view, that would be grossly irresponsible. However, we do not want to reimpose restrictions, even in a limited way. We know only too well how much harm restrictions cause to businesses, young people's education and to our overall wellbeing. If that is to be avoided—as I very much hope that it can be—it will take all of us again making a conscious and concerted effort to comply with all the basic mitigations that we know from experience can slow down transmission. Of course, that applies to individuals as well as businesses.

I will set out some of the work that the Government is doing, including on one particularly significant issue, and what we are asking everyone to do.

Over the past two weeks, cabinet secretaries have been engaging closely with business and sectoral organisations across the country to encourage significantly increased compliance with existing baseline measures. That, of course, includes the wearing of face coverings, encouraging stringent hygiene and support for continued home working where possible.

I am very grateful to businesses for the efforts being made to keep staff and customers safe, and I am particularly grateful to those businesses that are continuing to support home working. It is vital that those efforts continue. I know that they are not easy for business, but they are much less onerous to them than any further restrictions would be.

We are continuing to support urgent measures to improve ventilation in schools—for example, the purchase and use of CO₂ monitors. We are also looking urgently at options to support better ventilation in priority workplaces.

We continue to do everything possible to drive up the already high uptake of vaccine. Getting vaccinated remains the single most important step that any of us can take to keep ourselves and others safe. Therefore, ensuring that as many people as possible get vaccinated remains an absolutely key priority.

As I have mentioned, we expect updated advice from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation soon on vaccination of 12 to 15-year-olds and on booster jabs for vulnerable

groups such as older people and those with compromised immune systems.

We will, and stand ready to move to implement any such extensions to the vaccine programme as soon as we get the JCVI recommendations to do so, which I hope very much will be soon.

We are also taking targeted steps to increase uptake among groups who are already eligible for vaccination. I mentioned earlier that an invitation letter has recently been sent to all 16-year-olds and 17-year-olds who have not yet had a first dose. Mobile vaccination units will be used during university and college freshers weeks to encourage students who have not already done so to get vaccinated.

We will also concentrate further effort in the days ahead on encouraging anyone in the under-40 age group who has not yet had the vaccine, or has not had the second dose, to do so now.

It really is impossible to overstate the importance of vaccination in getting us safely through this phase and the winter months ahead. By getting vaccinated, we help to keep ourselves and others safe. The reverse of that is equally true: not getting vaccinated, if you are eligible, puts you and others at greater risk, and it makes it less likely that we can make it through the winter without having to reintroduce some restrictions. To everyone out there who has not already had their jabs, I say, "Please do your civic duty—please get vaccinated now, for your own sake and for all of us."

The final issue that I want to address is vaccine certification, for when entry to venues is dependent on people being able to show that they have been fully vaccinated. In recent months there has been a lot of discussion about vaccine certification. As I have indicated before, the Government has been considering very carefully whether—notwithstanding the understandable equity and ethical concerns—vaccine certification could, in some settings, help to protect public health, reduce the necessity for any further restrictions and, of course, boost vaccine take-up.

The Scottish Government has made it clear that we do not believe that vaccination certification should ever be a requirement for receipt of any key services or in settings where people have no choice over attendance—for example, public transport, education and access to medical services or shops. We continue to hold very firmly to that position. However, we consider that limited use of vaccine certification could help to control spread of the virus as we head into the autumn and winter.

For any decision of that nature to have an impact before winter, we would have to take and implement it quickly. However, I recognise that it is

a significant decision so, in my view, it should be expressly authorised by Parliament. I therefore propose that, subject to the Presiding Officer's agreement, we have a full debate and vote on the matter next week. To help to prepare for that, I will set out now what the Government, after much consideration, has concluded would be appropriate.

We propose that, subject to Parliament's agreement, vaccination certification should be introduced later this month—once all adults have had the opportunity to be fully vaccinated—for the following events and venues: first, nightclubs and adult entertainment venues; secondly, unseated indoor live events with more than 500 people in the audience; thirdly, unseated outdoor live events with more than 4,000 people in the audience; and lastly, any event of any nature that has more than 10,000 people in attendance. We do not currently consider that it would be appropriate to introduce certification for the hospitality industry as a whole, and we hope that it will not be necessary to do so. However, we will keep that position under review.

We are also very aware of the need to take account of people who, for good reason, cannot get fully vaccinated with both doses of the vaccine. For example, we envisage that children and people with particular medical conditions would be exempt from certification requirements. However, we consider that in order to help to protect individuals and the country as a whole, and to reduce the risk of further restrictions becoming necessary, people over 18 years old who are eligible for vaccination should be required to show that they have received both doses before entry to premises and events such as I have mentioned.

It is already possible to request that a paper copy of your vaccination record be posted to you to allow you to travel. From this Friday onwards, well in advance of any certification scheme coming into operation, we will also provide a QR code. That means that you will be able to download a copy of your vaccination record to keep on your phone or to print.

The introduction of Covid vaccine certificates, even in the limited circumstances that I have set out, is a significant move and not one that we would ever take lightly. That is why I believe that it should have parliamentary approval in advance. However, it is worth stressing that although we have had to weigh the decision carefully, we would be in no way unique in taking the step. The UK Government has announced its intention to introduce certification for England, and several European countries—including France, Italy and Ireland—have already introduced certification. In fact, the certification rules in several other countries cover a far wider range of venues than

those that we are currently considering for Scotland.

Many of the events and venues that will be covered by a certification scheme are important—they matter to our economy and to our cultural and social life, which is why we want to enable them to stay open safely. However, they are not essential services, and their nature, which involves bringing together many people in relatively small areas, means that despite their very best efforts—I know that they make their best efforts—they can contribute significantly to spread of the virus. By ensuring that people who enter those settings are fully vaccinated, we would be taking a proportionate step to help to make those settings safer for everyone attending and, by extension, for all of us.

As I said, I fervently hope—vaccine certification aside—that we will not have to impose any further legal restrictions. Of course, that depends on all of us making a concerted effort now, through our own behaviours, to stem transmission. We know that we cannot let cases continue to rise at the pace of recent weeks. We must slow down the pace. That is important for all of us as individuals, but especially for those who are most vulnerable to Covid.

We know that many of the people who are at highest risk, including many of those who were advised to shield at the start of the pandemic, are particularly anxious about the current situation. They worry that if they go out of their homes, especially with the number of cases being so high, they could be put at risk by people not wearing face coverings, not washing their hands or not trying to keep a safe distance. That should be a reminder for us all. When we take basic precautions, we are not simply protecting ourselves—although we are doing that, and it is important—we are making life easier and safer and helping to reduce anxiety for many others, too.

I will close by once again stressing the actions that each and every one of us needs to take in order to do that and to help to get cases down without further restrictions. First, as I stressed earlier, if you are eligible and have not yet done so, please get vaccinated. That remains the single most important thing that we can all do to keep everybody safe. There are drop-in vaccination centres in every mainland health board area. If you have not been vaccinated yet, or if you had your first dose eight or more weeks ago and have not had a second dose, you can just turn up at your nearest centre and get the jab.

Secondly, please test yourself regularly with lateral flow devices. If you do that and if you have the virus but do not have symptoms, you still have a chance of finding that out before inadvertently

passing on the virus to others. You can get free lateral flow tests through the NHS Inform website. They will be sent to you in the post or you can collect them from local pharmacies or test sites.

If you test positive through a lateral flow device or if you have symptoms of the virus, make sure that you self-isolate and book a PCR—polymerase chain reaction—test. If you are a contact of someone who has tested positive, you might also be told to self-isolate pending a PCR test, as I was at the start of the week. In any of those situations, please make sure that you self-isolate. That remains a really important way in which we can all slow down the spread of the virus.

Thirdly and finally, please follow all the guidance that is still in place. Please remember that it is still a legal requirement to wear face coverings in indoor public places such as shops, on public transport and when entering and moving about in hospitality settings. That is a simple but important way in which we can all protect one another.

More generally, please meet outdoors as much as possible. I know that that gets harder as the weather moves into autumn. If you are indoors, open the windows—good ventilation makes a big difference—and avoid crowded places. Indeed, for the next couple of weeks, perhaps all of us should think carefully about the number of contacts that we are having and, perhaps, reduce the number of those that are unnecessary. Even though it is not the law any more, keep a safe distance from people in other households if you can, especially indoors. Minimise direct physical contact such as handshaking, and keep washing your hands and surfaces thoroughly.

Having to take those steps is frustrating for us and for people across the world, but it really does make a difference—we know that from experience. It helps to limit the spread of the virus, and we must do that. We must do it to keep ourselves and our loved ones safer, and to help to ensure that we can avoid the need for any further restrictions.

The next few days are crucial. The Government is doing everything it can, and will continue to do so, but as has been the case throughout, we need your help, too. So, please, get vaccinated, get tested and tighten up again on following all the rules and guidelines. I again thank everyone across the country who is doing that.

The Presiding Officer: The First Minister will now take questions on the issues that were raised in her statement. I intend to allow around 40 minutes for questions, after which we will move on to the next item of business.

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Covid rates are very high, which is a reminder that the virus has not gone away. We have to learn to

live with Covid-19—[*Inaudible.*]—a better place because of the success of the vaccination programme across the country. We have to focus on the vaccine and on test and protect, because we cannot force more restrictions on the people of Scotland. We know that that would risk their mental health and result in job losses.

Appearing before a Scottish Parliament committee this morning, Barry McCulloch from the Federation of Small Businesses said that many small business owners are naturally concerned about the prospect of further restrictions and lockdowns, and that businesses are in survival mode. He is right. We need the Scottish Government to listen to our businesses and respond to their concerns.

Our NHS is also nearing breaking point. People cannot see their general practitioner in person, they are waiting hours on end for ambulances and they are being told to stay away from accident and emergency departments. Even if they get in, they are facing horrendously long waits. Let us be clear. Covid is not overwhelming our NHS, as the First Minister said in her statement; her health secretary's failures are overwhelming the NHS. He has shown poor leadership and inaction, causing delays that have overwhelmed the health service.

The First Minister has just announced her plans to introduce vaccine certification when, just a month ago, John Swinney, her Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery, said that that was the wrong way to handle the situation. What has changed between John Swinney saying what he said last month and what the First Minister said in her announcement today? When will the Scottish Government provide businesses with specific guidance on how to manage the scheme? Will they be expected to police it? If so, will the Government provide them with further support? [*Interruption.*]

Finally, I note that the First Minister said that she will not introduce vaccine certification to hospitality venues at the moment but will keep it under review. Will she ensure that there is meaningful dialogue with the hospitality sector during that period and that she listens to its concerns? If she believes that vaccine certification is required in hospitality venues, will that require a vote in Parliament and parliamentary approval?

The Presiding Officer: I hope that the First Minister was able to catch the questions.

The First Minister: I did hear the questions. I am not sure what the noise in the background was, but I am sure that it was understandable.

I will try to take the questions in turn. It is important for us all to focus on the detail and the complexities of the situation. We are 18 months in and we are still not in a normal political situation in

which who said what, when and whether a politician is still saying the same thing that they said a few weeks ago is as relevant as it is in other times. We are all trying to assess the evidence, learn as we go and make sure that we consider carefully all the pros and cons of every decision. I hope that all politicians will continue to do what most have done throughout the pandemic and engage with that in detail and in substance.

Nobody wants to impose greater restrictions. I absolutely understand the concerns of businesses and individuals that the virus might increase at a pace and in a way that would make them unavoidable, but I do not want that to happen. Nobody wants that to happen. Equally, I do not want people to die avoidably from Covid, and I do not want to see more people becoming seriously ill. I also do not want the pressure on our health service to build such that people who have other conditions cannot be treated timeously. It would be an irresponsible politician who ruled anything out in the face of an infectious, mutating virus, and I am not going to do that.

We all have a part to play here. The Parliament is the collective leadership of Scotland, and we all have to come together to persuade people of what we need to do to avoid further restrictions. Instead of going on about how terrible restrictions would be—we all agree with that—let us focus on saying to people, “Here is what will help us to avoid that.” That is what I tried to set out in my statement today, and I hope that we will all get behind those essential public health measures.

We have been considering the issue of vaccine certification very carefully, as members and those people who watched the two virtual meetings of Parliament over the summer will have heard me say. We have not ruled it out—we have been very clear about that—but we have made sure that we have considered carefully some of the ethical and equity issues and the practical issues that are involved. We have now come to a point where we think that a limited and careful use of vaccine certification can have a role to play.

However, given the significance of the use of vaccine certification, as I said in my statement, I think that it is right that Parliament votes on it and authorises it. If we were to decide to extend its use to other settings, I think that it would be equally important that Parliament had the ability to authorise that. I will therefore set out the details of that, and of what we will ask Parliament to vote on, more fully next week.

We are far from alone—we see this across the UK and much of the rest of the world—in being in a situation in which the delta variant has significantly changed the game. It is a different variant of the same virus, but in many respects, because of its greater transmissibility, it feels like a

different virus. We must respond to that properly. As was the case with earlier strains of the virus, the same basic mitigations can help to slow it down. That is why we must continue to get those messages across and to ask people to continue to do all the important things, including getting vaccinated.

Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): I offer my condolences to all those people who have lost a loved one. The nine deaths in the past 24 hours are a tragic reminder that lives are still at risk and are still being lost as a result of the virus. I again thank Scotland’s heroic workforce, not least our national health service and care workers, who continue to work under immense pressure.

It is clear that the virus is out of control. Case numbers are soaring and have reached record levels this week; hospitalisations continue to climb; thousands of Scots are self-isolating; and there is widespread confusion about the quarantine and testing requirements. PCR test kits are running out in some areas, and contact tracing is being carried out only in less than half of cases. Test and protect is clearly not fulfilling its function. The First Minister is right to say that we can never rule out restrictions, but the tools that the Government is responsible for are clearly not working. Restrictions cannot be a fallback for Government failure.

I look forward to seeing the proposals on vaccine certification next week. What direct engagement has there been with the sectors that are involved in order to make sure that they are part of the processes and procedures that will follow from the decisions that are taken on certification?

On the vaccination programme, I welcome the mobile clinics on university and college campuses, but can we go further and have them in schools, so that we can target 16 and 17-year-olds, at large workplaces and at large events?

We need to start planning for winter now. What specific planning is being done for the winter pressures that will arise not just because of Covid, but because of flu and the wider pressures on the NHS? When will the booster programme begin? What plans are in place to ensure that the roll-out of the flu vaccine and the booster vaccine can happen simultaneously?

The Government’s strategy—if there is one—and the tools are not working, and the virus is clearly out of control. What is the strategy? Is it virus suppression, virus elimination or herd immunity? At the moment, we are achieving none of those.

The First Minister: Anas Sarwar should know the answer to that last question, because it was set out in our revised strategic update. I

announced it to Parliament and he asked me questions about it at the time. Our strategic objective is to reduce the virus and keep it at levels that are sufficient to reduce the harms from the virus. If that was not known to Anas Sarwar, I gently suggest that it should have been. *[Interruption.]*

Anas Sarwar says that our strategy is not working. Every country is grappling with a highly transmissible strain of the virus. We had a spike in cases in early July, when our case levels were the highest in the UK. We then had a period throughout the rest of July and much of August when we had the lowest case levels in the UK. Our schools have gone back ahead of those in other parts of the UK, so we are again seeing a rise. The situation that we are grappling with is not different from the one that most other parts of the world are grappling with.

Anas Sarwar is wrong. I also take issue with his point about winter planning in the NHS. If he is saying to me that we should be starting winter planning now, I could not disagree with that more strongly. We started winter planning a long time ago. If we were starting it only now, that would be seriously remiss of us. Last week, we set out the NHS recovery plan, which is integral not just to the medium to longer-term recovery of the NHS, but to ensuring that the NHS is equipped to deal with the variety of pressures that it will face in the winter.

Test and protect is working, and it is working extremely well. PCR test kits come via the UK Government and they have been received. There have been some pressures on them in recent weeks, but those pressures have been met by new supplies arriving. Most people are getting their PCR test result within 24 hours. Test and protect is working well and contact tracing is being targeted on the highest risk areas first. That system will always be under pressure when case numbers are high, but it is working well and I am deeply grateful to those across the system who are putting in so much effort to make sure that it is working well.

On the booster campaign—again, I have said this so many times directly to Anas Sarwar and others—we await the JCVI recommendation. If we did not take the JCVI recommendations on this, we would simply be taking decisions that many people would rightly turn around and tell us did not have the right evidential base. However, we are ready to get the booster campaign under way as soon as the JCVI gives its final recommendation. We have interim recommendations, which have been the planning basis for that.

People can hear—and will have heard before—that I am frustrated that we have not yet got updated advice on 12 to 15-year-olds. I hope that, like many other countries, we can start to

vaccinate in that age group soon and that the JCVI soon feels able to say that the evidence allows it to recommend that. Again, we stand ready to do that as quickly as we are able to.

We are looking at different ways to reach 16 and 17-year-olds. Some health boards are already looking at taking vaccination directly into schools, and that process will continue. We will continue to do all those things.

However, to come back to the central point, this is an infectious virus that has got a lot more infectious. All of us need to make sure that we are playing our part, and as politicians and leaders of the country, all of us need to play our part in getting those messages across. The Government will continue to lead by example in doing that.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): The First Minister will understand the real concerns of Liberal Democrats and others about the introduction of what some have described as medical identification cards. The Government has, in effect, moved to a position whereby people will be compelled both to receive medical treatment and to provide their personal data in order to access certain freedoms. That is an illiberal step.

Other information technology systems, particularly around test and protect, have proved insufficient to the challenge of big data in a Covid context. Does the First Minister have faith in the IT systems that will back this up, considering that systems are creaking everywhere else? Will she tell Parliament whether this measure will be time bound or here to stay, if we have to live with Covid? Does she understand the very real concerns of those who are worried about the impact on civil liberties?

The First Minister: Anybody who has heard me talk about vaccine certification will know that I understand the concerns and share some of them. This is not a move that any Government should take lightly. However, frankly, I am also deeply concerned and have been for 18 months—as I know that everybody has been—about the harm that Covid does. We therefore need to consider every possible tool at our disposal that helps us to protect people from the harm of Covid. Increasingly, after so long, we particularly have to consider any tools that can help us to reduce the harm of Covid without needing to impose wider and more blanket restrictions on people's way of life. Using vaccine certification in a very limited way can help us to do that.

The kinds of venue that I have spoken about—large-scale events, night clubs and adult entertainment venues—are important to our economy and to many people's cultural life. I am not underplaying the importance of night clubs to young people, for example. However, they are

venues in which, despite the best efforts of those who run them, the conditions make it more likely that the virus will spread. Taking the proportionate step of asking people to make sure that they are fully vaccinated to protect themselves and others would therefore be an appropriate thing to do.

The IT systems that are supporting our efforts on Covid are not “creaking”. Everybody is under pressure from Covid, but all the systems and back-up arrangements for anything like this have to be robust. That is why we have taken such a careful approach, and it is why we are taking time, for example, to finalise and launch the app that will support some of this, which will happen later this month.

These things are really important. I think that they have a part to play, but I also think that it is important that Parliament gives its authorisation.

On the longevity of all of this, I do not think that it is either possible or sensible to be definitive about that right now. This is a global pandemic, which we are still in. For as long as any measure can help us to reduce the harm that Covid does, we should consider having it in place.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Can the First Minister say anything about the Government’s thinking on face coverings, moving forward? I am thinking particularly about schools—there was a suggestion that face coverings would be used in them for a limited period—places of worship and perhaps sports stadia, where people are sitting outside.

The First Minister: Face coverings play a really important part in helping to stop the spread of the virus. We will regularly review requirements to wear face coverings, and any reviews will take account of a range of factors such as the impact on transmission as well as social and economic considerations.

Face coverings continue to be worn by staff in all school communal areas and by staff and pupils in secondary school classrooms. In indoor areas of sports stadiums, such as stairwells, toilets and concourses, the wearing of masks also remains mandatory. We continue to meet stakeholders across all sectors to discuss guidance on face coverings. We know, for example, that the issue is particularly important for faith communities.

Face coverings are a measure that, like any measure, should not be kept in place for longer than we deem it necessary. For as long as it is necessary, however, I think that most people—I appreciate that it is not everybody—consider that it is a reasonably small price to pay to help keep themselves and others safe and, we hope, avoid the need for greater and more stringent restrictions.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): On vaccine certification, we know that there are still adults who have difficulty in accessing vaccinations for a variety of reasons. Indeed, as of today, 17 per cent of over-18s in Scotland have not been doubly vaccinated. Given that backdrop, would the Scottish Government consider allowing evidence of a negative Covid test as an alternative to vaccine certification as a means of entry to the venues that the First Minister has outlined?

