



OFFICIAL REPORT  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Meeting of the Parliament (Hybrid)

Thursday 16 December 2021

Session 6



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# Scottish Parliament

Thursday 16 December 2021

[The Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 11:40]

## General Question Time

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** Good morning. I remind members of the Covid-related measures that are in place, and that face coverings should be worn when moving around the chamber and across the Holyrood campus.

### Red Meat Industry

**1. Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to support the red meat industry. (S6O-00548)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands (Mairi Gougeon):** The Scottish Government has a strong track record of supporting Scotland's red meat industry. We campaigned for years for repatriation of the red meat levy, which was eventually implemented through a United Kingdom act. That will generate about £1.5 million annually to promote our red meat sector. We recently supported Quality Meat Scotland's Scotch lamb campaign around St Andrew's day. In response to on-going issues in our pig sector, we have provided a hardship support scheme and have recently opened a private storage aid scheme to take pressure off the industry.

Finally, unlike other parts of the UK, we continue to provide additional support for suckler beef and sheep producers, with payments due to start under the latter scheme in April and May 2022.

**Rachael Hamilton:** We are now down to 26 red meat abattoirs in Scotland and shockingly, only 15 female butchers. What does the cabinet secretary say to the Rare Breeds Survival Trust, which says that her Government has failed to address the local abattoir crisis in Scotland?

**Mairi Gougeon:** I understand the importance of local slaughter provision in the red meat sector. We have relatively good coverage, but we recognise that there might be occasions when local slaughter needs are not immediately met. There are several reasons for that, including greater costs. Appropriate throughput is vital for abattoirs to ensure that they have a viable future. Unfortunately, that is not the case when there is low local demand, which can sometimes make long-term viability an on-going issue.

The Scottish Government and Food Standards Scotland would be happy to have discussions with any organisation that is considering operating an abattoir in Scotland.

### “Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) Levels 2020/21”

**2. Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the “Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) Levels” statistics. (S6O-00549)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Shirley-Anne Somerville):** I refer Michael Marra to my statement on Tuesday 14 December, the accompanying national improvement framework plan, which was published earlier this week, and the Government's actions on education recovery, which were published in October.

**Michael Marra:** This is a defining moment for Scottish education. The statistics show the lowest attainment on record under curriculum for excellence and an increase in what was already a staggering attainment gap. In response, the cabinet secretary has cut attainment challenge funding this year to the levels of 2017 and plans to return teacher numbers to what they were when the Scottish National Party took office in 2007. There is nothing in the plans to respond now to this urgent situation. Can we really have confidence that a failing pre-pandemic plan can protect the life chances of a pandemic generation?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** I point Mr Marra to the fact that, before the pandemic, the year-on-year trend in the ACEL data was positive. We are already taking action to ensure that we are supporting children and young people during this difficult time, for example through the increase in the Scottish attainment challenge funding from £750 million in the previous session of Parliament to £1 billion in the current session. Statistics that came out on Tuesday pointed to there being an additional 2,000 teachers since 2019 and a low pupil to teacher ratio.

We are determined to carry on with that. That is exactly why we made a manifesto commitment of 3,500 additional teachers and 500 support staff. As I said to Mr Marra, we are already on track to deliver that.

**Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con):** Our schools went into the pandemic underprepared after the SNP cut teacher numbers to the bone. Does the new announcement on teacher numbers amount to a recognition that the SNP got this wrong?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** We have made it absolutely clear as we move towards recovery and continue to deal with the pandemic that we are working to ensure that we are supporting our

schools and local authorities to be able to support children and young people through additional teachers. That will, of course, ensure that we continue to assist children and young people at this very difficult time and that we assist them in the longer term. With the baselining of the money for the additional teachers, we will see greater opportunity for permanent contracts—and rightly so—for our teaching workforce.

**Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP):** What lessons can be learned from across the United Kingdom and around the world about the impacts of the pandemic on our education system?

**The Presiding Officer:** The cabinet secretary should be brief.

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** Kaukab Stewart has raised a very important point. The challenges that we face, which were shown in the ACEL statistics, are not unique to Scotland. Indeed, recent reports from the Office for Standards in Education, the World Bank and others show that there will be an impact on many, if not most, children. That is exactly why we have taken action on teacher numbers and increasing attainment challenge funding.

#### Hunterston Port and Resource Centre

3. **Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what recent discussions it has had regarding the Hunterston Port and Resource Centre development. (S6O-00550)

**The Minister for Business, Trade, Tourism and Enterprise (Ivan McKee):** I refer Katy Clark to questions S6W-04431 and S6W-04432, from Jamie Greene MSP, in answer to which I set out that Scottish Enterprise continues to engage with Peel Ports and North Ayrshire Council under a memorandum of understanding to secure the delivery of regional and national investment objectives at Hunterston. There have been no visits by senior Scottish Government representatives to the site since 1 January 2021, but Scottish Government planning officials attended an online meeting with Peel Port representatives about the Hunterston PARC development in November 2020.