The First Minister: I will come to that point directly in a moment. On the point about some people finding it difficult to get to vaccinated—I mean this quite generally; I am not making a political point—there are some people who cannot get vaccinated because of a health condition or age, and it is important that any vaccine certification scheme takes account of that, but I would seriously question whether anyone who is eligible has difficulty in getting vaccinated that prevents them from doing it right now. There may be some, in which case we will work to overcome that, but there are drop-in centres in every part of mainland Scotland and people have been offered appointments. I would say to people that, if you are eligible to get vaccinated, there is no reason not to do so. If there is some reason that I am not aware of, get in touch with NHS Inform or your local health board, and I am sure that a way will be found to overcome that.

It is really important that all of us get that message across. If you are eligible, there is no reason why you cannot or should not be getting the vaccine right now.

My segue into the next part of the question is that I do not think that we should say that we will allow a negative Covid test to effectively let people off the hook of getting vaccinated, if they are eligible. Vaccination is really important to keep the country safe. We are not proposing that we would do this initially, but in the longer term there is an argument for considering whether we would add a negative test to the certification. If someone was unable to get vaccinated, instead of a straightforward exemption, a negative test might be an alternative. We are not proposing to introduce that initially, but it is one of the things that we will keep under consideration.

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): Constituents of mine have had issues with accessing local services such as cafes and restaurants when visiting France, as Scotland’s paper Covid vaccination certification is not accepted. Only a valid QR code, as recognised by France’s pass sanitaire system, is permitted, so I welcome this afternoon’s announcement.

The UK Government has issues with the European Commission regarding having the UK

certification and QR code accepted across Europe, although I note that some countries, including France, are the exceptions to that. Is the Scottish Government confident that, once we roll out the QR code system here in Scotland, it will be accepted internationally? Have representations been made to European countries and the European Commission to make sure that it will be accepted for Scots who are visiting Europe?

The First Minister: Yes. That is an important question. We have been engaging actively with the Commission to ensure that our app meets the required standards. The Scottish Government is part of the UK Government's application to join the EU's e-health gateway scheme, along with the other devolved nations. We have already successfully tested our QR codes with Norway, Denmark, Belgium, Ireland and Northern Ireland, and we continue to expand the list of countries that we have tested ahead of the release of the QR code on Friday.

More generally, it is the role of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office to liaise with international countries on behalf of the UK. The Scottish Government has been working closely with the FCDO and Border Force to ensure that its Covid status solutions are recognised and accepted world wide.

Work is on-going, and I absolutely recognise the importance of making sure that all of that is done to a satisfactory standard.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): For months, members across the Parliament have raised concerns about test and protect being overwhelmed and underresourced.

Today's contact tracing figures from Public Health Scotland expose the difficulties at the heart of test and protect. In the past week, only 43 per cent of cases have been completed and the average number of primary contacts has dropped to an all-time low of 1.5. No wonder the virus is spreading.

As the First Minister just said, the focus is on highest-risk cases, which means that it is only on people who have tested positive. The testing of close contacts appears to have been all but abandoned. The First Minister understands the importance of test and protect in controlling the virus, so will she provide it with the necessary resources to properly track down and contain Covid-19?

The First Minister: Test and protect is properly resourced. We continue to keep its resourcing under review and we continue to work with it to ensure that it can meet the demands on it. The demands will always be higher when cases are higher. We often get the sense from the Opposition's questions that the virus is circulating

only in Scotland, but countries across the world are grappling with Delta.

On contact tracing through test and protect, I know from my experience this week that close contacts are being asked to get tested, and I know many other people who are in that position. People should put a lot of faith in test and protect.

People should also remember that, as I have said repeatedly throughout the pandemic, test and protect is not our first line of defence: we are our first line of defence. We must all behave in a way that tries to limit transmission. That is the key message that we all have a duty to communicate to people right now.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I noted what the First Minister said about the JCVI in her reply to Anas Sarwar, but can she share with the Parliament her preferred timetable for booster vaccines for the very vulnerable, the elderly, and health and care workers, for example, which must surely alleviate pressure on the NHS and reduce deaths?

The First Minister: I am tempted to say that, assuming that the evidence is that it is safe to do it, I want to get that done as quickly as possible—that is certainly true in relation to vaccinations for 12 to 15-year-olds; as soon as we get a recommendation, which I hope will be soon, we want to get on with that. I am tempted to say the same for a booster campaign. However, one of the issues that the JCVI is looking at is the optimal interval between someone's first dose and a booster dose, so although the temptation for people like me is to get on with a campaign as soon as possible, if we would reduce a booster's effectiveness by doing that now, as opposed to in a month's time, that is a material consideration. That is why we need to wait on the final recommendation.

The important thing for us right now is that we are ready to go as soon as the JCVI says that that is appropriate. Some other countries are starting to schedule booster vaccines—I think that Israel is the earliest country to do that; it was also quite early with the original vaccination programme. As soon as the evidence tells us that it is right to do, we are ready to get on with it.

Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): I am sure that the First Minister shares my concern about the high level of positive Covid-19 cases across East and West Dunbartonshire. Will she say what additional measures are being taken to tackle that worrying trend and address the challenges in areas with the highest prevalence of cases?

The First Minister: I have indicated our intentions, subject to parliamentary approval, on

vaccine certification. Notwithstanding that, the current systems that are in place for outbreak management will continue. We continue to maintain daily watch lists, which provide information on trends to inform us about the status of the virus across the country.

In relation to the areas that the member asked about, we have provided NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde with more than £11 million of funding as part of the targeted community testing programme. That is supported by the mobile testing fleet that the Scottish Ambulance Service runs, and we provided the Ambulance Service with additional funding, to increase its capacity. A range of things are being done to support the local response appropriately, and it will be important that that continues throughout this challenging phase.

Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): The news that eight health boards, including NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, are in the top 20 Covid hotspots across Europe is concerning. Although we are all thankful that the vaccination programme has been an incredible Scottish and UK success story, it has been revealed that just four in 10 people who downloaded the app are still using it. Given the latest World Health Organization statistics on the prevalence of the virus in Scotland, does the First Minister agree that those test and protect figures are unacceptable? If so, what further measures is her Government taking to promote the app's use at every turn?

The First Minister: The app is an important part of test and protect, but it has never been the whole part of it. I take every opportunity to remind people to download the app, use it and ensure that it is turned on so that it can provide the support that we want it to. I hope that every member across the chamber will do that, too, and take the opportunity to remind our constituents of that.

We also have to remind people to do all the other basic things: wear face coverings, wash hands, keep a safe distance, even though that is not the law, and ventilate rooms. Based on previous experience to a large extent, I believe that, if we do all those things, we can turn the corner and start to see case numbers level off and come down. Again, we know from experience that that will not happen by itself; it will happen only when we do the things that stem transmission.

The Government takes the lead in having responsibility for doing all the things that we have to do and for persuading the public to do likewise. However, as the collective leadership of the country, all of us across the chamber have a role in ensuring that we get such messages across.

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): I thank the First Minister for her statement. Some of my constituents who are due to go to university are

getting mixed experiences and expectations in relation to whether they will get face-to-face teaching. Will the First Minister clarify whether face-to-face teaching can take place? What are her expectations for how universities communicate that to their students?

Given the concerning high case numbers in Lanarkshire, what support is being provided to NHS Lanarkshire at this extremely testing time?

The First Minister: We continue to work closely with universities and colleges on preparing and publishing guidance for the new academic term. That work has been informed by expert advice that the Covid-19 advisory sub-group on universities and colleges has provided.

I can confirm that in-person learning can take place. However, we understand that most universities and colleges will operate a blended learning approach, which will involve some learning continuing to be online at least for the start of the academic year, and I support that. I expect institutions to clearly communicate that to students, because that is their responsibility and there will not be an entirely consistent picture across different courses, given their nature.

In relation to NHS Lanarkshire, we continue to liaise with and provide support to all NHS boards to help them to cope, both in a public health sense in terms of local outbreak management and through the NHS recovery plan and the winter planning that is already under way. NHS Lanarkshire receives support as part of that.

Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): I have some concerns about how the introduction of vaccine certification could affect disabled people, those with underlying health conditions and those from the global south who might not be able to access proof of vaccination from the countries in which they were vaccinated. How will the Scottish Government ensure that the introduction of vaccine certification will not negatively impact those whom I have already mentioned and those who are most at risk from the virus?

Will the Scottish Government write to the UK Government to ask for an extension of the furlough scheme to be available, should Scotland need it?

The First Minister: On the latter point, we will continue to argue for the extension of the furlough scheme. I thought that we had reached an agreement earlier in the pandemic that financial support that must come through the UK Government because we do not have borrowing powers would flex, depending on the public health situation in each of the four nations. I hope that that agreement will be respected. That said, I should underline the point that I made earlier: I do not want to be in the position of imposing any

restrictions if we can at all avoid it. Therefore, I hope that that is a hypothetical point but, nevertheless, it is an important one that we should understand.

The points about vaccine certification are well made. I have made some of them myself as we develop the proposals further before bringing them to Parliament. For example, I have indicated today that we are already envisaging exemptions for some people who cannot get vaccinated. There are issues with people who have been vaccinated in other countries and how we recognise that here. Of course, some of the work that is being done on international travel and recognition of vaccination will have a part to play in that.

We will set out more detail when we bring those proposals to Parliament for debate next week, but I encourage any member who has practical or detailed questions right now to send those to us and we will try to make sure that we address them all as we develop the proposals.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): In a similar vein, I have a question about certification decisions. We had an update that the QR code will be launched on Friday; I assume that that is an interim arrangement and that an app will be launched. A QR code might be open to abuse by being shared among people who might not be vaccinated. Can the First Minister provide any more detail about when the app might be launched and how it might work?

The First Minister: Gillian Martin is absolutely right: the QR code that I spoke about that goes live on Friday is not a substitute for the app. The app is currently under testing; it is important that we test it properly. It is scheduled to be released on 30 September. It has been designed to meet European Union standards for international travel, which I referred to earlier, and it will provide access to individuals' vaccination records that are held by NHS Scotland. The app will be released later in September after all the robust testing that is required; the QR code is an interim measure until that happens.

Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): A recent Medical and Dental Defence Union of Scotland survey shows rising levels of stress among key medical and dental staff. With the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care attacking general practitioners and causing my colleagues a lot of distress, and Covid pushing my NHS colleagues to the brink through exhaustion, is it any wonder that the survey shows that 50 per cent of GPs and 70 per cent of dentists are likely to leave their profession, which would push our NHS deeper into crisis? How will the First Minister ensure that my colleagues do not leave? It would be an unmitigated disaster if they did.

I refer to my entry in the register of members' interests as a practising doctor and member of the MDDUS.

The First Minister: No member of the Scottish Government, including the health secretary, has attacked GPs. It is, to be frank, disgraceful to suggest otherwise.

When I launched the NHS recovery plan at the Golden Jubilee national hospital in Clydebank last week, I made the point that GPs have been working extremely hard throughout the pandemic. At the start of the pandemic, I visited a general practice to launch the roll-out of the Near Me service, so even though face-to-face consultations have, understandably, been restricted, GPs have been seeing patients online and in other ways, including home visits.

To say that we do not want to move away from the virtual arrangements that have worked well during the pandemic and get back to a more face-to-face approach in primary care is not attacking GPs. It is incumbent on us all not to engage in such suggestions.

The point about the stress, anxiety and exhaustion of many members of the NHS workforce, though, is very well made and is one that we recognise. That is why a significant part of the NHS recovery plan talks about the support that is being put in place for the mental and physical health and wellbeing of NHS staff.

In our discussions, we often talk about hospitals and health centres—the bricks and mortar of the NHS—but the NHS is nothing without the dedicated people who work in it, so it is vital that we support them. That is one of the reasons why I am proud—much as I would love us to be able to go further—that we have this year given agenda for change staff in the NHS the highest pay rise in any part of the UK.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): The United Kingdom Obstetrics Surveillance System published research last month that showed that the number of pregnant women being admitted to hospital with Covid-19 across the UK is increasing, with many experiencing acute symptoms. What message does the First Minister have for pregnant women who are unsure about getting the vaccine?

The First Minister: Pregnant women should come forward for vaccination. I recognise that there have been concerns, but many people working in midwifery and obstetrics, for example, have also said that pregnant women should come forward. It is safe to do so; in fact, the risks from not being vaccinated outweigh any risks from vaccination.

Vaccination uptake levels are high, which is obviously a good thing, but we know that anyone who is not vaccinated right now poses a greater risk to themselves and creates vulnerability in the population as a whole, so we want everybody who is not yet vaccinated to come forward. We will be making particular efforts with the under-40s group in the days to come. Again, I appeal to all members to ensure that they communicate the message clearly to the people in their constituencies whom they serve.

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): The Government has, in effect, ended test and protect in our schools. It is necessary for a student to have a negative PCR test before returning to school when their close contact with someone who has tested positive takes place in a school setting, rather than, for example, during an overnight stay, and they are not displaying symptoms. What assessment has been made of the extent to which that change in policy is contributing to the current rise in the number of cases, including in transfer between school and home?

The Educational Institute of Scotland has called for a reversal of that policy. However, given reports that people are having to travel some distance to get a PCR test, and given the delays in test and protect following up close contacts, would we have the test-and-trace capacity even if the policy was reversed?

The First Minister: Yes. Anybody can see from the data for the past few days that although we have had record numbers of cases being reported, we have also had record levels of testing. We have testing capacity through test and protect. I will continue to defend the people who work in test and protect, because they are doing a great job. We will continue to support them with the resourcing and capacity that they need.

It is not true, and not helpful, to say that the test and protect approach has been abandoned in schools. What we did, as we set out to Parliament, was modify the approach. We knew that, in the previous term, many young people were being asked to isolate and were therefore missing out on education when they probably did not have to do so. We are now taking a more risk-based approach, which is kept under constant review.

As with anything, if we feel that we need to go backwards—we do not want to do it—and put in place greater protections, that will be done. We are also taking a number of other steps to ensure that school settings reduce the risk of transmission. Ventilation and CO₂ monitoring are key parts of that.

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): Reports have been circulating about a shortage of testing kits in the walk-in PCR testing

centre in Greenock, in addition to people being sent elsewhere for PCR tests. Can the First Minister provide an assurance that the facilities and kit at the centres will be replenished to help the people of Greenock and Inverclyde?

The First Minister: I alluded to that earlier. I am aware that last week some people experienced difficulties in accessing tests due to a shortage of kits. The UK Government supplies the test kits, and the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care has raised the issue with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care. Nevertheless, as there have been those pressures, we have been getting new supplies to ensure that testing kits continue to be available.

As we do on all aspects of testing, we continue to liaise closely. At an earlier stage of the pandemic, there were pressures on Lighthouse laboratory capacity. We worked collaboratively to resolve those; that will be the case in this situation, as well. It is vital that PCR testing is available for those who need it, as long as we are in a situation in which there are rising or high levels of cases. I know that the Greenock site was fully booked earlier last week, so we will continue to work to ensure that capacity exists there.

As I think I said earlier, most people get their PCR test results back relatively quickly. That is important, especially now that the rules on self-isolation for close contacts have changed.

Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): My question follows on from Stuart McMillan's question. What action is the Scottish Government taking to increase Covid-19 testing capacity in Argyll and Bute?

The First Minister: I thank Jenni Minto for that important question. For people with symptoms, we have extended PCR home test kit coverage and the 119 courier collection service to the islands of Bute and Mull. Local partners have the option of extending provision further, if that is required.

There is also a walk-through local test site and there are a number of mobile testing unit deployments and 10 small-scale test sites across Argyll and Bute. People with symptoms can book a test at those sites or order a home test kit through NHS Inform. People who do not have symptoms can access lateral flow tests by ordering them online, getting them from a community pharmacy or going to a community test site. Local residents can find the site locations and opening hours on their local authority website.

15:54

Meeting suspended.

15:56

On resuming—

Food and Drink

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-00990, in the name of Mairi Gougeon, on supporting success in food and drink in Scotland.

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): I am delighted to bring the debate to the Parliament, enabling all MSPs the opportunity to show their support for food and drink in Scotland, just ahead of food and drink fortnight. The pandemic has taught us a lot about what really matters. We realise that being able to go to the shops and buy whatever we need is a privilege not to be taken for granted. We have learned that sitting down to eat as a family or household provides nourishment that is also social and emotional.

Today I want to celebrate the contribution of the food and drink sector to Scottish life, not only in feeding us but in providing opportunity and employment, protecting and enhancing the environment and helping to define who we are as a nation.

Our producers, farmers and fishermen showed tremendous resilience as they navigated the pandemic, and they now face the stark realities of a new operating landscape brought about by a reckless Brexit deal. The Scottish Government is committed to supporting the sector to recover and to pursuing our goal of Scotland being a good food nation. Creating this good food nation will bring us many benefits. We aim to achieve a decline in dietary-related diseases and a healthier population.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): Is the Government able to achieve its manifesto ambition to cut childhood obesity by 2030?

Mairi Gougeon: The member will be aware that the work to tackle those issues is on-going.

We are aware of the need to consider the environmental impacts of our food consumption and production. A good food nation should be a more sustainable food nation. Scotland already has a reputation for producing world-class quality food. Our aim is to build on that reputation and secure our future as a destination of choice for those who value quality local food and a place to which other countries turn in order to learn how to become a good food nation.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): Does the minister understand the farming community's

frustration that we still do not have a future farm policy in place? It will be the driver for our cuts to agricultural emissions, but it does not look as though we will have a policy in place for another two years. Do we not need a bit more urgency?

Mairi Gougeon: There absolutely is urgency. That is why we established the agriculture reform implementation oversight board just last week, and it will be driving forward the recommendations of the established farmer-led groups. We recognise the urgency, and we want to drive and deliver that change.

We have seen the stresses and strains that Brexit and Covid-19 have placed on our food system, so it is more important than ever that our food policies ensure that we are more resilient, and that people in Scotland can access affordable, healthy food that is locally produced, sourced and available. We are working to make that ambition a reality through a wide-ranging programme of measures on food and diet across the five key areas of health, social justice, knowledge, environmental sustainability and prosperity. The next step is to introduce a good food nation bill that will provide the statutory framework needed to support the development of our future food policy to benefit the wellbeing and health of people in Scotland.

Many have called for the right to food to be included in that bill, but the right to food is best considered as part of a single, coherent package of legislative proposals via the human rights bill, which will set out for the first time and in one place the wide range of internationally recognised human rights belonging to everyone in Scotland. That will include a right to adequate food as an essential part of the overall right to an adequate standard of living, as reflected in our shared policy programme with the Scottish Green Party. *[Interruption.]* I will not take an intervention at the moment; I need to make progress.

I know that many were disappointed when we had to shelve plans for the good food nation bill in the previous parliamentary session due to the pandemic, but I assure members that we intend to introduce that bill early in this session.

Ambition and policy on food is no use without an industry, however, and I do not need to tell members that, as one of our largest employers, our food and drink industry is both economically and culturally vital to Scotland, sustaining jobs in some of our most fragile and rural communities. It is also one of the sectors most adversely affected by Brexit, which is threatening jobs and businesses all around the country, undermining the sector's ambition to double turnover to £30 billion by the year 2030. That is why a key priority last year was to put in place a recovery plan for the sector, the first sectoral recovery plan of its

type. Working closely with the food and drink partnership, particularly the industry body Scotland Food & Drink, we have collectively committed £10 million in support so far.

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): The United Kingdom Government offered extended powers in the Agriculture Bill to enable devolved Administrations to develop their own subsidy system. Wales and Northern Ireland took up the offer, but the SNP Government did not. Can the cabinet secretary explain why the SNP Government is snubbing the offer for extended powers through the UK Government's post-Brexit agriculture policy?

Mairi Gougeon: That is absolute nonsense when it is the UK Government that is decimating the food and drink industry in Scotland right now.

There is no doubt that some sectors suffered due to the pandemic, particularly those dependent on a vibrant export market or those affected by outbreaks. However, the effects of Covid have only added to the severe and significant impacts of Brexit. Put simply, the Tories could not have designed a worse Brexit deal and all that we warned of is now coming to pass. I know that some would like us all to pretend that Brexit is done and dusted, but that will not wash. They know, we know and, indeed, our hard-pressed food and drink businesses know that worse is to come. With further custom and border checks still due to be implemented—some starting this autumn and others in January 2022—the full impact of Brexit is still to be realised.

To add insult to injury, the much-lauded trade deals being secured in an attempt to replace the reported £18 billion being lost across the entirety of trade as a result of being ripped out of the single market are nothing but a damp squib. What have we got to show for the UK-Australia future trade agreement? *[Interruption.]* I will not take an intervention at the moment.

The same as we had before, only now Australia gets to bring more of its food products into our markets, competing tariff free with our own producers of quality red meat in particular. Previous UK Government modelling suggested that the agriculture and semi-processed foods sectors would lose out from an Australia trade deal, so we have every right to be nervous about the impact of that trade deal, which frankly is only the start. We were not involved in the negotiations that resulted in the agreement and we are not involved in the negotiations that are still going on, despite the impact that the deal will have on devolved responsibilities.

Daily, we hear of new and emerging challenges: shortages of heavy goods vehicle drivers and workers in processing and manufacturing, as well

as associated skills shortages across the industry. Labour and skills shortages like those lay bare the extraordinary recklessness of this hard Brexit.

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): The cabinet secretary raised the issue of HGV drivers. Obviously, there is a shortage of those across Europe and supply chains have struggled on that basis. However, one of the other issues facing communities like mine in the Highlands and Islands is the lack of local infrastructure, such as the ferries, for being able to get produce off the islands. We called for a minister to come and give a statement on ferries. Will the cabinet secretary, as the cabinet secretary for the islands, give her backing to one of her colleagues coming here to give us a statement on when our island communities can expect reliable ferry links?

Mairi Gougeon: It is convenient for the member to gloss over the issue of HGV drivers, when we know—from the letters and briefings that we have seen from industries—that migration is one of the key issues, which the Tory amendment completely ignores. *[Interruption.]* No, I have already taken an intervention.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Can we have less noise from sedentary positions, please?

Mairi Gougeon: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

We should not forget that, as businesses faced Brexit border disruptions and barriers to trade, which cost UK food exporters £700 million in January alone, the UK Government dismissed industry concerns as “teething” troubles. Those teething troubles are now a chronic problem. Only last week, organisations from the Scottish food and drink industry issued a joint letter, which called for immediate action from the UK Government to solve the growing labour crisis, and NFU Scotland echoed that call in its own letter to the UK Government. I have also written to the UK Government to reinforce that strong messaging from industry, but I feel that it will fall on deaf ears, as all other pleas have.

Scottish seafood is exported to more than 100 countries and brings £1 billion a year to the Scottish economy. Brexit has caused real problems in maintaining workforce in the seafood sector. We continue to press the UK Government to put in place a workable immigration policy that permits European Union workers to enter the sector and supports workers under our fair work agreement. *[Interruption.]* No, I will not take an intervention.

We fully support the fishing sector in calling on the UK Government to explain how the Brexit deal that it struck is positive for the Scottish seafood community. That sector has been let down in quota negotiations, was hit with the immediate

effects of new border controls and now faces supply chain issues with labour shortages. What UK ministers described as teething troubles are, in reality, new and permanent trade barriers. *[Interruption.]* I will not take an intervention.

Those barriers have caused long-term damage to the competitiveness of our seafood sector and might be the death knell for some of our exporters and fishing boats.

To address the longer term impact of Brexit, we are developing a new strategy for seafood, to help the sector find new markets, adapt and thrive, and that includes doing so here at home.

Financial support is also key, particularly for investment in innovation. To that end, I announce today nearly £800,000 of new awards to fishing businesses and marine organisations in coastal communities, as part of the £14 million marine fund Scotland. Those awards include funding for new storage facilities at a major seafood processor, funding to help young fishers enter the industry and support for seafood businesses in the north east to develop seafood processing and deliver training. That is in addition to the £1.8 million that has already been announced for Seafood Scotland to support seafood businesses to access new markets after the severe economic impacts of Brexit and Covid-19, and I look forward to seeing those projects develop.

However, welcome though that £14 million is, it is a paltry replacement for the European maritime and fisheries fund, which would have returned £62 million to Scotland for the benefit of our coastal communities, and we are still waiting for details on the long-promised £100 million from the UK Government to support the recovery from Brexit and Covid.

At every turn, Scotland's fishing and seafood sectors are being short-changed under Brexit, but now, more than ever, we need to produce our food in a way that protects the environment for future generations and safeguards our natural assets.

In addition, Scotland's food and drink success would not be possible without our producers on the land, and this Government is absolutely committed to continuing to support the sustainable production of the world class food that our farmers and crofters are famous for.

As we approach the end of our period of simplicity and stability, work begins in earnest to put in place a successor to the common agricultural policy, which will guide and support farming, food production and land use in future.

We have a positive vision for our land-based industries, in which our world-class producers thrive and, along with our other land managers,

contribute to our world-leading climate change agenda and response to the biodiversity crisis.

Scotland will be recognised as a global leader in sustainable agriculture. While remaining aligned to the principles of the EU, we will have a support framework that delivers climate mitigation and adaptation, nature restoration and high-quality food production. *[Interruption.]* I will not take an intervention; I need to make progress.

That work includes our commitment to seek to double the amount of land that is used for organic farming by 2026. We will support farmers and land managers who produce more of our own food needs and manage our land sustainably with nature and for the climate.

Farming, crofting and land management will continue to play an important role in maintaining thriving rural and island communities. We will support that change to ensure that farmers, crofters and local communities can capitalise on the benefits and have equality of opportunity, and that there is a just transition.

Last week, we laid out our first steps towards reforming national policy for Scottish agriculture, and it will be one of the biggest areas of reform undertaken by this Government in the lifetime of this Parliament, with wide-ranging and long-term impacts and opportunities.

Farmers and crofters are at the heart of our approach, and that is why the agriculture reform implementation oversight board will be co-chaired by me and Martin Kennedy, the NFUS president.

Our priority is to make early progress in delivering emissions reductions and agree a package of funded measures that deliver action on key recommendations from the farmer-led groups by the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP26.

The national test programme will seek to recruit farmers and crofters this autumn, with implementation beginning by spring next year. At the same time, we are consulting on the key shared themes and specific recommendations from those farmer-led groups. It is important to get the views of as many stakeholders, particularly farmers, tenant farmers, smallholders and crofters, as possible in order to inform our reform agenda. Therefore, I hope that members will encourage those in their constituencies to take part.

We cannot lose sight of all the strengths of the industry that I have talked about in my speech today. As we come to food and drink fortnight, there is a lot to celebrate, enjoy and highlight, and I hope that members will make the time to do so, whether by visiting local markets or producers.

It is also clear that the industry is most vulnerable to the damaging effects of Brexit.

Scotland's food and drink sector has a lot to offer, and has so much potential and ambition, despite the current challenging circumstances. *[Interruption.]* I will not take an intervention as I am coming to a close.

The Government will do everything that it can to support the industry through those challenging times. Throughout Covid, the sector delivered for the nation and showed resilience and determination. If we can all get behind it and show the support that the sector deserves, I firmly believe that the future will be positive. I commend the motion in my name and ask members to support it.

I move,

That the Parliament, in advance of Food and Drink Fortnight, acknowledges the significant contribution that food and drink make to Scotland's economy, society and reputation; notes the resilience shown by all of Scotland's food producers throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and thanks everyone involved in food and drink in Scotland for helping to keep food on the table through these challenging times; laments that the sub-standard Brexit deal, secured by the UK Government, is harming food and drink businesses, slowing and making exports harder, has raised their costs and bureaucracy, is causing problems for businesses in recruiting and retaining staff, and is now resulting in concerns about food supplies; welcomes the economic and environmental opportunities for low-carbon, sustainable and organic food production, which can be created by encouraging public kitchens to source more local food; recognises that the Scottish Government is consulting on a draft Local Food Strategy and encourages everyone to take part, and resolves to continue supporting the sector with legislation to grow as a Good Food Nation, where people take pride and pleasure in, and benefit from, the food that they produce, buy, cook, serve and eat each day, and include a right to adequate food as part of wider work to give effect to international human rights law in Scots law.

16:11

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): I am delighted to open the debate on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives.

As the cabinet secretary outlined, food and drink is Scotland's largest international export industry. It has a strong worldwide reputation, whether due to the quality of our wonderful Scotch beef or our tremendous whiskies. It is Scotland's largest manufacturing sector, which employs 47,000 people, contributes nearly £4 billion gross value added to the economy and has a turnover of £11 billion.

Today, in advance of Scotland's food and drink fortnight, we take the opportunity to celebrate the significant contribution that the food and drink sector makes and all the key workers who have done tremendous work over the past 18 months, including warehouse workers, corner shop retailers, the hard-working farmers who found a window of opportunity in which to cut their barley,

and our fishermen, who go out in all conditions to get the best fish and seafood, which is sent across the world.

As we celebrate the fantastic work of farmers, I must say that I found a couple of the cabinet secretary's points astonishing. I will give her the opportunity to address the point about the future farm policy and the news that civil servants would rather cull 300,000 beef cattle than work with farmers to produce food sustainably and meet climate change targets.

Mairi Gougeon: I will happily address the point: it is absolute nonsense.

Rachael Hamilton: I thank the cabinet secretary for acknowledging that, because I wrote to her two months ago about it and Jim Walker's recommendations with regard to the suckler beef climate scheme. That is now on record.

I believe that this Government has seriously let down farmers, who are now set to be hit by a nationalist coalition of chaos with the Greens. Just yesterday, in *The Herald*, columnist Claire Taylor made it abundantly clear when she wrote:

"There is no denying that the agricultural industry has been ignored over these past months and that the relationship between those in power and farming has been damaged in the process."

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Does Rachael Hamilton accept that the most damaging nationalism and ignoring of farmers has been through Brexit and the Conservative Party?

Rachael Hamilton: I remind John Mason that our biggest export market is the rest of the United Kingdom, which is important to the food and drink industry. Therefore, sticking in a hard border, as Emma Harper, who is sitting next to John Mason, suggests, would be seriously damaging. *[Interruption.]* I will make some progress—I have taken two interventions already.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Rachael Hamilton has stated that I want a hard border, which is absolutely not true. I refute that, and I am grateful for the opportunity to state it in the chamber.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That is not a point of order as formally understood, but Emma Harper has made her point.

Rachael Hamilton: On the delay in the future farm policy, will the cabinet secretary tell us why the farming and food production future policy group report has still not been published? It was the subject of a freedom of information request during the summer and the report is still in draft.

On the 100th day after the election, the SNP hurriedly launched the agriculture reform implementation oversight board, which just goes to

show that it has taken its eye off the ball, and it is now recklessly pursuing a dangerous deal with the Greens to rip Scotland out of the UK.

We have a fantastic chance to design and construct an agricultural support system that really delivers. After the Brexit vote, it took the SNP two years even to launch a simple consultation on the next steps for Scottish farming, and there is little indication of where that will go as we look beyond 2023.

Today, we heard in the Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee that there is a need to invest in innovation and food production across Scotland. Our motion recognises that and notes the food industry's asks of the Scottish Government. We know that our industry is the best in the world, but we consider that this Government has failed to address the issues and support the industry.

I have made it clear that the desire for independence that was announced yesterday through the nationalist coalition will irrevocably damage our food and drink sector. It is well known that, as I pointed out to John Mason, the UK is Scotland's most important customer.

I will move on. As a natural progression from farming, it would be wrong of me not to mention the Scottish whisky industry.

Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP): The member said that the SNP-Green agreement could be damaging to the Scottish farming industry. Does she not find it a bit concerning that there is no mention at all of food production in the UK Government's Agriculture Act 2020 and that people such as Ben Goldsmith are advising the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs?

Rachael Hamilton: The member should look at what the fishing industry has said about the Green-SNP deal. It is absolutely extraordinary that the agreement does not mention fishing, which is one of our most important sectors. The livelihoods of fishermen and people in the industry could be affected by it. Elspeth Macdonald from the Scottish Fishermen's Federation made it clear that she was very unhappy that no mention was made of that in the food production part of the Green-SNP deal.

I move on to Scotch whisky. We all know that that is an amazing industry. It employs 11,000 people in Scotland, 7,000 of whom work in rural areas. We know how important it is to ensure that there are strong, sustainable and resilient businesses in rural areas where there is depopulation.

Time is rumbling on, so I will talk about the benefits relating to the changes to the tariffs on

single malt Scotch whisky. We know that the industry has been under huge threat. There has been a downturn in sales because of Covid and fewer people have been going into visitor centres. However, it is important to recognise that some markets will be opened up. The Scotch Whisky Association has recognised that opening up the market to Australia and removing the 5 per cent tariff on whisky exports and, indeed, the removal of the 25 per cent export tariff by the US, will help to ensure that the Scotch whisky industry can recover what it has lost and also increase sales.

Mairi Gougeon: I would also be really interested to hear Rachael Hamilton's take on the impact of the trade deal with Australia on our red meat producers, who are set to suffer as a result. In typical Tory fashion, that issue just happens to have been glossed over.

Rachael Hamilton: I think that farmers are more concerned about possibly being instructed to cull their cattle than they are about having to look at sustainable methods of future farm policy. However, I will mention the Trade and Agricultural Commission, which was placed on a statutory footing. Its work will be taken forward. There will be an opportunity to scrutinise the trade deals. NFU Scotland asked for that, as have others, including members in this chamber. There is an opportunity for the cabinet secretary to feed into that.

In conclusion, the picture is worrying. We need to look at labour shortages, particularly in relation to the resilience of the food and farming sector. However, as my colleagues have said, there are a lot of things going on in the industry. There is a lack of diversity; there is an ageing workforce. Normally in Scotland we have a shortage of about 50,000 lorry drivers. We need to ensure that we are training and skilling people up, that we are providing vocational apprenticeships and that we have a resilient food chain.

To bring it round to a very positive note, we are celebrating the success of Scottish food and drink in the next fortnight. The Government needs to get its act together. It needs to show farmers and food producers the way forward. We simply cannot produce high-quality, world-renowned food and drink products unless the Government gets behind farmers, gets them out of the dark and gives them further clarity.

I move amendment S6M-00990.2, to leave out from "laments" to end and insert:

"calls on the Scottish Government to launch a comprehensive 'farm to fork' review of Scotland's food policy as a key part of Scotland's economic recovery from COVID-19 to ensure a resilient UK-wide food supply chain; understands the importance of the UK internal market for Scottish food and drink, worth £4.5 billion; recognises that Scottish independence would irrevocably damage the food

and drink industry; calls on the Scottish Government to implement a public procurement policy that increases the use of Scottish produce; urges the Scottish Government to publish, with urgency, the Farming and Food Production Future Policy Group's findings and give clarity and direction on Scotland's future farm policy, and asks the Scottish Government to recognise and support the calls in an open letter from Scotland's food and drink sector to embed automation in Scottish Government funding programmes to support productivity and the development of higher quality jobs, and to work with the Scotland Food & Drink Partnership to continue to promote the industry as a career pathway through apprenticeships and other schemes."

16:22

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): I begin by saying thank you on behalf of Labour members to Scotland's food and drink sector. Thank you to our farmers and crofters who, in the face of the uncertainty of Brexit and the lack of direction that we have had on the future of agricultural support, continue to deliver world-class quality food that Scotland is rightly proud of. Thank you to our fishers, who, after being let down by the post-Brexit deal and completely omitted from the SNP-Green coalition agreement, continue to play their part in our nation's food security. Thank you to our shop workers who, while we were able to work from home, continued to work on the front line, along with producers, processors, wholesalers and deliverers, put the food and drink on our shelves to keep the nation fed during the pandemic. Thank you to the more than 18,000 food and drink businesses in Scotland, which turn over £14 billion a year, for employing more than 115,000 people.

The food and drink sector makes an immense and growing contribution to Scotland's economy, and Labour supports the aim in the Government's paper "Ambition 2030" to keep that growth going and to double turnover to £30 billion by 2030. However, that sector is facing enormous challenges in keeping those shelves full, not least because of the double whammy of the pandemic and Brexit.

This week, the Food and Drink Federation warned that chronic staff shortages have left Scotland's food industry at crisis point. In a letter to the UK and Scottish Governments, the federation's industry partners appeal to those Governments to get their act together when it comes to access to labour and support for the sector. It makes stark reading. Its survey of businesses in the sector found that 93 per cent reported job vacancies, 90 per cent described those vacancies as hard to fill and 97 per cent said they will struggle to fill vacancies in the future. The letter is clear:

"We have now reached crisis point putting the growth, viability and security of many Scottish businesses in jeopardy, with knock on impacts for consumers. We need action now to save Christmas."

That letter was backed up today by the National Farmers Union Scotland, when it wrote to the UK Government to highlight the impact of the labour shortage. There is no more obvious illustration of that crisis than the current lack of heavy goods vehicle drivers and the impact that that is having on, for example, getting milk to processors, an issue that is highlighted by the NFUS in its letter.

I recognise that, in the short term, we need to urgently break down the barriers that the UK Government has put in the way of access to overseas labour.

Jamie Halcro Johnston: The member was at the Economy, Energy and Fair Work Committee this morning, where this issue came up. Does he recognise that there is a shortage of HGV drivers across Europe? Lots of effort can be put into attracting new people in, but, if countries such as Germany are facing exactly the same problem, we will be competing with them. This is not a problem just for the UK and Scotland.

Colin Smyth: It would be unfair to say that the failure to be able to access overseas labour is not impacting that problem. However, I recognise that some of the labour shortages that we face today are caused by a multitude of structural factors that go beyond Brexit and the pandemic.

It is also important to highlight that there is also a difference between a labour shortage and a skills shortage. That means doing more to train our own workforce to ensure that people have the skills to meet the demand in the labour market and to ensure that they are paid a decent wage; it also means taking a fresh look at our supply chains. The food and drink sector's hard work and innovation during the pandemic mitigated the worst impact of the sudden shift in demand from the food service sector to the food retailer and of the halt in people being able to move freely, but the vulnerability of supply chains to major upheaval was clear. The capacity to adjust rapidly is seriously limited, and we cannot ignore the precarious nature of our food and drink system, which is under enormous strain.

The sector has responded well to the crisis, but we should not be dependent on a largely reactive response. We need to have a far more strategic and joined-up approach to managing our food and drink system, and we need robust contingency planning to ensure that the sector is prepared for future emergencies. We need a more cohesive and comprehensive policy on food—from the farm to the fork to waste—through a proper national food plan.

At the centre of that plan must be the aims of embedding farming and food production at every level of education and having a far bigger focus on procuring and promoting local food and drink. It

simply cannot be sustainable that the majority of the fish that we eat are imported while the majority that we catch are exported. The Scottish Government, local authorities, the national health service and other public bodies spend £11 billion a year on goods and services, including food, but for far too long public procurement has had a narrow focus on price and cost reduction. We have failed to maximise the benefits of low-carbon local supply chains and to minimise the vulnerabilities and risks from an overreliance on international supply chains.

Key to changing that is how we support our local food producers. Labour has long advocated the development of local food strategies, but that cannot involve the top-down approach that is all too common with the Government. Support for the sector must be local. It cannot involve central organisations and agencies simply handing down grants to local businesses.

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I agree with a lot of what Colin Smyth has said about public procurement. Does he agree that procuring locally would also cut down the high amount of food wastage that currently happens in the public sector, which in itself should help to tackle food poverty?

Colin Smyth: I absolutely agree with Brian Whittle. Local procurement has many advantages, including supporting businesses, reducing our carbon footprint and reducing food poverty. However, doing that depends on giving local businesses the opportunities to bid for procurement contracts.

To come back to my point about local food strategies, we need intense on-the-ground support for local businesses that addresses, for example, digital and logistical infrastructure in order to drive the high-value sales that we need while tackling the skills, confidence and capacity challenges that many of our small and micro businesses face.

The importance of food and drink goes beyond their crucial economic importance. They impact on our health, our environment and our record on animal welfare. For far too long, far too many people in Scotland have lacked adequate access to food, exposing the gross inequalities that we face today. In a nation that provides so much outstanding food and drink, it is to our nation's shame that many children in Scotland still go to bed hungry at night. Although our food and drink sector in Scotland has grown, so too has the scandal of food poverty.

It is absolutely right that we celebrate the successes of Scotland's food and drink, as we will during food and drink fortnight, which begins this weekend. However, we need to rethink how we approach access to food in this country, and that

means recognising that access to food is a fundamental right. It was deeply disappointing that the Government did not deliver a dedicated and comprehensive good food nation bill in the previous session of Parliament. It is not good enough to simply blame the pandemic, because the commitment to deliver that bill was made at the start of the previous session, long before any of us had even heard of Covid.