**Katy Clark:** As the minister will know, the site, which is now owned by Peel Ports, was designated for industrial reuse many decades ago, but it is a beauty spot, an area of environmental importance with many diverse biodiversity issues and a site of special scientific importance, and it is very close to communities. Hunterston B has stopped generation, and North Ayrshire Council has set up a task force, but its ambition was always that the Scottish Government should be involved with a ministerial task force to look at the

development of the site. Would the minister be willing to consider a ministerial task force that would also involve North Ayrshire Council, the trade unions, the landowner, employers, community representatives and community councils in particular, with a view to ensuring job creation and delivering on our environmental commitments?

**Ivan McKee:** Katy Clark is correct to identify the importance of biodiversity and sites of special scientific interest. Of course, each planning application in relation to the site is considered on its merits, and biodiversity matters would be considered as part of that process.

On the substance of Katy Clark's question, I would be very happy to meet the stakeholders that she—*[Inaudible.]*—the best way to move forward with the site, given that, as I said, Scottish Enterprise is working with Peel Ports under a memorandum of understanding, and work is progressing in that regard. On wider stakeholder engagement, I would be happy to have appropriate meetings and to determine the best way to ensure ministerial engagement.

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** Does the minister agree that Hunterston Port and Resource Centre, which is in my constituency, is vital to the economic regeneration and green transition of North Ayrshire? Will the Scottish Government and its agencies redouble their efforts in pursuit of potential investors who will bring skilled and well-remunerated employment to the area?

**Ivan McKee:** I recognise the strategic importance of Hunterston as a proposed national development in draft national planning framework 4, which has been laid in Parliament and is currently being consulted on. Hunterston has also been selected as one of the projects in the Ayrshire growth deal to drive sustainable and inclusive growth.

As I have said, Scottish Enterprise continues to be closely engaged with Peel Ports and North Ayrshire Council, and they are collaborating under a memorandum of understanding to advance and secure the delivery of national and regional investment objectives in the Scottish Government's inward investment strategy and the Ayrshire economic strategy. As I said in my answer to Katy Clark's question, I am very happy to engage with other stakeholders to ensure that the work that is being done moves forward as quickly and effectively as possible.

### Town Centres (Support)

**4. Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what measures it has taken to support town centres. (S6O-00551)

**The Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth (Tom Arthur):** We have been working with partners, including local government and Scotland's Towns Partnership, to build on the success of the town centre first principle and the 2013 town centre action plan, supported by the regeneration capital grant fund, the £50 million town centre fund and business improvement districts.

In 2020 we commissioned an independent review of the town centre action plan to build on that strong platform and in light of the climate emergency and the pandemic. We are working with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to respond to the recommendations in the review report, "A New Future for Scotland's Town Centres". Since 2020 we have provided more than £6 million of additional support to town and community partnerships and business improvement districts. Earlier this year we launched the £10 million Scotland loves local programme to support local businesses and town centres.

All of that is underpinned by our £325 million place-based investment programme over this session. It builds on the town centre action plan and the regeneration capital grant fund to accelerate our ambitions for place, 20-minute neighbourhoods and town centre revitalisation.

**The Presiding Officer:** I appreciate the desire to provide comprehensive responses, but I would prefer more succinct questions and answers.

**Christine Grahame:** You have pre-empted my preamble, Presiding Officer, which was to say that that was a very comprehensive answer.

I want to move on from funding, which is welcome, and give two examples from my constituency of Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale: Galashiels and Penicuik town centres. There are far too many large empty retail stores there—they have been empty for years—and it is difficult to trace the owners. Is current compulsory purchase legislation sufficient to permit a local authority to take ownership and redevelop, possibly for a mix of town-centre housing and smaller commercial outlets? That does not seem to be happening.

**Tom Arthur:** I thank Christine Grahame for her further question, and I will be as brief as I can. Acquiring authorities are expected to carry out thorough land referencing in order to ascertain the ownership of land that they intend to include within

a compulsory purchase order. However, the inability to trace all owners is not necessarily a barrier to the use of compulsory powers. Current Scottish Government guidance covers that situation.

We have committed to a review of compulsory purchase legislation, which will provide an opportunity to consider whether the current procedures are fit for purpose.

**Siobhian Brown (Ayr) (SNP):** My question is in the same vein as Christine Grahame's. What further action could be taken to improve the appearance of our town centres, where many shops lie empty and are deteriorating, along with derelict land and buildings?