A bold good food nation bill is an opportunity for Scotland to lead the way on environmental sustainability, healthy eating and animal welfare, and to work with our trade unions to drive up terms and conditions for our food and drink workforce who, too often, are some of Scotland's lowest-paid workers. Crucially, we need to enshrine in law the right to food, which would pave the way for a clear duty on our public bodies, with clear targets for action backed up by an independent statutory body to ensure that that action is delivered.

The cabinet secretary said that the Government will introduce a good food nation bill early in this session of Parliament, but she also said that the right to food would be in a different piece of legislation. However, the cabinet secretary did not say when we will see that legislation that will enshrine in law the right to food, so I hope that she will clarify that later in the debate.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): Will the member give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is about to conclude his remarks, Mr Ruskell.

Colin Smyth: If the Government fails to deliver the right to food, Labour will do so, through a member's bill from my colleague Rhoda Grant. That would build on the work of the Scottish Food Coalition and Elaine Smith in the previous session.

In moving Labour's amendment, I ask all members to make a clear commitment to a dedicated and bold good food nation bill in this session of Parliament that has tackling poverty at its heart, and to introducing a meaningful right to food in Scotland.

I move amendment S6M-00990.1, to insert at end:

“; condemns the unacceptable level of food poverty in Scotland and recognises that the ever-rising use of foodbanks in Scotland is morally unjustifiable in a country where fresh, quality food is plentiful; notes that the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated food insecurities and highlighted the urgency for a Good Food Nation Bill, and believes that enshrining the right to food in Scots law should be an early priority for the Scottish Government in the current parliamentary session.”

16:29

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): This is the first opportunity that I have had to address

Parliament since I stood down as leader of my party, and I want to thank all those who have sent me kind wishes in the past few weeks. Perhaps the old adage that you are never more popular than when you are dead is true.

Today we have a wide-ranging debate covering food and drink fortnight, the pandemic, Brexit, food poverty, farm support and climate change. It just shows how important the food and drink sector is to our economy, our way of life and the future of the planet.

We will vote for the Labour amendment, because it quite rightly includes a significant reference to food poverty in a food-rich nation. We will also vote for the coalition Government's motion, because there is not very much there to disagree with. We will, however, vote against the Conservative amendment, because it bizarrely excludes any reference to the disruption that Brexit has caused. I know that many Conservative members supported Brexit, but to completely ignore it is rather naive and does not address its real challenges and consequences.

Scotland's food and drink sector is world class. In my constituency alone, we have langoustine, porridge oats, whisky, and barley for producing that whisky, berries and, the most important product of all, broccoli, which is produced all across north-east Fife. Those products are an important part of our economy and are big employers in north-east Fife. However, the sector is under considerable and immediate pressure from the double impacts of Brexit and the pandemic. Costs of labour and materials are going through the roof at the moment and there are massive shortages on both fronts. That is affecting the primary producers and the supply chain. The whole production system has been disrupted, which is having massive consequences for the sector.

We are seeing that in the shortage of drivers, pickers and processors—right down to the hospitality sector. There is a massive problem with labour shortages at the moment, which is why I support the call that the NFUS made today for a 12-month Covid recovery visa and for a review of the seasonal workers scheme. That has just worked this year; it has just got the sector by, but there is deep anxiety about future years. We are already seeing the sector making decisions about future investment. We cannot afford to have a loss of confidence at such a critical time when we are already facing pressure because of Brexit and the pandemic.

In the Northern Isles, there are significant problems with the supply chains, the ferries and freight. We need to focus on the coalition Government's responsibilities as well as pointing out its mistakes.

There are also medium-term pressures. There is deep frustration in the agricultural sector about the dithering that has gone on for some years now. By 2032, there has to be a 31 per cent cut in agricultural emissions. That is only 11 years away. The Government has started the process and, to be fair to the new cabinet secretary, she has just started in her new role. However, we will probably be a couple of years into those 11 years before we finally see a policy. The NFUS has quite rightly talked about the inertia that is being created by the current system. There is a pressure towards the status quo and a lack of change, but we will need to make significant changes if we are going to meet that 31 per cent target in 11 years' time. The coalition Government needs to move on from the snail's pace at which it is operating.

The future policy group was set up three years ago and we still have not heard a word from it. The results from the farmer-led groups were published last week, but there is a new consultation on the back of that work. Next year, we are going to have another consultation on the back of the firm proposals. I presume that there will be a report on the back of that consultation, and we might actually see a bill on the back of that.

WWF is absolutely right when it says that the longer it takes for the new policy to be developed, the harder it will be for farmers to meet that 31 per cent target by 2032, which is only 11 years away.

Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP): Surely the Government's position of consulting an industry that is so wide ranging and so important is far more important than throwing together a quick deal. Would Willie Rennie not agree?

Willie Rennie: It is hardly a quick deal. It has taken at least three years to produce even one recommendation from a group that was established in the previous session of Parliament.

Of course we need to consult the farmers, but if we endlessly consult and make no decisions, it does not help the farmers a jot. Mr Fairlie will know from his discussions with the farmers that they are frustrated about the lack of decision making. We need to move on, because they have a massive job to do to meet the 31 per cent emissions reduction target by 2032, which is only 11 years away. There are massive tensions involved in protecting biodiversity and addressing climate change while ensuring that Scottish food production is robust and sustainable. *[Interruption.]*

I need to conclude soon.

There are tensions between forestry and productive land, between biodiversity and energy crops, and between domestic production and offshoring. Decisions on all those things are

difficult, but delaying them will not make them any easier.

I wish the cabinet secretary well in dealing with those massive challenges. Where we can, we will support her and work together to meet them, but she needs to start making decisions.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. I call Jenni Minto.

16:36

Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): It is quite right that Parliament celebrates Scottish food and drink fortnight.

I will start by quoting from “The Scots Kitchen” by F. Marian MacNeill, a Scottish author, suffragist and founder member of the Scottish National Party:

“The art of a country always has its roots in the soil—it is the natural conditions and products that determine the general character of the national cuisine.”

She was talking about our natural larder.

Argyll and Bute is a natural larder, with a lush landscape, nutrient-filled waters and passionate food producers. Wherever you go today in Argyll and Bute, its wonderful food and drink is only a footstep away. Last week, I ate langoustine in Oban, locally caught sea bream served with vegetables from our own allotment, and I toasted a sadly departed friend, Jenny Compton-Bishop from Jura, with local gin.

In Argyll and Bute, people know the strength of locally, sustainably produced, raised or caught produce. Shops proudly display “Shop Local, Eat Local” posters. My local shop in Port Charlotte gives locals and visitors the chance to buy local produce, and that is replicated across the island and Argyll and Bute. The towns that I visited during recess—Oban, Lochgilphead and Campbeltown—have new delis and food shops opening, and established shops are expanding their ranges. The Scottish Government’s £10 million investment in Scotland Loves Local is helping to revitalise our high streets by encouraging people back to them.

Throughout the pandemic, the food and drink sector has worked together for the common good to support communities. For example, Argyll Bakeries employed a chef who prepared ready-made meals, which became key stock items across the constituency. Distilleries provided hand sanitiser and local hauliers supported volunteers to distribute food packages. As the First Minister said yesterday, co-operation and working together allow ideas to come to fruition with far better outcomes.

In 1784, the French traveller Faujas de Saint-Fond told of the variety and abundance of Argyll’s table. On the island of Mull, he described the breakfast table

“elegantly covered with ... plates of smoked beef, cheese ... fresh eggs, salted herrings, butter, milk, and cream ... currant jelly, conserve of myrtle; tea, coffee, three kinds of bread and Jamaica rum”.

Sadly, Mr Rennie, there was no broccoli.

Finlay Carson: My stomach starts to rumble when I hear of such nice things. However, will Jenni Minto acknowledge that some of the sectors that she is talking about—the inshore fisheries sector, the salmon farming industry and agriculture—have real fears about the new coalition that the SNP has formed with the Green Party?

Jenni Minto: The coalition that we have formed with the Green Party will look at everything in the round—it will look at the way in which we produce items and the environment, and I think that that can only be positive for our natural larder. *[Interruption.]* I will not take an intervention; I will continue. Argyll and the Isles Tourism—*[Interruption.]* I will not take another intervention; I will continue.

Argyll and the Isles Tourism Co-operative is known as Wild About Argyll, and has established taste-of-place trails. They support small-scale, high-quality specialist producers, giving visitors an opportunity to speak to local people and sample their very special produce. If people have not visited Argyll, I suggest that they come and discover them; I know that the trails will capture people’s imagination and captivate their taste buds.

For spirits and beer, there are more than 20 distilleries and breweries, all using the natural larder of Argyll and Bute in their processes. The water, the botanicals and the peat all enhance their flavour and, with the stunning scenery, where better to raise a toast?

There is coffee and cake from Southend to Dalmally in phone boxes, cafes and horse boxes—we find a lot of uses for horse boxes in Argyll—where people can find wonderful home baking, to be washed down with a mug of Tiree Crofter tea or Argyll roasted coffee.

There is also the seafood trail. Loch Fyne herrings were historically celebrated for their delicious flavour and were sent in barrels to Edinburgh. As Finlay Calder—I am sorry; that is the wrong name. I am getting my politicians and my rugby players mixed up—they are both from Dumfries and Galloway, I believe. *[Laughter.]* There is also langoustine, crab, lobster, salmon, mussels, oysters, queenies, halibut and white

fish—the rich bounty of our sea—and artisanal sea salt and kelp.

On the farm produce trail, we have lamb raised on the hilly uplands, Highland cattle on the less favoured land, milk in Kintyre and Bute and, of course, barley for whisky; and some producers are diversifying into ice cream. We also have the new vegan trail—Rothesay's Bute Island Foods is the home of Sheese; it is a manufacturer and world exporter of the vegan cheese.

As I said in my first speech in the chamber, a permanent solution must be found, and quickly, for the Rest and Be Thankful. We also need a reliable and versatile ferry fleet. Everyone depends on being able to travel throughout Argyll and Bute safely and easily. I am pleased that the minister and his team are bringing new energy and commitment to solving those issues, and I thank the transport minister for his earlier detailed update on the Rest and Be Thankful.

Of course, our food and drink businesses are currently focused on keeping the shelves full as they face huge labour shortages and keeping employees safe as the pandemic continues, as well as on getting to grips with the new processes, paperwork and information technology services involved in exporting their products to the EU as a result of the chaos of Brexit.

One shellfish operator I spoke to exported 60 per cent of his catch to the EU in 2019; now, he no longer exports there, and has to find new markets. Thankfully, Scottish Development International has done amazing work in that area, but the food and drink industry needs Scottish Government support to enable it to adapt its produce to meet the requirements of new buyers. This morning at the Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee, we heard evidence from the food and drink industry about its fears. It is imperative that those fears are heard and that urgent action is taken.

It is said that you are what you eat, and that is true of nations as well as individuals. Argyll and Bute's larder, and Scotland's larder, are vital to our health, wealth and wellbeing. Imagine what we could do with those resources in an independent Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Minto. I am feeling decidedly peckish after your tour de force on the produce of Argyll and Bute.

16:43

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): It goes without saying that Scotland offers some of the finest produce in the world, and I am delighted to say that much of it comes from my constituency of Galloway and West Dumfries. The

area is richly blessed with companies and businesses, both big and small, that have gained either national or international recognition for their produce. The Lactalis Group creamery in Stranraer produces some of the finest dairy products, which are sold in more than 60 countries, including its Seriously brand.

Lactalis is not alone in making its mark. We also have a number of smokehouses, such as Marbury smokehouse, the Galloway smokehouse and the new diversification project at Potterland smokery, with its innovative new smoked lamb, or lamb ham. Those businesses are regularly recognised for their excellent produce, ranging from smoked salmon, trout and seafood to game products.

More recently, Bladnoch distillery has witnessed its whisky exports and production range increase dramatically under the leadership of master distiller Nick Savage. It is not alone: Five Kingdoms brewery and Sulwath Brewers, together with Dark Art and Hills and Harbour gin, have all tasted sweet success and growth—post-Brexit and mid-Covid, I might add.

Despite that, the SNP Government is still failing to give our food and drink industry the support that it rightly deserves. The Government is outstanding at making announcements on things such as the good food nation bill, but then it forgets to deliver them.

Mairi Gougeon: What about what the UK Government still has to deliver to Scotland to meet the £170 million shortfall for agriculture, as well as the paltry £14 million that we received as the replacement for the European maritime and fisheries fund, which should have been £62 million? What response would the member give to that?

Finlay Carson: The response that I would give is that the agriculture sector in this country is far more concerned and worried about the future, given the lack of direction shown by the cabinet secretary's Government.

The Scotland Food & Drink partnership has already come up with a strategy called "Ambition 2030", which aims to promote farming and fishing, as well as food and drink. It brings together the food producers and processors that make food and drink Scotland's most valuable industry, employing 47,000 people and contributing £3.9 billion gross value added to the economy from a turnover of around £11 billion.

We all want to ensure that the sector continues to be recognised as a world leader in responsible, sustainable and profitable growth, but that can be achieved only by the Government working in tandem with the Scottish food and drink industry—from farmers and growers to processors,

wholesalers, distributors and retailers—in the drive to promote the sector by providing greater resources and incentives in order to create the workforce that future growth demands. We need to create high-quality jobs and rewarding employment that will subsequently encourage more young people to consider the sector as a worthwhile and rewarding career choice, and we need to see far more apprenticeships and other schemes being offered than at present, especially now in the wake of the pandemic, when morale and mental health among the younger generation remain critical.

The Scotland Food & Drink partnership wants to encourage more young people into farming and fishing and at the same time improve Scotland's diet and nutrition. We need to encourage a more healthy approach to eating. That must be a top priority, given that our consumption of fruit and vegetables remains disturbingly low. There has been a lamentable lack of progress on healthy eating in Scotland. Mean fruit and vegetable consumption stands at 3.2 portions a day, short of the target of 5, and the grams per day intake of fruit and veg has not changed since 2001—in fact, it has dropped somewhat.

Agriculture remains very much at the heart of my constituency, but yet again the SNP Government has failed it at every turn. We are still waiting for the Government to publish its plans on future farming funding, which were promised by the end of 2020. Although I endorse the high level of stakeholder engagement that we have seen, there comes a time when the Government must make its future plans clear, and it has absolutely failed in that. That does not surprise me, especially as it took the Government two years to even arrive at a simple consultation process.

It is little wonder that the NFUS last year described the Government's failure as

“a disaster in the making for Scottish agriculture.”

Indeed, the same organisation previously slated it for having “no vision” on future farming policy, or even where it wants to be in the near future. Once again, I would urge the Government to stop the dilly-dally and delay and, with urgency, bring forward its vision and supporting policies for the future of rural and agriculture support. With farmers, crofters and growers facing huge challenges but nevertheless stepping up to the mark to do their bit to address climate change and biodiversity loss, they need this Government's support. Farmers must be given clarity now and given a clear direction on Scotland's future farm policy—of that there is no doubt.

Earlier this month, Mairi Gougeon launched a consultation on a local food strategy whereby more local production would be encouraged in

order to reduce the distance that food travels, but that is something that should have been done long ago. Public sector procurement policies and procedures must be urgently reviewed. It is quite remarkable that a food processor in Wales sends truck loads of meals to some of our hospitals and schools in Scotland. That is unacceptable and one of the reasons why the Scottish Conservatives have been calling for a comprehensive farm to fork review of Scotland's food policy that aims to boost demand for our own produce and improve public procurement that utilises Scottish produce and, more importantly, reduces food waste and food miles.

We stand with and fully support the sector in its drive towards greater productivity while attempting to achieve net zero emissions by 2040. The Food and Drink Federation Scotland plans to launch its road map at COP26 in two months' time. It will look at the actions that businesses can take in a host of areas, including packaging, manufacturing, distribution and storage. It will also point to the role that customers have in reducing the carbon footprint of food. Clearly the federation has a vision—it is just a pity that this Government and its ministers appear not to follow that good example.

16:49

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): The Food and Drink Federation Scotland pointed out in advance of this debate that food and drink is Scotland's largest manufacturing sector. The sector employs some 47,000 people, contributes £3.9 billion gross value added to the Scottish economy and has a turnover of £11 billion. This is serious stuff, so it is baffling that there is so much point scoring going on in the chamber when we are trying to talk about such important issues.

Something else that is baffling is how on earth the Scottish Tories could lodge an amendment that simply writes off Brexit as if it made no contribution to the problems and challenges that the sector in Scotland faces right now. I am sure that people will be baffled by that. Rachael Hamilton suggested that the SNP Government should get its act together; in truth, the federation has come forward with clear proposals that it wants both the UK Government and the Scottish Government to take up.

It is worth stating what FDF Scotland, Scotland Food & Drink, NFU Scotland, Scottish Bakers, Opportunity North East, the Scottish Association of Meat Wholesalers, the Scottish Seafood Alliance and the Scottish Wholesale Association have asked for. Those organisations asked the Scottish Government to

“Ensure support for automation is embedded in Scottish Government funding programmes where it supports productivity and the development of higher quality jobs”.

That is a straightforward ask. The organisations also asked the Scottish Government to

“Work with the Scotland Food & Drink Partnership to continue to promote the industry as a great career destination, and to provide opportunities through apprenticeships and other schemes”.

I hope that the minister will respond to those two specific asks, which that group of organisations think would make a difference.

Mairi Gougeon: I thank the member for raising those points. I have responded to the industry on its asks of the Scottish Government, because we are committed to working with it. On a few issues, we are already implementing some of what it is asking for. For example, the food processing, marketing and co-operation grant scheme, which was launched last month, will help with the automation element. I reassure the member that I have responded and that work is on-going.

Alex Rowley: That represents someone taking a more serious approach to what is going on, as opposed to trying to score political points.

The organisations made asks of the UK Government, too, and I ask Tory members whether they support those calls, even if it is not in their gift to respond to them. The sector asked the UK Government to

“Introduce a 12 month covid recovery visa for the food and drink supply chain—to deal with immediate pressures on the industry and allow employers”

in Scotland

“to expand recruitment to EU and other overseas workers”.

The sector also asked that the UK Government

“Commission an urgent review by the Migration Advisory Committee of the needs of the food and drink sector”

and

“Waive the fees to employment visas for the food and drink supply chain until 2022”.

Those are three specific asks that the sector says would make a difference. I do not know whether Rachael Hamilton wants to respond to them.

Rachael Hamilton: I was going to respond on the two asks in the open letter that we included in our amendment. I am glad that members on the Labour benches agree with them and that the cabinet secretary has responded to them, albeit not fully enough.

On the asks about labour shortages, we have acknowledged today that there is a perfect storm. There is a whole host of reasons for labour shortages, which are also an issue in France, Germany and Italy. There are calls to the UK Government to produce a plan to invest in skills in our domestic workforce. I know that the UK

Government is doing that and I fully support the approach.

Alex Rowley: From that, I hope that the Parliament can come together, get behind what the Food and Drink Federation is calling for and make it clear to the UK Government that such measures should be taken if we are to do something to protect jobs and the industry.

I want to highlight that food has to be affordable. There has been a rise in the number of food banks since 2010. In 2010, I do not think that there were any food banks in Scotland—there were certainly very few—but they are now commonplace in every city, town and village in the country. Again, there are things that the Parliament can do. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation points out that social security should be strong enough for all of us to rely on when we need a lifeline. It says:

“A cut of £20 a week to Universal Credit”—

a working tax credit—

“scheduled for 6 October, will impose the biggest overnight cut to the basic rate of social security since the modern welfare state began, more than 70 years ago.”

I hope that we can build a consensus and that Scottish Tory members will join, I am sure, every other member in calling on the UK Government not to go ahead with the £20 a week cut, which will drive food poverty even higher in Scotland.

16:56

Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP): I very much welcome the motion in the name of the cabinet secretary. The recent story of Scotland’s food and drink sector is remarkable. I have been involved with the industry for virtually my entire working life, and I am incredibly proud of it. The industry has shown an outstanding degree of progress and development over a relatively short time, and it has evoked a total shift in the global perception of our country.

Not so very long ago, we Scots had the only slightly undeserved reputation for eating nothing that had not been deep fried, including Mars bars. Tourists came to Scotland for the scenery, the castles and the history. They certainly did not come because of our reputation as a nation of gourmet food lovers. Yet, ironically, we have always grown, raised, caught, harvested and landed some of the finest produce in the world. The problem was—and, to some degree, still is—that, as a nation, we have never really appreciated what is here on our doorstep. In our fields, rivers and seas is an abundance of some of the world’s most sought-after natural ingredients.

Scotland and fine food were far from synonymous, except to a very few who were in the know. The vast bulk of our best produce went

straight to the kitchens of some of the best hotels and restaurants around the world, as we allowed the “stack it high and sell it low” principle to take hold of our own diet. We dined out on the rise of fast food—highly sugared, highly salted, instant and available 24 hours a day for convenience.

We stopped cooking. We lost generations of knowledge and skills and the ability to home cook really good, nutritious, tasty and locally grown food. By losing that, we lose a lot more than just those basic skills. We lose understanding. We lose an opportunity for communication. We lose a connection to the food that we eat and, added to that, a connection with one another that we can get only by sitting round a full table of fabulous food with friends and family. This debate is about far more than economics.

Over the past 20 years or so, we have finally realised that and have regained our love for and appreciation of what good food looks like, tastes like and smells like. Whether it is street food festivals doing street food theatre, seafood shacks on the beach cooking what was caught that morning or restaurants with two Michelin stars, Scottish produce is now recognised, celebrated and—above all—cooked, eaten and enjoyed throughout this country and across the globe.

Incidentally, I was pleased to see the line in the Government motion about

“encouraging public kitchens to source more local food”.

I would simply like some public kitchens to be more locally based. In Perth and Kinross, school dinners are going to be centrally produced outwith the district and then delivered to school kitchens for reheating. That goes against everything that we are talking about today.

The food and drink industry hit a moment in time when there was a coming together of ideas and imagination and a readiness in consumers to get involved. It was exciting, it was transformative and the industry grabbed the opportunity with everything that it had and ran with it, creating the fastest growing sector in Scotland’s economy.

Part of that transformation was down to action taken by the Scottish Government, which is a fact that should be recognised. The establishment of a national food and drink policy under the leadership of Richard Lochhead was pivotal. Scotland had never had a national food and drink policy before, but neither had any other country in Europe. What that demonstrated to the industry was that the Government of the day understood that the industry had an opportunity and that people were ready for it. With real collaboration between industry and Government, great things can happen, and they did.

In 2007-08, the target for the industry was to be worth £13 billion by 2013. That target was smashed years early, which demonstrated that the collaboration was working—industry and Government working hand in hand, communicating and delivering.

Finlay Carson: I refer to my entry in the register of members’ interests, as I am a member of NFU Scotland.

Does the member recognise, as someone who is close to the farming industry, the frustration in the sector at the continued lack of detail about what future support will look like? Does the member also agree that farmers continue to be left in the dark about plans for future funding?

Jim Fairlie: I accept that farming communities have been frustrated, and I have made that point to the cabinet secretary. I said to Willie Rennie earlier that the farming community would be much happier to see a policy that it is part of, that it helped to shape and that helps to make sure that we deliver our climate commitments but we also have a food industry that is still about producing food.

I will continue with what I was saying. I have lost my place.

When you are on a roll, why not go further? The Scottish Government did that and still is. The new target of £30 billion in turnover by 2030 is massively ambitious, but we have done it before so we can do it again. It is challenging but it is achievable. With the industry and the Government working together and sharing an ambition, anything is possible, and I know that we can hit the target again.

Challenges there are aplenty, and two of the biggest could not have been envisaged: the extent of damage from Brexit and the consequences of the Covid pandemic. One example of that is that East of Scotland Growers has just destroyed 2.5 million heads of broccoli and 1.5 million cauliflowers in the past couple of weeks. It is possible that it is about to do the same again, because it simply does not have the storage and capacity to move its products.

FDF Scotland tells us that the Brexit-related issues that its members face generally fall into three different groups: companies such as seed potato producers being unable to export to the EU due to the terms of the EU exit deal; companies struggling with increased costs; and those—predominantly shellfish farmers from the west coast—whose products have short shelf lives having found that increased delays due to bureaucracy mean that they cannot get their products to market in time.

No number of trade deals with countries on the far side of the world will compensate the businesses that are being thwarted in their attempt to maintain access to the world's largest single market on the other side of the North Sea. We have all seen the gaps on the shelves in our shops and heard the stories about the shortage of lorry drivers. Apparently, big pay increases have been offered to drivers, so at least an ill wind is blowing somebody some good.

We are witnessing Brexit getting real. Paying lorry drivers a bit more is only the tip of the iceberg as far as increased freight costs are concerned; I have heard that there are cases of the cost of shipping containers escalating from £2,000 to £20,000 over the past six months. Nobody is going to make any money on Australian trade deals with those kinds of numbers.

We have seen it in the treatment of our fisherfolk, our soft fruit farmers and our seed potato merchants—being part of the UK is harming our industry. The UK Government is acting as a roadblock and is preventing us from getting to where we need to be, literally as well as figuratively. I trust the Scottish Government to do everything in its power to help our food and drink industry and to find ways around the roadblocks. We all know—which is why I could not support anything that the Tories put forward in their amendment—that the best and simplest answer should be in our hands: remove the roadblock entirely and become a normal independent country.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Brian Whittle, to be followed by Ariane Burgess. Mr Whittle, you have around six minutes.

17:04

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): Is it a generous six minutes, Presiding Officer?

I am delighted to speak in a debate to support our food and drink industry. Returning members will know of my long-standing efforts to put more of Scotland's food and drink products on to Scottish dinner tables. I have always argued, and will continue to argue, that, in doing so, we can achieve real success in dealing with Scotland's poor health record.

Presiding Officer, you will be glad to know that I am bringing all that passion into my new environment brief. I believe that this is an area that can bring benefits and sustainability and support Scotland's drive towards net zero.

I will use my time today to discuss the whole chain of food and drink production, from farming to processing to procurement. No member in the chamber would dispute that our farmers are

among the best in the world. We charge them with producing high-quality food, maintaining the highest level of animal welfare, paying the living wage and leading the custodianship of the countryside. They take on those responsibilities not just willingly but enthusiastically. Today, more than ever, we ask them to work in a way that protects our environment and can deliver a sustainable future.

Farmers want to protect the environment—it is quite literally the foundation of their business. In all my conversations with farmers across the south of Scotland, I hear that there is a shared desire to innovate and become greener. In fact, they are so enthusiastic that we now see NFU Scotland and WWF Scotland united in challenging the Scottish Government to move faster on the issue. Sadly, though, they are under sustained attack from a vocal minority who insist on misrepresenting our farming and food-producing communities, criticising the industry's greenhouse gas emissions—in particular, in livestock farming—while failing to acknowledge Scottish farmers' success in reducing their carbon footprint.

Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): Perhaps Mr Whittle would like to name one of the people in his South Scotland region who would celebrate the removal of their produce from a market of 500 million consumers. Can he name some?

Brian Whittle: I thank Michelle Thomson for that intervention, but I wonder if she would recognise that, on my very recent visit to a farm with NFU Scotland and a number of farmers, they suggested that the price that they are now getting for beef and sheep is one of the highest prices they have had for a long, long time. There you go.

The reality is that Scottish farmers are leading the way in reducing emissions in rearing grass-fed livestock and continuing to innovate towards net zero at every opportunity. Our farming sector should be held up as an example to the world, not done down in pursuit of an easy headline. After all, the NFUS has set a net zero farming target of 2035, way ahead of the Scottish Government's net zero target. That is something that every MSP should support and celebrate—yet, at the heart of this Government, we now have ministers whose track record is one of criticism, not commendation.

We have ministers who, rather than working with our food producers and encouraging and supporting innovation in the green economy, would prefer to shut the whole industry down. We have a Scottish Government minister who—quite openly—wants to eliminate our world-renowned salmon farming industry. She did not even bother to engage with salmon farmers, or at least to discuss the innovations that they are now deploying. She did not even bother to look at a

map to find out where those farms are. No, she simply and simplistically decided—without, it appears, any basic knowledge of the industry—that she would like it gone. It is good to see that the Greens are already so well aligned with the SNP’s approach of headlines now, details never. It is no wonder that the Scottish fishing industry is concerned about

“an increasingly hostile environment for”

the industry as a consequence of this new coalition. I sometimes suspect that the Greens will really be happy only when we are all living up a tree in the Trossachs, foraging for nuts and berries and washing our clothes in the river, all the while importing more food—

Mairi Gougeon: Will the member take an intervention?

Brian Whittle: Of course I will, cabinet secretary.

Mairi Gougeon: I thank the member for taking an intervention, because I have to address some of the statements that he has come out with. I do not know whether he has actually read the co-operation agreement between the Scottish Government and the Scottish Green Party, which lays what he says absolutely to rest. Some of the accusations that he is making are complete nonsense.

Brian Whittle: Here you go—I have the agreement right here. It does not even mention fishing—[*Interruption.*] So, you are denying that one of your Scottish Government ministers says that they want to shut down the salmon industry. Is that what you are saying, cabinet secretary? As you well know, it is not true.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Through the chair, please, Mr Whittle—and there should be no interventions from a sedentary position, cabinet secretary.

Brian Whittle: At a time when—

Mairi Gougeon: Will the member take an intervention?

Brian Whittle: If you give me a minute.

At a time when we should be looking forward, promoting new technologies and ideas to decarbonise our most successful industries such as food and drink, the focus of the Scottish Greens is firmly on putting Scotland into reverse gear, and they now sit at the heart of the Scottish Government. They must be the least green Green Party on this planet. The Scottish Government should be embracing and encouraging the innovation that is taking place in our food and drink industry. Instead, it has joined forces with a party whose idea of innovation is to turn off the economy.

Beyond production, we need to consider where we process food. There is so little that is processed in Scotland. We send far too much of our produce out the country to be processed. How can it be right, in the country hosting COP26, that there are food producers who are being forced to ship their products hundreds or even thousands of miles to be processed and packaged? Surely we could do more to support local food processing, building new local industries and cutting their carbon footprint at the same time.

Finally, I turn to public food procurement. Quality Scottish produce on the dinner tables of our schools and hospitals—[*Interruption.*] I am just finishing.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member does not have time to take an intervention.

Brian Whittle: Surely that has to be a no-brainer. Even here, despite the matter being raised constantly in the chamber by me and by others, the Scottish Government has failed to act. It is entirely within the Scottish Government’s power to make the route from field to fork as short as possible and to support our food producers, yet the much-heralded good food nation bill has continually been kicked down the road. It should have been the vehicle to address many of the issues that we are discussing but, so far, the Scottish Government has failed to turn promises into action.

As I said earlier, we charge our farmers and food producers with the highest standards, yet the Scottish Government, through the public procurement policy, does not do enough to recognise the cost of those standards, and it failed to support our farmers in the way that it could and should have done.

We have a fantastic food and drink industry in Scotland, but we are being let down by the Scottish Government, which prefers to lay the blame at the feet of others rather than acknowledge its own failings. There is so much that it could do to support our food and drink industry. It is time that warm words were finally backed up with actions.

17:12

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): As other members have said, food poverty is a pressing issue in Scotland. Like other human rights, the right to food is already protected under international law, but we need only consider the unacceptable levels of food insecurity in Scotland to know that that protection is not happening on the ground. Of course, that is, first and foremost, a legacy of Tory austerity, but there are things that we can do in Scotland.

Enshrining a right to food has been a long-standing priority of the Scottish Greens. That is why we used budget negotiations in the previous session to secure the extension of free school meals, and it is why a right to food is part of the co-operation agreement between us and the Scottish Government in this session. That will form part of a human rights bill. It is about more than just a right to food, however. We need to act.

For one reason or another, as we have heard, the good food nation bill was waylaid in the previous session, and we have been clear that it will be progressed. It will underpin on a statutory basis the work that is already being done across the Scottish Government to support the good food nation policy. As we head into food and drink fortnight, we must acknowledge the food insecurity that persists in Scotland, and which has been exacerbated by the pandemic.

However, tackling that is about more than providing the right to basic sustenance for our citizens. Food must mean more to us than a means to survival if we are truly to build a wellbeing economy. Food is at the heart of our daily life and our culture. It is the focal point of occasions—community gatherings, festivals and celebrations. *[Interruption.]* No. I will not take an intervention; I will keep going.

Today, by celebrating the people who produce and procure our food and drink, and who play a vital role in our lives, we must also acknowledge the challenges that they face. It has been a torrid time for food producers in Scotland. The reckless Tory Brexit stripped away a vital EU workforce and threatened the standards of our food for deregulated trade deals, and there are now serious disruptions in the supply chain.

We saw in the first part of the pandemic that people stocked up to ensure that they could feed themselves and their families. Supermarkets benefited from that surge in demand, but that was not necessarily reflected down the supply chain, which led to shortages. Now, there is a different reason for shortages. As well as the loss of lorry drivers, many food producers do not have the labour to harvest what they have grown or raised. We heard earlier from Jim Fairlie the heartbreaking story of 2.5 million heads of broccoli having to be thrown away due to the lack of a labour force for harvest. In addition, shellfish have been left to rot on the quayside because producers face export challenges.

However, Brexit is not the only threat to our food supply. Farmers are dealing with an increased number of extreme weather events because of the climate crisis, and are spending more to mitigate the effects of floods and droughts. It will therefore be increasingly important for food producers to have a direct relationship with their local

communities. Over the summer, I met food producers and providers across my region, from beef farmers in Orkney to oyster farmers in Na h-Eileanan an Iar, and from Highland market gardeners growing vegetables for hundreds of families to a community food-growing and kitchen project in Argyll, feeding anyone who needs a meal.

It is clear to me that food is a central part of our communities and that they must have access to and involvement with that food resource. Eating well and being able to nourish ourselves and each other should be a right. Food in Scotland has returned to being a point of pride and pleasure, and we are fortunate to have a multitude of producers who care about the food that they make. In the face of our climate and nature emergencies, the right to food that is adequate, available and accessible is going to become even more pressing. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry, but I am going to keep going. That has made me lose my place.

In the face of cruel policies from the UK Government and the focus on stigmatising those who cannot afford to eat well and enjoy their food, Scotland's place as a good food nation has never been more important.

We can learn from our communities. During the pandemic, we saw local producers rise to the challenge of feeding their local communities, and people started to make local connections for procurement. We have the opportunity to take that further by redesigning our food systems so that people can access locally produced food.

Food is at the heart of so much of our lives, and we must eat to live. We have started to understand that access to good food will support us with good health and mental wellbeing. The co-operation agreement that we have struck with the Government recognises that producing high-quality food goes hand in hand with tackling both poverty and the climate emergency.

Scotland can be a global leader in sustainable and regenerative agriculture, Scotland can have a diverse pattern of land ownership and tenure that supports that, and Scotland can be a good food nation in which no one needs to go hungry.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): I call Elena Whitham, to be followed by Martin Whitfield. Ms Whitham, you have around 6 minutes.

17:18

Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): I refer members to my register of interests, which shows that I am still a serving councillor in East Ayrshire Council.

I rise to speak in support of the motion and in support of Scotland's larder and our wonderful producers. They have been tremendous throughout the pandemic, but have also struggled with the real and present challenges that are posed by Covid-19 and Brexit.

I will focus my contribution to the debate on how we can support our food and drinks sector by seeking to adopt right across Scotland a community wealth building approach that will see organisations such as local authorities, health boards, colleges and universities and other public bodies utilise their vast procurement spend within their localities. I am glad that the Scottish Government is currently consulting on the draft local food strategy, because it is hugely important for many policy areas.

Councils are the area with which I am most familiar. The collective council spend across Scotland last year was £23.9 billion, or 14 per cent of gross domestic product. Although a lot of that is taken up by education and social work budgets, a significant amount of money is spent on procurement of goods and services—and, incidentally, on wages, which circulate in local economies.

In my local authority area of East Ayrshire, which is one of two councils in Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley, the council has held the Soil Association's food for life gold award for more than a decade, and is the only council in the UK to do so. Decisions that were taken at local level all those years ago, on the back of the Scottish Government's hungry for success initiative, meant that community wealth building principles were at the heart of school food in East Ayrshire long before they came to the fore in the nation's collective consciousness.

Jim Fairlie: Elena Whitham mentioned what the East Ayrshire school estate has achieved. I pay tribute to Robin Gourlay—the guy who initiated the work and made the hungry for success initiative work by ensuring that the council brought local food into local schools. He was seconded to the Scottish Government and Scotland Food & Drink, where he made much bigger strides in getting better quality local food into schools across the country—far better than it was before the SNP came into Government in 2007.

Elena Whitham: I thank Jim Fairlie for that intervention. Recently, I was on a conference call with the Association for Public Service Excellence—APSE—and Robin Gourlay came on to the call. He has recently retired, so we paid tribute to all the massive work that he did.

East Ayrshire Council serves school lunches that contain very few processed foods. A large proportion—up to 70 per cent—of the food is

locally sourced and 15 per cent is organic. All that is done with careful consideration of sustainability and environmental impact. Locally, that approach has resulted in suppliers growing their businesses to accommodate the increased demand for local food in school meals, thereby employing more local people, reducing food miles in the council's carbon footprint and helping to create wealth that is retained locally. With the creation of 15 community food larders over the pandemic, East Ayrshire is also reducing local food waste and supporting dignified food provision in communities.

Brian Whittle: I absolutely agree with Elena Whitham that East Ayrshire Council should be held up as an exemplar of how we should procure food. Does she agree that, as I have said over the past five years, it is about time that the rest of Scotland followed East Ayrshire's example?

Elena Whitham: I thank Brian Whittle for that intervention. The thrust of my speech is around us seeking a way to passport that learning and experience across the country. The local food strategy and moving towards being a good food nation will do exactly that.

On receiving the Soil Association's gold award for the 12th successive year, Andrew Kennedy, head of facilities and property management of East Ayrshire Council, said:

"Since 2008, East Ayrshire Council has recognised the connections between what we eat and learning, how food helps with our health and how we can support our local producers. We invest in the food on the plate and the value it has, with good quality sustainable meals now the norm in East Ayrshire. Our approach also plays an important role in community wealth building ... for which the Council has received funding to develop Scotland's first regional approach to CWB through the Ayrshire Growth Deal. ... This means that we are committed to continuing to work with local businesses to support the local economy and to reduce our carbon footprint by continuing to source fresh local produce."

During the height of the pandemic, East Ayrshire Council retained its school food contracts to ensure that local suppliers did not go under, and every week delivered a staggering 30,000 freshly prepared meals to families who were in receipt of free school meals. At Christmas, boxes also included an East Ayrshire gift card for each child, which gave a boost to local businesses by encouraging families to shop locally.

I turn my attention to a recent news story that emerged when local dairy business Mossgiel Organic Farm in Mauchline in my constituency won the milk contract for East Ayrshire Council. That contract not only supports the farm to grow, but has a huge benefit in terms of carbon and single-use plastics reduction. By installing refillable milk vending machines in every school and delivering supplies via an on-going move to an electric fleet, it is estimated that there will be a

whopping reduction of approximately 400,000 pieces of single-use plastic from East Ayrshire primary schools every year.

Farmer Bryce Cunningham of Mossgiel now joins other Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley producers, including We Hae Meat in Girvan, A & A Spittal of Auchinleck and Corrie Mains Farm of Mauchline, in capturing the hearts and bellies of weans across East Ayrshire. I am sure that others will agree that that is fantastic news and a model for replication where possible, in order to aid our growth as a good food nation.

Whether it is local sustainable eggs, poultry, pork, beef, fish, cheese, milk or dry goods, Scotland's food and drink sector has much to offer our anchor organisations. In many areas just now, we have Scottish Government supported community wealth building initiatives, including—as a Scottish first—as part of our Ayrshire regional growth deal. In order to support the sector and our communities to recover from Covid and the uncertainties of Brexit, it is vital that we ensure that the learning and examples from those pilots are shared across the country.

As has been said already, there is no doubt that procurement is tricky and is often mired in seemingly unchangeable bureaucracy, but strong leadership and a compelling and urgent case for change can focus hearts and minds. From farm and sea to plate, let us make it local.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: It has been great to see so many interventions being taken by members. However, from now on, interventions will have to be accommodated in the time allowance for each member. I call Martin Whitfield, to be followed by Michelle Thomson, who will be the last speaker in the open debate. Everybody who has participated in the debate must be in for the closing speeches.

17:25

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): Thank you for your indication with regard to interventions, Presiding Officer. It is a pleasure to follow Elena Whitham's speech, and I draw attention to the connection that she made between good food and learning, which is essential.

Living in East Lothian, Scotland's food and drink county, I need to start by mentioning and congratulating some of the best food and drink producers not only in Scotland, but in the world. With our bakers, smokers, breweries, distilleries, honey producers, preservers, fine independent coffee houses, restaurants and public houses, farmers markets and farm shops, food lies at the heart of East Lothian. That is due also to our fisheries and farmers, and the families and companies that draw from nature the products that

are used in the food and drink industry. They have a love and care of food, and the pie producers and restaurateurs can not only name the farm that the produce comes from, but tell us who the farmer is because they have a relationship with them. They know the boat and the family that landed the lobster that sits on the plate.

That talks to the strength and love of food, not only in East Lothian, but across the south of Scotland and beyond. It talks about how food is an essential piece in the jigsaw of our society. During the pandemic, we saw the huge support from the Scottish public for their local producers and the outstanding products that are being reared, grown and manufactured on our doorstep.

That should be the case, because food is part of the foundation of life. Maslow's hierarchy of needs puts food as one of the foundation stones of being human. It is woven into every fabric of our lives. However, there is another plate and another reality for many people who live in Scotland, which is that food is a rare resource. Food poverty is a reality for our neighbours and people who live in our communities.

We all know that food banks exist, and we rightly rail against the need for them. The Trussell Trust charity runs more than 420 food banks in Scotland, and there are more than 70 independent food banks across 20 local authorities here in Scotland. Between April 2020 and March 2021, 607 food parcels were delivered for children in Dumfries and Galloway, 383 parcels were delivered for children in the Scottish Borders, and 2,602 parcels were delivered for children in East Lothian.

In July, just over a month ago, my local food bank in Tranent handed out 254 three-day emergency food parcels to feed 606 people, 220 of whom were children. We live in a society in which 220 children cannot be fed by their families without charity and community support.

Brian Whittle: I make the point again that it is about time that we tackled the amount of food waste in our society. Something has to be wrong if we are wasting such an amount of food when people are going hungry.

Martin Whitfield: Along with challenging the issue of food waste, which Brian Whittle rightly raises, we need to challenge the poverty that those families, some of whom are in work, are in. That talks to the universal credit cut that is coming and to the children's payment that needs to be paid.

We need to do so much. This is a complex problem—we are all agreed on that—but we have solved complex problems before. We came up with a Covid vaccine in just over a year. We can

solve these problems, if we genuinely want to do so.

It took 6,000kg of food, handed in and donated by people in my community, to feed those children.

In 2009, the Trussell Trust operated just one food bank in Scotland. In April 2017, it operated 52. Now, it operates 420.

This Government and the Westminster Government must do better. We have heard about—and it is right to talk about—the £11 billion that the Scottish Government and other public bodies spend on our infrastructure. It is right that we look at the supply chains. Covid has proved that we can deliver local. We should work with that, not allow the system to fall apart as we waste months and months down the line. If we allow that to happen, when we turn around to our local communities and authorities and ask them to supply the schools from local producers, those networks will have broken down. We have heard brilliant examples of local authorities doing that—yes, they were pushed into doing it by great advocates, which is often needed—but the Government needs to be a great advocate for that approach.

We need to turn the spending that we are sending all over the world to support our local communities. We need to cut that mileage to reduce the carbon footprint.

It is to the Government's credit that, after years of Scottish Labour—and others—campaigning for the United Nations right for food to be enshrined in Scottish law, and initially rejecting that as “not necessary”, that will happen. However, we need that sooner rather than later. Covid has shown the reality of food insecurity, with food bank usage already surging before lockdown. We have malnutrition in 2021. Malnutrition and hunger should not exist in 21st century Scotland. Enshrining a statutory right to food in Scottish law is the start of one aspect of eradicating food poverty.

With regard to the two amendments—I will be very quick on this aspect—I accept some of what is included in Rachael Hamilton's amendment, particularly the point that Scottish independence would irrevocably damage the food and drink industry. However, the Conservatives must equally accept and recognise the damage that Brexit has done to the food and drink sector, its contribution to labour shortages and the damage to the access to markets. Not to do so and encompass that is naive.

Obviously, I support the Labour amendment, because who in this chamber—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must wind up now, Mr Whitfield.

Martin Whitfield: I will be very quick, Presiding Officer.

Who in this chamber cannot condemn the unacceptable level of food poverty? Who cannot see the moral wrong in an ever-rising use of food banks in Scotland? Our country produces fresh quality food and it is plentiful.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that you will have to conclude now.

Martin Whitfield: Enshrining the right to food in Scots law should be a priority.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you very much, Mr Whitfield. I call Michelle Thomson, who is the last of the speakers in the open debate.

17:33

Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): Thank you, Presiding Officer. You will be pleased to hear that I will speak for considerably less than six minutes.

Two years ago, I led a piece of research where we engaged with more than 1,000 business leaders in 74 countries. They saw Scotland as a country that produces quality products and a place where ethics rank high among our key attributes as a trading nation. No sector better meets those perceptions than the food and drink sector. Fewer sectors contribute as much to Scotland's global brand. Access to good affordable food is critical for the health of our nation. We know that poor diet leads to poor health outcomes and, as has been commented, to poor learning for our children.

The sector has strategic significance, and we are all indebted to our farmers and producers for the work that they do to secure supplies. However, they face unprecedented challenges.

Over the past 24 hours, I have heard of local consumers in my constituency facing nearly empty shelves that were once stacked with food. My constituency staff have been discussing problems with entrepreneurs who hope to open both a restaurant and a food shop. They face huge rising costs of the basic materials that are needed to refurbish the premises due to issues with supply chains. One existing business in the drinks sector has told me of problems with supplies from Spain; until recently, it had received urgent supplies in 48 to 72 hours but now it faces an eight to 10 weeks' wait. Others have faced problems with increased bureaucracy, and all that comes on top of the biggest difficulty of all—the recruitment of staff.

Such challenges are not unique to Falkirk East. UK-wide, as many as 500,000 jobs may need to be filled throughout the whole food supply chain.

James Withers, the chief executive of Scotland Food and Drink, recently stated:

“The current evidence can’t be dismissed. Staff shortages are everywhere in the food supply chain, from farm to manufacturer to haulier.

And if you think gaps on supermarket shelves are worrying, remember care homes & hospitals need food too”.

A recent survey by the federation pointed out that 93 per cent of food and drink companies have vacancies that they are struggling to fill.

Good, skilled people lie at the heart of our food and drink sector. The current problem of employers being blocked from recruiting staff from elsewhere in Europe is caused in part by ideological dogma. I agree that we need to do more to increase the attraction of employment in food and drink and to provide skills for the future, but, at least in the short and medium terms, we need to open the gates to recruitment from our European neighbours.

Brian Whittle: Does Michelle Thomson recognise that the pandemic in itself, which caused so many people to go home on furlough and led to the restriction of travel, has exacerbated a problem that was here long before Brexit?

Michelle Thomson: I would certainly agree that the pandemic has had an influence on skills leaving. However, in terms of skills coming back, the so-called hostile environment—which applies not just to areas outwith the EU—is being strictly enforced on those friends and neighbours who used to come here from the EU. It has had a real impact on them feeling welcome to return, and that is what I bemoan.

Much of the labour market problem is due to the insanity of a Tory Brexit compounding problems on top of the pandemic. The deniers—I think that we have just heard from one—who are easily found among the Tory group should listen to the views—[*Interruption.*] No, I will not take another intervention. They should listen to the views of James Withers:

“Brexit has created a world where too often problems are denied, warnings ignored & evidence is dismissed”.

“Brexit has been an enormous shock to the labour market; a Brexit implemented in the middle of a pandemic, when supply chains were already straining.”

What are we to do? What kind of future—apart, of course, from an independent Scotland—are we looking for? I am inclined to support the view of Wendy Barrie of the Scottish Food Guide, who recently wrote to me:

“What we need in Scotland is to focus on quality: honest good food, sustainably produced on smaller units. Smaller scale, multiplied up, is more resilient for Scotland’s future and better for the environment”.

I am not saying this to imply that we should turn away from importing and exporting, an idea eloquently outlined by my colleague Jim Fairlie. Instead, we should ensure a healthier home market, where our commitment to quality and resilience serves our needs better. There is much to consider, but working with the sector will allow us to set down strong roots once more for our future growth.

We need to develop strategies that better prepare us for future shocks and global challenges.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please finish, Ms Thomson.

Michelle Thomson: This is my last point. I welcome work such as the Scotland food and drink recovery plan, as well as other work that is being undertaken by the Food and Drink Federation and our own Scottish Government.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you for getting us back on track. We move to closing speeches. I call Rhoda Grant; you have six minutes.

17:38

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): The food and drink sector is incredibly important to Scotland, as we have heard today. We in the Scottish Labour Party have been calling for the Scottish Government to bring forward a good food nation bill that is worthy of the sector’s importance for years. Sadly, it has continued to delay. Seven years has passed since the publication of the national food and drink policy, and we are still waiting for a good food nation bill. The Government pleads the pandemic, but Covid-19 has, if anything, underlined the urgent necessity of such legislation, rather than pointed to the need for delay.

I echo Colin Smyth’s thanks to food and drink workers. Many of those working in the industry were on the front line during the pandemic, working in shops, delivering food, providing assistance and, indeed, growing food. However, many of those workers depended on food banks for their nourishment. Many workers in the hospitality industry found themselves sidelined when they were furloughed, while many others did not even get that, because of the seasonal nature of their jobs. Others sought and found alternative employment, which has left a huge staff shortage throughout the industry.

Through all those issues, the pandemic has caused a huge increase in the dependence on food banks. It is horrendous that the Trussell Trust provided 221,554 emergency food parcels. Martin Whitfield reminded us of a time, not that long ago,

when food banks were not required. We should all aspire to having as a core principle in our food and drink strategy the aim of ending the need for food banks—everybody should be able to access good nutritional food.

The Scottish Government has dithered over legislating for a right to food. The right to food should be at the centre of the Government's good food nation bill, but we hear today that that is not going to happen. I will introduce a member's bill that would enshrine in Scottish law the right to food and create a commission to drive that right into a reality. Work on that was started by my colleague Elaine Smith, and I have pledged to continue it until the right exists in Scottish law.

In Scotland, we are privileged to have the best food and drink in the world, from Scottish whisky to Scottish salmon, and from Tunnock's teacakes to Stornoway black pudding—the list goes on. Every member took the opportunity to name check the good food in their constituencies. I cannot do so, because there are far too many examples in my area, although Jenni Minto managed to get in most of the ones in Argyll and Bute. She led the charge on that, closely followed by Finlay Carson for his constituency.

It was lovely to hear all that, but it highlighted the obscenity of people going hungry and malnourished in a country with such bounty. Some members rightly took time to pay tribute to those who work in food banks to provide free food, but they should not have to do that. Martin Whitfield passionately addressed that issue and pointed out how dehumanising it can be to depend on charity for such a basic human right.

Colin Smyth talked about enshrining the right to food in Scottish law. He said that that is vital to all our people, and that we need an independent authority to make it happen. It is important that such an authority is part of any bill to ensure that the policy is driven forward. We know that lack of food and poor nutrition have a huge effect on physical and psychological wellbeing, so it is important that we make sure that food is available to everybody, not through charities but in their own right.

On the Conservative amendment, Alex Rowley and Martin Whitfield made the point that the issue is not what is in the amendment; we disagree with what the amendment would take out of the Government motion. The Conservatives' points would have been made more strongly if they had recognised some of the UK Conservative Government's shortcomings in respect of our food and drink policy.

Colin Smyth talked about local procurement, which should be a fundamental part of any food and drink strategy. The Government should not

just hand down the strategy; it should work locally to enable small producers to become involved in procurement for our hospitals and schools. Elena Whitham made the same points in her speech, and Finlay Carson talked about meals that are produced in Wales being served in Scottish schools and hospitals, which surely is not right for the environment or for our local businesses.

One of the main concerns that have been raised in the debate has been about the lack of a policy—Willie Rennie, Finlay Carson and others made that point. We are asking farmers and crofters to reach net zero, but we do not have a clue how to help them to achieve that, which is simply not right. If the farming and crofting community do not achieve it, that will not be their fault; it will be the Government's fault.

The lack of an overall food policy causes many issues. It causes a lack of skills and climate change goals to be missed and it fundamentally affects people's access to food. That omission will cost us dearly with the health impact of a poor diet. Those who live in our poorer areas lose 20 years of their lives and are more likely to die of Covid. Creating a right to food must be seen as a national emergency. That is my final comment.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you. Before I ask Jamie Halcro Johnston to wind up for the Conservative Party, I am not going to name and shame them but I will note that a couple of members who participated in the debate were late for the closing speeches. When I say to members that they have to be back in the chamber for closing speeches, I mean the start of closing speeches, not some time during them.

With that, I call Jamie Halcro Johnston. You have around seven minutes.

17:45

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I hope that those members are suitably chastened, Presiding Officer.

I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of members' interests as I am a partner in a farming business and a member of NFU Scotland.

At the beginning of another parliamentary year, the pandemic that we have laboured under for so long still casts a long shadow on our economy. Our most recent economic statistics still show output below what it was before the pandemic. There are problems still to be faced.

There have undoubtedly been positives as we have opened up. Some parts of our domestic tourism trade in some parts of Scotland have seen visitors return in encouraging numbers, and many customer-facing businesses are benefiting from

consumer demand. However, many of the businesses concerned suffered considerably during the worst parts of the past year and a half, and our food and drink sector is no different. As we welcome food and drink fortnight this year, it is once again against a negative backdrop. The Government's motion praises the resilience of producers but we should also recognise just how challenging the period has been and the continuing impact on our economy.

One thing that the pandemic has brought is an unpredictability in demand and supply. Hospitality has suffered some of the greatest challenges. Restaurants, pubs and everything from distillery tours to school lunch halls have been forced to stop, start and stop again at short notice. That disruption has caused challenges for the supply chain, producers, and distributors that should not be underestimated.

As members will know, the food and drink sector has a disproportionately large footprint in my region, the Highlands and Islands, with Orkney beef and cheese, Speyside whisky, Shetland shellfish and brewing on the Black Isle. It is impressive produce and it represents hundreds of employers often making use of local ingredients and sustaining local jobs. It all contributes to more than £11 billion of turnover in the sector.

We must be responsive to the future outlook of those businesses. The enterprise agencies, councils and government more widely should monitor the progress of our recovery at all local levels. As the food and drink partnership recovery plan that was produced under Fergus Ewing noted, growth has often come from entrant businesses that became established in their local markets before expanding outwards.

Many issues with the sector pre-dated the Covid pandemic. My colleague Rachael Hamilton and others said that the continued lack of strategic direction on future Government agricultural policy cannot be raised often enough in Parliament.

Jim Fairlie: Does the member agree with the former chair of the Trade and Agriculture Commission, Tim Smith, who has just said that he is beyond frustrated that the Government has not yet set up a new statutory trade and agricultural commission to scrutinise new trade deals, and that that lack of scrutiny because of such a commission not being set up in the Scottish Parliament will be hugely detrimental to Scottish industry?

Jamie Halcro Johnston: I will tell the member something that the former NFUS president Andrew McCormick said to Fergus Ewing, the cabinet secretary's predecessor. He said:

"Where is the policy? Where is the road map? All the information you need is sitting waiting on Scottish

Government desks to be pulled together. Stop dithering and start delivering."

I suggest that the member stops distracting and focuses on the issues that his colleagues in the Scottish Parliament can deal with but have not yet done.

That lack of strategic direction represents an unwillingness on the part of ministers to give the sector the clarity and vision that it desperately needs. The cabinet secretary has spoken of sustainable, low-carbon food, but to create that requires a sustainable low-carbon approach to our rural economy. Agricultural businesses have been crying out for direction. They know that change must come and, in many cases, they are optimistic about that change, as Brian Whittle said. The progress from the Scottish Government has been at a snail's pace. The ferries will probably be finished before we get a direction for Scotland's farmers.

On that point, the growing ferries crisis, which I raised earlier with the cabinet secretary—an issue on which we have called for the transport minister to make a statement to the chamber—has impacted on rural and island communities across the length of the west coast. Over the course of the summer, some of our island and most remote communities found themselves all but cut off, which had a significant impact not only on residents and potential visitors but on a swathe of businesses, including in the food and drink sector, on islands that rely on their sea connections to export their produce. Those problems may seem distant to SNP ministers here in Edinburgh, but they are a real issue to so many businesses across my region.

We have had a number of good contributions to the debate, and there has probably been more agreement than we might have expected. My colleague Rachael Hamilton raised the concerns of a sector that feels that it is being ignored, with the result that the relationship between farmers and Government has been damaged in the process. Elena Whitham and Colin Smyth highlighted the importance of local food sourcing in procurement. Colin Smyth also highlighted the Government's failure to introduce the good food nation bill.

Fin Carson spoke about just some of the produce of his constituency of Galloway and West Dumfries and the need for a locally focused approach that would reduce food miles and build on the strength of local suppliers. He also spoke about the missed opportunity that has resulted from the Government's failure to focus more on the good food nation bill.

For someone who has such a dubious history of livestock-based public relations stunts, Willie

Rennie—probably sensibly—played it safe and focused on his passion for broccoli.

Brian Whittle was absolutely right to say that our farmers are among the best in the world—although I might be a bit biased on that—and that Scottish farming is enthusiastic about the opportunities for change. He made the point that farmers need our support. That is also the case for the fishing sector and, in particular, the fish farming sector, which suffers from cheap and often inaccurate headline grabbing by certain people.

Jenni Minto gave us a good, in-depth run around Argyll and Bute and some of the fantastic produce that is available there, and she rightly highlighted the importance of reliable transport links for our food producers.

Some long-established Scottish businesses have gained a global reputation for quality, sustainability and innovation, and in recent years the sector has worked to tackle its impact on climate. In areas such as mine but across Scotland, too, many people have been dependent on the sector—directly or indirectly—for employment. The sector also brings visitors to Scotland, and provides a sense of place and a flavour for our local identities. We are rightly proud of that, and I have no doubt that support for the sector is shared around the chamber.

However, as is the case for businesses across Scotland, support needs to be in place, as well as the conditions for businesses to thrive. The Scottish Government needs to be focused on working to support this vital sector in the present and in the future, instead of being obsessed with making every issue or difficulty that the sector faces yet another constitutional grievance, no matter how untrue that might be.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You need to be winding up now, please.

Jamie Halcro Johnston: I am.

This is the beginning of a five-year session that will be vital for the sector's future. It is a chance to improve, to innovate and to develop opportunities; it is a chance to ensure that we get the right support in place for the years ahead; and it is a chance for the Scottish Government to stop talking about what it cannot do and to start talking about what it can do.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Mairi Gougeon to wind up the debate. I would be grateful if you could take us up to decision time, cabinet secretary.

17:53

Mairi Gougeon: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

I thank all members for their contributions to this important debate. I know that there is a broad consensus that the food and farming industry is key to our economy. It has kept the food on our table during the pandemic, and I want to reiterate Colin Smyth's thanks to the industry for the work that it has done throughout the pandemic and beyond in making sure that we have had food on our table.

The industry now faces the stark reality of Brexit and the rules, regulations and extra costs that that has brought for the sector. A policy that was supposed to free business from red tape has had entirely the opposite effect.

On that subject, I must address some of the points that have been made during the debate in relation to the amendments. It is a bit rich for the Tories to make claims about the impact of independence on the food and drink industry when we are seeing the fallout from the UK Government's decisions, which we in Scotland cannot affect. Jamie Halcro Johnston used the term "constitutional grievance". Which party was it that included mention of independence in its amendment?

It is really important that we look back at what the UK Government has done to the food and drink industry in Scotland. It is a UK Government that took the convergence uplift intended for Scottish farmers and crofters, to the tune of £160 million, for which we had to fight for years to get back. It was only down to the industry and the relentless pursuit of that by my predecessor, Fergus Ewing, that we saw the money eventually return to Scotland.

It is also a UK Government that, despite claiming it would fully replace EU funding, did nothing of the kind—cutting our funding for agriculture to the tune of £170 million. I am glad that Finlay Carson thinks that is an amount to be sniffed at.

It is also a UK Government that, rather than provide the £62 million that would replace the European maritime and fisheries fund allocation to Scotland, provided only £14 million to our coastal communities.

It is also a UK Government that could not be less interested in the disastrous impacts that its policies are having on food producers here.

Finlay Carson: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Mairi Gougeon: No—I need to make progress.

On trade deals, I wrote three letters with three requests for urgent calls with the Secretary of

State for International Trade, Liz Truss, to discuss our industry's fears. To this day, I have not had a response.

The trade and agriculture commission mentioned by Rachael Hamilton is still not established. We have therefore had trade deals that have been rushed through without that body being established to do what it was created to do.

On migration, the FDF highlights an absolutely critical issue in its briefing to members, which has been conveniently cherry picked by the Tories and completely glossed over in their motion. Every single plea by me in my previous role as rural affairs minister and from Ben Macpherson in his role as migration minister and then in rural affairs—

Finlay Carson: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Mairi Gougeon: No—I need to make progress, and I think it is really important that Finlay Carson listens to these points.

Jenny Gilruth, in her previous role as Minister for Europe, Migration and International Development, made 19 requests for meetings to discuss migration matters. Every single one of them was ignored. It is therefore quite clear which Government is doing irrevocable damage to our food and drink industry.

What we are asking for was aptly summarised by Michelle Thomson. We need to plan for the future when it comes to these issues. We have set up a commission to consider land-based learning, which will look at the skills that we need in the longer term and for the future.

Finlay Carson: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Mairi Gougeon: I will not give way at this moment in time.

We need—[*Interruption.*]. We need the immediate interventions requested by the industry, because—as it has stated—we are heading into a crisis, and these points need to be addressed immediately.

On the Labour amendment, I could not agree more with a lot of the arguments that were made by Colin Smyth and Martin Whitfield in their passionate speeches. It is completely morally unjustifiable that we are seeing an ever-increasing use of food banks in Scotland. Nobody should be going hungry or having to rely on food banks in our country. We continue to use all the powers at our disposal in Scotland to challenge the root causes of poverty, but it does not help when that is completely undermined by the UK Government through actions such as the removal of the £20 universal credit uplift. We will publish an action

plan to outline the steps that we will take to end the need for food banks.

Colin Smyth mentioned the importance of local food strategies and procurement, as did a number of other members. We want to harness the power of public sector procurement, which is why we committed to tackling that and outlined that in our manifesto. We have the food for life programme in our local authorities. Can we embed that approach across the public sector, given its clear benefits for health and our local economies and producers? That point was well made and emphasised by Elena Whitham and Martin Whitfield. Elena outlined the work being done by East Ayrshire Council. I will also come on to address the local food strategy that was mentioned.

As we heard, there are lots of positive stories in the food and drink industry in Scotland about how communities have pulled together to get food to those most in need, about how businesses have innovated to keep going and about the green shoots of recovery that we are starting to see as restrictions are easing in Scotland and in our overseas markets.

I will highlight some of the points from the debate. Willie Rennie mentioned some of the fantastic produce in his constituency. When we follow that supply chain through, I also have to mention Jamie Scott at The Newport Restaurant, who, with his team, always masterfully manages to put that together and showcase the very best of Scottish produce.

During the summer recess, I was absolutely delighted to visit Islay and Colonsay with Jenni Minto. I was able to sample for myself some of the things that she mentioned, to visit Bruichladdich distillery, and to see some incredible hospitality—we saw the best of Scotland being showcased, such as by Emma Clark at Glenegedale House.

Finlay Carson talked about the food in his region, and I am just sorry that the Stranraer oyster festival has not been able to take place. I have visited that with my colleague Emma Harper on a number of occasions.

Elena Whitham spoke about Bryce Cunningham, whom I first met a few years ago and who was one of the Scottish Government's climate change champions. It has been fantastic to see how his business has developed and is now integrated in the local supply chain.

I could not let today pass without mentioning some of the businesses in my constituency. We have talked about those people who went above and beyond during the crisis last year, when people rediscovered the importance of buying local and supporting our small businesses. One such vital business in my town is my local butcher, whom it is also apt to mention since it is love lamb

week. Gavin Brymer and his team went above and beyond during the pandemic to keep people fed, reconstructing their business—pretty much overnight—to ensure that they could keep people fed with their home delivery service.

There have been those who have been working to provide local food to local people, such as What's For Tea Tonight, near Laurencekirk, and Farm to Table, near Auchencroft, who provide their own fresh produce from the farm, as well as partnering with other local producers, such as the Phoenix Bakehouse in Inverbervie. The Lobster Shop in Johnshaven supplies the freshest and best shellfish.

I must mention The Food Life in Brechin, which has been doing truly amazing work with young people. It received lottery funding to deliver a project that brings together young people in the community to learn about building sustainable local systems while equipping them with food production skills, looking at the growing, processing and distribution of food. We have so much to shout about and truly applaud, not just over the course of this food and drink fortnight, but well beyond it.

The sector is, of course, built on people: more than 122,000 over 17,000 businesses, from microbusinesses through to some of the biggest players on the global stage. There are the entrepreneurs, the farm shops and the people diversifying what they farm to create and supply the growing market for sustainably produced food.

As I have said, the key ingredient of food and drink is undoubtedly the people. We need to thank all those who work in our food and drink industry, from the primary producers to those throughout the supply chain, and really celebrate them all in this food and drink fortnight. They are at the heart of what is helping us to be and what will make us a good food nation. For that reason, we have to continue to support them and the people working with the industry.

Personally, I look forward to being part of the recovery process and will certainly do everything that I can to continue the recovery in order that our food and drink sector flourishes, as it rightly deserves to do.

Business Motions

18:02

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-00999, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 7 September 2021

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by First Minister's Statement: Programme for Government 2021-22

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 8 September 2021

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
Health and Social Care

followed by First Minister's Statement: COVID-19 Update

followed by Scottish Government Debate:
Programme for Government 2021-22

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.25 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 9 September 2021

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
Social Justice, Housing and Local
Government;
Constitution, External Affairs and Culture

followed by Scottish Government Debate: A Caring
Nation – Setting Out a New Vision for
Health and Social Care in Scotland

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 14 September 2021

2.00 pm Time for Reflection
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Topical Questions (if selected)
followed by First Minister's Statement: COVID-19 Update
followed by Scottish Government Business
followed by Committee Announcements
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 15 September 2021

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
 Justice and Veterans;
 Finance and the Economy
followed by Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party Business
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.10pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Thursday 16 September 2021

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 11.40 am General Questions
 12.00 pm First Minister's Questions
followed by Members' Business
 2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
 Education and Skills
followed by Scottish Government Business
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 13 September 2021, 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.—[George Adam]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of motion S6M-01000, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on a stage 1 timetable for a bill. Any member who wishes to speak against the motion should press their request-to-speak button now.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Carer's Allowance Supplement (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be completed by 24 September 2021.—[George Adam]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

18:03

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is consideration of two Parliamentary Bureau motions.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Economy and Fair Work Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the legislative consent memorandum in relation to the Professional Qualifications Bill (UK Legislation).

That the Parliament agrees that the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the legislative consent memorandum in relation to the Environment Bill (UK Legislation).—[George Adam]

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

Decision Time

18:04

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): There are four questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is that amendment S6M-00990.2, in the name of Rachael Hamilton, which seeks to amend motion S6M-00990, in the name of Mairi Gougeon, on supporting success in food and drink in Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division. There will now be a short technical suspension.

18:04

Meeting suspended.

18:08

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We move to the vote on amendment S6M-00990.2, in the name of Rachael Hamilton.

For

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Haicro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)

Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)

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

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-00990.2, in the name of Rachael Hamilton, on food and drink, is: For 28, Against 93, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-00990.1, in the name of Colin Smyth, which seeks to amend motion S6M-00990, in the name of Mairi Gougeon, on supporting success in food and drink in Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is now closed.

Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My screen froze. I am not sure whether my vote was recorded.

The Presiding Officer: It was not recorded, Ms Adam. How would you like to vote?

Karen Adam: My vote was no.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. We will ensure that that is recorded.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)

Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)

McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S5M-00990.1, in the name of Colin Smyth, on food and drink, is: For 25, Against 96, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S5M-00990, in the name of Mairi Gougeon, on supporting success in food and drink in Scotland, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My screen would not refresh and I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. We will record your vote, Ms Burgess.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I had the same issue. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. We will ensure that that is recorded.

Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I could not get my app to work. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. We will ensure that that is recorded.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)

McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-00990, in the name of Mairi Gougeon, on food and drink, is: For 92, Against 29, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament, in advance of Food and Drink Fortnight, acknowledges the significant contribution that food and drink make to Scotland's economy, society and reputation; notes the resilience shown by all of Scotland's food producers throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and thanks everyone involved in food and drink in Scotland for helping to keep food on the table through these challenging times; laments that the sub-standard Brexit deal, secured by the UK Government, is harming food and drink businesses, slowing and making exports harder, has raised their costs and bureaucracy, is causing problems for businesses in recruiting and retaining staff, and is now resulting in concerns about food supplies; welcomes the economic and environmental opportunities for low-carbon, sustainable and organic food production, which can be created by encouraging public kitchens to source more local food; recognises that the Scottish Government is consulting on a draft Local Food Strategy and encourages everyone to take part, and resolves to continue supporting the sector with legislation to grow as a Good Food Nation, where people take pride and pleasure in, and benefit from, the food that they produce, buy, cook, serve and eat each day, and include a right to adequate food as part of wider work to give effect to international human rights law in Scots law.

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

The final question is, that motions S6M-01001 and S6M-01002, in the name of George Adam, on the designation of lead committees, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Economy and Fair Work Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the legislative consent memorandum in relation to the Professional Qualifications Bill (UK Legislation).

That the Parliament agrees that the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the legislative consent memorandum in relation to the Environment Bill (UK Legislation).

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Insulin Discovery Centenary

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a members' business debate, in the name of Emma Harper, on 100 years of insulin. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament celebrates 100 years since the discovery of insulin; recognises that this is one of the greatest medical breakthroughs in history, which went on to save millions of lives around the world; further recognises that, following the discovery of insulin, Scotland played its part in developing the insulin pen, which has made it much easier for people to administer the lifesaving drug, and that Professor Sheila Reith, a type 1 diabetic, doctor and mother, led this work in Scotland; notes the further advances in the treatment and management of diabetes, including through digital technology; understands that there are more than 312,000 people living with diabetes in Scotland; further notes that the inequalities attached to diabetes are stark, with rates of type 2 diabetes 80% higher in the most deprived communities, and that people living in poverty are more than twice as likely to develop life-changing complications; understands that there is work to do to support further advancements in diabetes care and treatment, and supports Diabetes Scotland's vision of a world where diabetes can do no harm.

18:20

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I welcome the opportunity to bring the 100 years of insulin debate to the chamber this evening, and I thank all colleagues who have supported it.

I thank Diabetes Scotland for its briefing ahead of the debate and for the amazing work that it does to continually support people living with diabetes, particularly during the Covid pandemic. If exposed to Covid, people with diabetes are at higher risk of severe illness, hospitalisation and even death. Figures released early in the pandemic showed that 20 per cent of Covid-related deaths were of people with diabetes.

Insulin is life saving for all people who are diagnosed with type 1 diabetes. Insulin is a hormone excreted by the pancreas directly into the blood stream so that glucose can move from the blood circulation into the cells of our body. Insulin is vital for metabolism and survival. Type 1 diabetes occurs when the beta cells in the pancreas fail and the pancreas is unable to produce any insulin at all. I note for the record that I am one of those people with type 1 diabetes. My twae sisters and my mum also have type 1, but that is a whole other story.

This year, it is 100 years since the discovery of insulin, which is one of the most significant advances in the history of medicine. Insulin was discovered in April 1921. Frederick Banting, Charles Best and Scotsman John James Rickard

Macleod initially isolated insulin from the pancreatic islets of dogs, then James Collip assisted with purified cattle insulin so that it could be administered to human patients with type 1.

Before 1921, it was extremely rare for people with type 1 diabetes to live for more than a year or two. In 1921, injection was the only delivery method for insulin, and that is still the case in 2021. When my wee sister Buffy was diagnosed at nine years old in 1977, my mum reused a small glass syringe and steel needles by sterilising them in boiling water. It worked, but it was not very practical. By the time I was diagnosed in 1979, plastic syringes, which were supposed to be for one-time use, were available. They caused less pain and were easier to use.

Scotland has played its part in supporting the development of technology to treat diabetes. As well as Scotsman John Macleod, my motion mentions Dr Sheila Reith, who was a consultant at the Southern General hospital in Glasgow. Her daughter had type 1, and Dr Reith had the idea for a more portable insulin cartridge, pen-like delivery device. Dr Reith worked with colleague Dr Ireland in the late 1970s, and the Penject device, as it was called then, was subsequently created. Insulin pen delivery devices have evolved and are still used today as part of multidose therapy for people with type 1 and type 2 diabetes.

One hundred years on from the discovery of insulin, where are we now? Insulin is still the safest method of reducing blood glucose levels, and things have improved significantly. Advances in technology, such as insulin pumps, closed-loop systems, which are basically an external pancreas, and digital blood glucose monitoring devices—buttons in our arms—are helping people to live better with fewer complications. As members can see on my phone's screen, green is good for me today. My apologies for the prop, Presiding Officer.

Diabetes complications are a huge cost burden on the national health service in Scotland, but advances, such as the pumps, are so good that such complications can be reduced. In Scotland, 312,000 people have diabetes, and the rate of diabetes is 80 per cent higher in the most deprived communities. Type 2 diabetes is a health inequality issue. It is estimated that the Scottish NHS spends £1 billion on diabetes—10 per cent of its budget. Therefore, avoiding complications will benefit people with diabetes and also our NHS.

Managing type 1 diabetes is a complex issue. A 2014 Stanford University study found that people living with type 1 diabetes make an extra 180 decisions each day compared with someone who is not diabetic—that is one extra decision every five minutes while awake. Those decisions include finding out what their glucose level is now; working

out how many carbs are on their plate and whether those are fast or slow carbs; whether they should eat now or wait for two hours; whether they might go hypoglycaemic when driving home; whether they should programme their pump to deliver insulin slowly or quickly; and whether they have replacement supplies in their car, at home or in their office in case the cannula pump gets pulled out. Having diabetes is not a piece of cake; it is complicated.

We have amazing support from our NHS staff. Our endocrinologists, dietitians, specialist nurses and healthcare support workers are fantastic in supporting patients, and I thank them for their work.

There is a lot in the Scottish Government's refresh of the diabetes improvement plan, which I welcome, including continued collaboration with the third sector and stakeholders.

I bring to the minister's attention the work of the brothers Anthony and Ian Whittington and their fixing dad, fixing families and fixing us programmes. They helped their dad to lose 5 stone in weight. He reversed his type 2 diabetes by engaging in the fixing dad social prescribing programme, which Ian and Anthony created. That worked. Perhaps fixing dad could help to inform actions to include in the diabetes refresh strategy as it evolves.

I agree with Diabetes Scotland that everyone should have free and equal access to what they need to live healthy lives. In a recent survey of more than 1,000 people living with diabetes in Scotland, one in five said that they were having difficulty getting key diabetes technology devices. I therefore welcome the fact that the diabetes plan mentions access to diabetes technology in priority 2 and the commitment to review access to diabetes technology. Can the minister provide information on the timescales for that review and when the review of the data will be available? That will no doubt help to inform future care approaches. Could guidance be produced for all Scottish health boards to ensure that all who could benefit from diabetes tech can access it free of charge? Now is the time to ensure that everyone can access what they need. I would be grateful if the minister committed to that in her closing speech.

There are many issues to address and speak about, many of which I could not cover. I look forward to hearing colleagues' contributions on the 100-year anniversary of insulin.

18:27

David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): I thank Emma Harper for bringing to the Parliament such a noteworthy motion, which is an

acknowledgement and celebration of the 100-year anniversary of the discovery of insulin.

In November 1920, a group of highly talented and determined individuals came together at the University of Toronto in Canada to help one another in the pursuit of a single purpose: to understand the cause of type 1 diabetes. Understanding the cause meant having a chance of treating the condition and drastically improving the lives of millions of people across the world.

The discovery of insulin and its rapid clinical deployment effectively transformed type 1 diabetes from a fatal diagnosis into a medically manageable chronic condition. It became the first life-saving treatment for diabetes.

Scotland has a rich history and tradition of innovation, and Scots have always been at the forefront of the advancement of humanity. Scotland's legacy with the development of the insulin pen is no exception. Dr Sheila Reith, Dr John Ireland and John Paton—all medical specialists in the greater Glasgow area—began their journey to improve the lives of people with diabetes roughly 60 years after the first pioneers from the University of Toronto discovered insulin. The invention and subsequent refinement of the insulin pen has been such a success that the vast majority of insulin used worldwide is now administered through the use of an insulin pen. That increases the accuracy of doses, reduces pain and, most important, promotes ease of use. Insulin pens have had the effect of allowing those with diabetes to more constantly manage their condition and reduce serious complications related to the disease.

However, it is not nearly enough to refine ways of managing diabetes. There is still much work to be done in reducing the number of people in Scotland who have diabetes. The prevalence of type 2 diabetes is still a significant health challenge and a leading cause of ill health in Scotland. The latest data show us that an all-time high of roughly 312,000 individuals in Scotland now live with diabetes, and 6,400 people died from complications related to diabetes in 2019 alone. In addition to those figures, it has been estimated that roughly 10 per cent of those with diabetes remain undiagnosed.

The Scottish Government has taken positive steps towards tackling those issues, and it has made significant progress since introducing the previous diabetes improvement plan in 2014. With ever-increasing access to technologies to help adults and children, as well as prevention campaigns such as the think, check, act scheme, and £42 million-worth of investment in a type 2 diabetes prevention framework, the Scottish Government is committed to making Scotland a healthier country.

However, we can do more, and that progress must continue. The centenary of the discovery of insulin represents an important opportunity to improve prevention, treatment and care for all people in Scotland who are affected by diabetes. The diabetes improvement plan for 2021 to 2026 reflects the current challenges facing people who are living with diabetes. It is an important step forward that builds on all the progress to date and supports the continued improvements in diabetes care. However, those improvements will be meaningful only if there is fair and equal access for everyone in Scotland. That is why I am so pleased to see equality of access identified as one of the eight priority areas in the improvement plan.

Many factors can impact on and disadvantage diabetes care and outcomes for people, and it is vital that those are addressed. Back in 2018, I met a number of patients living with type 1 diabetes in my constituency and campaigned alongside them to have the FreeStyle Libre system approved for use in Fife, after it received Scotland-wide approval in 2017. The system has been shown to offer life-changing improvements for people with diabetes who use insulin intensively, thereby reducing the complications of diabetes, including blindness, amputation and renal failure, and helping them to live healthier and fuller lives.

I will never forget the strength of feeling and the overwhelming emotional response from local people living with diabetes to the news of NHS Fife's supplementary approval for use of the FreeStyle Libre system.

I once again thank Emma Harper for bringing the debate to the chamber, and acknowledge its celebration of the 100th anniversary of the discovery of insulin. I hope that the future of medical innovation surrounding the care and treatment of diabetes will be just as groundbreaking as previous innovations, and that it will bring about a world in which diabetes can do no harm.

18:31

Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): I thank Emma Harper for bringing the debate to the chamber. I declare an interest as a practising doctor, as noted in my entry in the register of members' interests.

We have heard about insulin and its invention from other members, so instead of going back to that, I will answer a simple question: what is insulin, and why is it important? Just behind the stomach sits an organ called the pancreas. In a healthy person, it makes insulin in response to blood sugar levels. The insulin drops the levels of blood glucose and drives it into the cells, giving them energy. People who have type 1 diabetes

unfortunately cannot produce insulin because their own immune system is attacking and destroying the cells that produce insulin in the pancreas. Type 1 diabetes is an autoimmune condition, and there is nothing that patients can do about contracting it. We have incredible new insulin delivery methods that can improve people's lives, but not everyone has access to them. I urge the Scottish Government to look at that, as was mentioned earlier.

However, type 1 diabetes accounts for less than 10 per cent of the story. Type 2 diabetes presents a huge and growing concern in Scotland and around the world. In Scotland, the number of new cases has been growing year on year, with the majority among those aged over 40.

Diabetes is a huge problem for us in the national health service. It accounts for 10 per cent of the entire NHS budget. Of that money, 80 per cent—8 per cent of the entire NHS budget—is spent on dealing with complications of diabetes such as loss of sight, loss of feeling, heart attacks and strokes. Diabetes also affects our black and Asian communities far more, with large numbers of people in those communities going completely undiagnosed.

We need to prevent people from contracting type 2 diabetes, so I have been working hard to get people active. I visited the Woodland Trust in Dumbarton, which provides an incredible area for our families to explore. I also visited the RSPB's site close to Bearsden, where people with anxiety can be referred; it also provides wonderful areas for exploration and even picnics.

I am also a paths champion for Ramblers to encourage the upkeep of paths so that we can enjoy the countryside. By doing that, I hope to promote simple activity and mindfulness to get Scotland moving, especially with such amazing nature on our doorstep. I have met representatives from supermarkets to promote healthy eating and healthy, rather than unhealthy, foods.

Emma Harper: What Sandesh Gulhane describes in relation to Ramblers and outdoor access is often referred to as social prescribing. Does he think that there are challenges in how we market that language? Some folk do not know that outdoor access might be social prescribing.

Sandesh Gulhane: Absolutely—social prescribing is a very important part of general practitioners' armoury. It is about getting patients to understand the importance of eating well or being able to exercise. People think that exercise is going to the gym and sweating and feeling horrible at the end of that session, but that is not what we mean when we encourage them to exercise. We are talking about them just going for a walk and enjoying it. NHS Lothian can use social

prescribing to refer patients to get that exercise. The profession can take that forward, and I hope that the Scottish Government supports what I am doing to help prevent people from contracting type 2 diabetes.

The invention of insulin by Drs Macleod and Banting has, quite simply, saved millions of lives. It is a testament to how amazing the discovery is that, 100 years on, it is still the mainstay of treatment and is, rightly, being lauded in the Parliament as a medical miracle. However, let us not pat ourselves on the back. Let us try to reduce and prevent new cases of type 2 diabetes. That would be a legacy that Drs Macleod and Banting would be proud of.

18:36

Paul O'Kane (West Scotland) (Lab): I thank Emma Harper for helping to bring the debate to the chamber and I recognise how close the issue is to her heart. I also thank Diabetes Scotland for its work and the informative briefing.

We often forget how far, scientifically, we have come in comparison to 100 years ago. We have already heard that, 100 years ago, diabetics did not have many ways to treat their condition and did not lead long lives, because there was little medicine to provide for them at that time. Thankfully, we have seen a remarkable leap in technology and medicine to help people live with diabetes. We have already heard the statistic tonight that 312,000 people in Scotland have diabetes, which equates to one in 20 people in Scotland, so it is likely that all members know people whose lives are affected by it. I have close family and friends who are diabetic and rely on insulin in order to live their daily lives. My dad has been diabetic for many years, so I have seen at first hand the changes that have come as he has lived with his condition, particularly technological advances in monitoring his blood sugars and administering insulin. I have also seen the universal power of insulin transcending borders. Once, on a family holiday to Rome, my dad forgot his insulin; I am not sure whether Emma Harper has ever had that experience. The Italian medics advised us to go to the Vatican pharmacy to see whether they had any of the insulin that is prescribed in the UK. Alas, the pharmacy did not have any, but the medical staff assured us that Italian insulin works just as well and duly prescribed him some.

Louisa Gault from Port Glasgow is one of my younger constituents; she is eight and was diagnosed as a type 1 diabetic during lockdown, having been rushed to accident and emergency, thanks to the quick action of her GP and practice nurse, after her mum and dad, Jan and Joe, noticed the four Ts—toilet, tired, thinner and

thirsty. During an extremely challenging time for the NHS, the family has embarked on a rollercoaster journey in which insulin has played a huge part. Louisa is now insulin dependent and her intake of carbohydrates is closely monitored. At the age of eight, she already makes many of the decisions that Emma Harper referred to. Louisa's family members have described all that as a huge learning curve, but they have commended the support of our NHS, particularly at the Royal hospital for children in Glasgow and Inverclyde Royal hospital, as well as charities, such as the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation. At a young age, Louisa has demonstrated great courage and a desire to show that she will not let diabetes hold her back. She is a budding gymnast and tells her mum and dad that she wants to be a diabetic nurse one day, so I hope that the Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport will take note to reserve a future training place for her.

The reason why I mention Louisa tonight is to reflect on how far we have come in the past 100 years. Life has been changed and been dramatically improved by developments in medicine, such as insulin. Just think where we could be when Louisa is an adult, and indeed beyond that, with another 100 years of research and development. However, we must ensure that everyone who needs access to advances has it. We know that constant glucose monitors, for example, allow a greater level of freedom for people with diabetes by allowing them to understand their bodies and what works for them. However, as has been alluded to, access to those technologies is not always equal, due to variations in what health boards can provide.

I know that members will agree with me that we must do better to bring a more equal level of quality care to those living with diabetes. The Government has an opportunity to issue strong guidance to health boards to ensure that high-tech monitoring equipment is available to all patients who require it.

Diabetes Scotland has called for a greater public health approach to be taken to help our children to understand our foods and make healthier choices to reduce the risk of developing type 2 diabetes. We need far more work in that field to help us to develop as a healthy society. I hope that the minister will say something about that in her closing remarks.

With actions such as those that I have talked about, we can help people to have healthier lives and make Scotland a happier place, and we can create a world where children such as Louisa can thrive.

18:40

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): I am pleased to speak in this members' business debate on 100 years of insulin, and I thank my friend and colleague Emma Harper for bringing it to the chamber. Emma is passionate about education on and the care and treatment of diabetes, and no better person could have introduced the debate.

Thanks to a helpful briefing from Diabetes Scotland, we have learned that more than 312,000 people in Scotland live with diabetes and that the condition is creating one of the fastest-growing and potentially most devastating health crises of our time. The number of people who are diagnosed has more than doubled in the past 20 years. That is the bad news. The better news is that, with advancements in technology from blood glucose monitors to insulin pumps and looping, there is a range of options that can support someone with taking insulin, checking blood sugars and managing their condition.

Thanks to 100 years of insulin, for people living with type 1 diabetes, it is no longer the death sentence that it was prior to 1923, when Scottish doctor John Macleod and his Canadian colleague Frederick Banting jointly received a Nobel prize for the discovery of insulin. Prior to the discovery, it was exceptional for people with type 1 diabetes to live for more than a year or two.

Despite the great medical and technological advances that have been made since then, sadly, people living with diabetes are being hit hard by Covid. Almost 20 per cent of coronavirus-related deaths in Scottish hospitals are of people with diabetes. The figure was released at the start of the pandemic, so it might be a bit higher now.

As we have heard, the condition has also exacerbated inequality, with rates of diabetes 80 per cent higher in our most deprived communities. In addition, people living in poverty are more than twice as likely to develop life-changing complications, such as heart problems and strokes. In Diabetes Scotland's recent survey of more than 1,000 people living with diabetes, one in five said that they are having difficulty accessing key diabetes technology. Therefore, while we celebrate 100 years of insulin, we must look to the improvements that can be made for all people who are living with diabetes now, wherever they live and whatever their background.

I was shocked to learn just how many people are living with type 2 diabetes—according to the briefing, the figure is 90 per cent of those with diabetes. I was almost as shocked as I was when I was diagnosed with the condition two years ago. Fortunately, after a short spell on medication and a change in diet and lifestyle, I managed to

reverse the condition in three months. It is preventable and can be reversed. The care and advice that I received—including diagnosis at my general practitioner and national health service support services for eye care and dietary advice—were exemplary.

Of course, no one could have predicted lockdown lifestyle in early 2020, and now many of us find that a lot of repair work is needed to reduce our sugar levels. However, it can be done, and I am determined to do it again. We must recognise that structural factors make it difficult, and sometimes impossible, for people to make healthy choices. The Government must continue to address the social determinants of health inequality and the reality of the damage that poverty can do.

I have family members living with type 1 diabetes, and I hear from them how relentless and overwhelming managing it can feel. Emma Harper articulately outlined those difficulties. Diabetics must be supported at every level. Thankfully, much support can be found online from Diabetes Scotland, NHS Inform and information websites by way of dietary advice, including some delicious healthy eating recipes, and exercise and lifestyle advice.

In conclusion, we must ensure the best diabetes care for everyone, no matter their postcode or background. Of course we know that new technologies can change the lives of type 1 diabetes sufferers. Indeed, I feel fortunate that I can keep my condition at bay without the need for insulin, which so many people rely on. However, the onus is on me. Type 2 diabetes is preventable, so let us stem the tide of this mushrooming condition by making healthy food and lifestyle information available for everyone. We can save the NHS a fortune and take control of our own wellbeing.

18:45

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank Emma Harper for bringing the debate to the Parliament. I was really interested to see the motion on the agenda and to hear Emma's contribution this evening, knowing about the expertise that she brings to the subject from her role as a nurse and, as I have learned, as a patient.

I also have some experience of working with patients who use insulin. I spent many years working as a dietitian in the NHS and, in my early career, I covered diabetic clinics along with a specialist diabetic nurse and other members of a multidisciplinary team. Diabetes is a condition that patients manage and live with, and I learned so much about the adaptability, resilience and

humour of people following a diagnosis of such a life-changing condition. The experience also gave me a lifelong admiration for the dedication of NHS staff and how they build relationships with patients who face having to overcome enormous hurdles during many years of treatment. I give a big shout out to all those staff, from the porters to the caterers, the medical and clerical staff, and particularly to my colleagues among the allied health professionals, which is a group of incredibly dedicated health service workers.

As the motion points out, insulin is one of the greatest medical breakthroughs in history. It changed the lives of many millions of people by changing the diagnosis of type 1 diabetes from a death sentence to a life worth living. Before insulin, it would have been unusual for someone to live past two years after diagnosis, so 100 years of insulin is definitely worth celebrating.

There are so many elements that members could bring to tonight's debate, including diabetes diagnosis, diabetes treatment, and diabetes as a life. However, in such a short debate, we only have time to raise one or two issues. In the short time I have, I want to talk a little about tackling the inequalities around diabetes care, particularly the link between inequality and diabetes outcomes.

I thank Diabetes Scotland for its briefing, which reminded me of the realities of living with diabetes, particularly for someone who comes from a more deprived background. Although insulin means that type 1 diabetes is no longer necessarily a death sentence, type 2 diabetes is still on the increase, and the day-to-day complications in heart health, eye care and foot care mean that it is an incredibly hard condition to live with.

It is important to acknowledge that living with diabetes can be relentless, and managing it can feel overwhelming. Managing lifelong conditions can take its toll on individuals and their families, so it is important that we, as parliamentarians, acknowledge our role in fighting for services and for every possible advance to be made, and made accessible to all.

The poorest people in Scotland are more than twice as likely to have diabetes at any age than the average person, and once they have the condition, those who live in the most deprived homes are twice as likely to develop complications through diabetes than those who are in less deprived areas. Those stark figures show the reality for so many. Where someone is born and where they live unfairly lays out their future, particularly when it comes to health.

Tackling the root causes of health inequalities has to be key right here in the Scottish Parliament. We need to tackle inequality in income, access to suitable housing, and access to healthy food. We

need to acknowledge the role that we all have in the Parliament and we need policies that transfer power and wealth. The great achievements in diabetes care can continue, but we have to work hard in this place of power to ensure that the factors are in place to give economic justice to all.

The briefing from Diabetes Scotland gives us the stark figures. Rates of diabetes are 80 per cent higher in the most deprived communities in Scotland. That is unacceptable and we must act. Let us celebrate 100 years of insulin, and let that remind us that things can change. With the correct structural changes in society, we can head towards Diabetes Scotland's vision of a world in which diabetes can do no harm.

18:49

Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): I, too, thank Emma Harper for bringing the debate to the Parliament. As the motion states,

“there are more than 312,000 people living with diabetes in Scotland”,

a number that has more than doubled in the past 20 years. My younger cousin was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes at a similar age to Paul O’Kane’s constituent, and I very much recognise that my aunt had to take many of the same decisions that Emma Harper has talked about this evening, and they were not popular with a cousin who had three non-diabetic cousins.

We need a greater focus on prevention if we are to reduce the number of people being diagnosed with diabetes. About 90 per cent of people with diabetes have type 2, and reducing levels of obesity will help to prevent further diagnoses. Tackling the obesogenic environment will be central to achieving that, and I look forward to the Government introducing legislation to restrict the use of promotions on food and drink that are high in fat, sugar and salt.

We must address the health inequalities that continue to plague Scotland. Obesity rates are highest among those from the most deprived communities, and no one should be subject to food insecurities in 21st century Scotland, but it is still the case that food banks are being used.

According to a report published by the UK Parliament Select Committee on Food, Poverty, Health and Environment, the inability to

“access a healthy, balanced diet”

places people at greater risk of developing obesity, as they may be

“both overnourished with calories and at the same time undernourished in relation to key nutrients.”

As I have mentioned, our food environment is saturated with low-cost, unhealthy foods. The select committee found that

“healthy food has been shown to be three times more expensive, calorie for calorie, than less healthy alternatives.”

We cannot expect people to eat healthier diets until we address the fundamental issues of poverty and access to affordable, healthy food.

We also need to address unequal access to care, as has been highlighted tonight. Many complications arising from diabetes are preventable, as they arise mainly through poor glycaemic control—or when blood sugar levels are too high. In the past few years, great advancements have been made in the development of technologies that help people to maintain good glycaemic control. However, those technologies are not available to all, and there is a postcode lottery in Scotland. Constituents have written to me about being unable to access that technology, which monitors glucose levels day and night and can make a substantial difference to how people with diabetes manage their condition. Some people with diabetes have had to pay for those technologies themselves, but not everyone is able to do so. Diabetes Scotland is calling for clear guidance to health boards that technology such as glucose monitors, insulin pumps and looping should be made available to all those who need them, and I urge the cabinet secretary to give serious consideration to that. I would be grateful if the minister had anything to say on the matter.

Covid-19 has highlighted the health inequalities that continue to plague Scotland, and we cannot afford their widening further. Health and wealth are inextricably linked, and the poorest people in the UK are 2.5 times more likely to have diabetes at any age than the average person. People with diabetes in deprived areas or from minority ethnic backgrounds are less likely to have key health checks, putting them at increased risk of developing complications. We need to ensure that everyone has access to the resources that they need to manage their condition and prevent complications, with dedicated information campaigns that raise awareness of the symptoms and encourage people to get checked.

Having a long-term health condition can undoubtedly take a huge toll on mental health, and having diabetes makes people more vulnerable to developing a serious illness if they catch Covid-19. The pandemic may have been a particularly distressing time for people with diabetes. Some people with diabetes will have been shielding, which may have put them at greater risk of isolation and loneliness, and others may have had appointments postponed, all of which can have a

serious impact on mental health. People with diabetes are more likely to experience anxiety and depression, and research conducted by Diabetes UK found that seven out of 10 people with diabetes feel overwhelmed by their condition and are not getting the emotional support that they need.

It is vital that we do not view diabetes simply as a physical condition in isolation from mental health. We need to talk more openly about how long-term conditions can affect mental health, ensuring that emotional support is integrated into physical healthcare.

There have been incredible advancements in diabetes care and treatment since the discovery of insulin, and we must now do more work to ensure that everyone can benefit from them. If we give people the tools, resources and support that they need to manage their diabetes, we can substantially improve their quality of life.

18:54

The Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport (Maree Todd): I am absolutely delighted to respond to the debate on behalf of the Government, and I thank Emma Harper for lodging the motion.

Given that almost the full multidisciplinary team is in the chamber this evening, I should declare that I am a pharmacist. I hope that that ensures that we make better policy in this place.

I join Ms Harper in celebrating the fact that it is 100 years since the discovery of insulin and take the opportunity to highlight the progress that has been made in diabetes treatment and care in Scotland. Diabetes presents a significant challenge across the world, and Scotland is no exception. We know from the 2019 diabetes survey that approximately 312,000 people in Scotland have been diagnosed with diabetes and that, of that number, just under 88 per cent have type 2. The Scottish Government is committed to delivering safe and effective person-centred healthcare, treatment and support to those who are living with diabetes.

As we know, insulin is the most effective diabetes treatment. We have heard about the group of scientists in Canada, one of whom was John James Rickard Macleod, the Scottish physiologist who discovered insulin. Prior to that, diabetes was a death sentence, and those who lived with it beyond a couple of years were the exception. Insulin is still one of the greatest medical discoveries of the last century and, as members have commented, it is still in daily use.

A hundred years since the discovery of insulin, diabetes treatments continue to evolve. In the

1970s, Dr Sheila Reith, a consultant physician here in Scotland, worked with colleagues on developing the insulin pen. Like Emma Harper's mum, Sheila had a young daughter with type 1 diabetes. Finding the daily injections with glass syringes and steel needles extremely frustrating, she set out with colleagues to make treatment easier, creating a prototype insulin pen as a simple, cheap alternative to traditional injections. After much testing, the NovoPen was released on the open market in 1988. It just shows the length of time required to develop such innovations.

We do not underestimate the impact of these discoveries on people who live with diabetes. They have not only transformed treatment and care but have opened the door for many other innovations in diabetes treatment.

Diabetes is a clinical priority for the Scottish Government. In 2014, we published the first diabetes improvement plan, which outlined eight priority areas and a focused set of actions to be overseen by the Scottish diabetes group. We recognise that the needs of people living with diabetes continue to change—indeed, that has been particularly evident during the Covid-19 pandemic—and we continue to respond to the needs of those living with diabetes and the services that provide care and support.

In February, we published a refreshed diabetes improvement plan, which builds on the significant progress that has been made in diabetes care in Scotland. We know that there is more that we can do, and the plan clearly sets out that ambition. We will track progress over the life of the plan and continue to demonstrate the improvements that are being made. Indeed, each of the commitments in the plan has an associated outcome measure and a plan for data collection, and we are committed to sharing regular updates with the diabetes community as we progress.

Emma Harper raised this very issue in her speech. We collect a huge range of data in the Scottish care information diabetes collaboration, and I should also point out that there is no single review point. Our approach is about sharing that information and learning time and time again and having a dynamic situation in which we continue to improve through quality improvement methodology. We will measure the data over time and track progress against the data in the Scottish diabetes survey. We will continue to improve care and ensure that we share the information with the wider diabetes society.

As members have pointed out, there is no doubt that the on-going development of new technologies has transformed lives. The diabetes improvement plan sets out our continued approach to increasing the provision of technologies such as insulin pumps and

continuous glucose monitors. We know that these technologies reduce clinical complications such as hypoglycaemic episodes and admissions to hospital, and they also have a positive impact on quality of life by providing more flexibility in daily life and reducing anxiety. In December 2016, the First Minister announced £10 million of additional funding to support this approach, and in March we allocated another £5 million to health boards to allow them to increase access to these technologies.

In fact, the latest diabetes survey showed that insulin pump therapy in under-18s was at its highest level since data on it were first collected, at nearly 40 per cent. That is likely to be a key factor in the substantial improvements in glycosylated haemoglobin, which is a measure of the good control of diabetes that has first been seen in Scottish children over the past decade.

We know that advances in technology continue to benefit people who are living with type 1 diabetes, and we are also aware of the role of technology in type 2 diabetes care models. We know that obesity and type 2 diabetes are closely linked. Through targeted and evidence-based interventions, we can help people to manage their weight, improve their physical activity and reduce the risks of type 2 diabetes and its complications.

We published the type 2 diabetes early detection and intervention framework in 2018, along with a five-year plan to take it forward. This financial year, we will invest £7 million to enable boards to implement and enhance treatment pathways for those who are at risk of, and living with, type 2 diabetes. That is 40 per cent more than last year's budget of £5 million—a £2 million increase. That funding will enable boards to establish and deliver targeted weight management services and community interventions, which are usually delivered in groups, and through specialist NHS services for more complex cases.

Scotland is an international exemplar in type 2 diabetes remission, due to the ground-breaking DiRECT study, which was led by scientists at Glasgow university and funded by Diabetes UK. The DiRECT study has changed the treatment paradigm for type 2 diabetes, as it shows conclusively for the first time that a dietary approach can put type 2 diabetes into remission, as Rona Mackay has described. For that reason, our funding to all health boards supports that remission service for people living with type 2 diabetes.

We know the impact that diabetes can have on people, and, if we continue to implement our diabetes improvement plan, there will be a strong focus on health inequalities. We know that both type 2 diabetes and excess weight disproportionately affect those who are living in

deprivation and that women live with further disadvantage compared with men in terms of weight-related morbidities. One of the biggest challenges with type 2 diabetes is the delivery of appropriate and accessible self-management education. We know that people from areas of deprivation face more barriers to accessing that, and that will be a focus of our inequalities work.

I loved hearing about Louisa Gault. Raising the story of a young person who was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes during the pandemic, the challenges that she faces and the ambitions that she has was wonderful at reminding us of the impact that the condition has on people from a very young age. She is taking 180 extra decisions every day but is still planning to become a gymnast and a diabetes nurse. I am more than happy to do anything that I can to support her in her ambitions.

I will finish by acknowledging the significant advances in diabetes treatment and care over the past century. Insulin and the technologies that followed its discovery have been life changing for people with diabetes, and we continue to support world-class innovations in that area. The Covid-19 pandemic has undoubtedly had an impact on people with diabetes—there are new challenges for the staff, for the services and for the people who are experiencing diabetes. We will keep on learning, sharing our learning and improving the services.

We are very grateful for the continued efforts of Diabetes Scotland and to the clinical community for its unwavering commitment. By combining our efforts, we can make a real difference to those who are living with diabetes in Scotland. I look forward to continuing the constructive and productive discussions and to continuing our improvement of diabetes care in Scotland.

Meeting closed at 19:04.

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

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