**Tom Arthur:** I thank Siobhian Brown for her question and I congratulate her on her appointment as convener of the cross-party group on towns and town centres.

It is, of course, vital that we repurpose and reimagine our town centres, broadening their offer and ensuring diversity so that they are not overreliant on one sector. That is supported by the independent review of the town centre action plan, which published its report in February and advocated long-term sustainable actions built upon local partnerships. We are considering the report's recommendations with our partners, and we are working collaboratively to take forward our response. I would be happy to meet the member and the cross-party group to discuss the outcome of that process in due course.

**The Presiding Officer:** Question 5 was not lodged.

### Community Heat and Power Networks

**6. Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what support and advice it plans to provide to enable the establishment of community heat and power networks to deliver net zero targets. (S6O-00553)

**The Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights (Patrick Harvie):** As set out in the heat in buildings strategy, we will invest £400 million over this session to support the development of heat networks and low-carbon heat infrastructure at scale in Scotland. We will also launch a heat network pre-capital support unit in 2022, which will help to nurture opportunities for new networks and to expand existing ones. In addition, the Scottish Government's community and renewable energy scheme—CARES—utilises the Local Energy Scotland network of regionally based development officers to provide advice and financial support to local communities that are looking to decarbonise their energy consumption.

**Sarah Boyack:** I thank the minister for that answer. Will the minister confirm that local authorities and community groups need advance finance to establish those community heat networks, so that they can access expertise, risk assessment and feedback from what has worked in previous projects, so that the Scottish Government directly funds development work to enable local authorities and community co-operatives to get going on the new projects that we need across Scotland to deliver the low-carbon heat and power that we need, and for the profits to be reinvested locally?

**Patrick Harvie:** The Scottish Government is clear, across the whole heat in buildings strategy, that a huge scale of investment is needed. That is why we will create a green heat finance task force to look at the wide range of options for increasing that investment. We are committed to supporting local communities and local authorities that want to maximise the deployment of heat networks, and we will work collaboratively with local government and across the political spectrum to ensure that that happens.

#### Sheriffhall Roundabout

**7. Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the proposed works at Sheriffhall roundabout as part of its £300 million commitment to the Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Region Deal. (S6O-00554)

**The Minister for Transport (Graeme Dey):** As I advised members in the chamber on 27 October, we remain committed to delivering the grade separation of Sheriffhall roundabout. Following the publication of draft orders, a significant number of objections were received. Transport Scotland is currently trying to resolve those objections, but a public local inquiry may be required if they cannot be resolved.

**Colin Beattie:** That area of my constituency is heavily used, by my constituents and those in the surrounding areas, every day. A bottleneck situation often develops because of the volume of traffic, which is frustrating for road users. What specific action can the Scottish Government take to address the delays to beginning the works at the Sheriffhall roundabout? Can he provide any reassurance to my constituents that the matter is in hand?

**Graeme Dey:** I reassure the member that Transport Scotland is focused on trying to resolve the significant number of objection responses that were received following the publication of draft orders for the scheme. For example, replies have now been issued to nearly all the objectors. However, as I said, given the number of objections

that have been received, a public local inquiry may be needed to consider objections that are not—*[Inaudible.]*—withdrawn. That would disappoint and frustrate me almost as much as it would Mr Beattie. Nonetheless, I am sure that he would recognise that, having put in place the opportunity for communities and stakeholders to have a say and an involvement in key decisions on such infrastructure, it is incumbent on us all to respect that process and engage with it to the best of our abilities.

#### Dog Control Database

**8. Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will publish a timeframe for the implementation of the Scottish dog control database. (S6O-00555)

**The Presiding Officer:** I call the Minister for Community Safety, Ash Regan.

As there is a connection issue, we will move to question 9 in the meantime. I call Richard Leonard.

I ask colleagues to bear with me.

#### Scottish National Investment Bank

**9. Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the Scottish National Investment Bank's investment portfolio. (S6O-00556)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy (Kate Forbes):** The Scottish National Investment Bank is building its portfolio and making commercial investments in line with its missions, which relate to net zero, place and innovation. Since its launch last year, the bank has committed to £137 million of investment and is on track to provide £200 million to Scottish businesses in the current financial year. It is growing that investment pipeline in order that it can apply at least another £200 million next year. That is a huge achievement for a new body that began operations only just over 12 months ago

**Richard Leonard:** I know that the minister always says that these investment decisions are matters for the board, and I am all in favour of planting more trees. However, does the Government not have a view on the fact that the biggest investment by far—more than a third of the money that has been allocated by this public bank—has been handed out to a private fund manager, Gresham House, which specialises in tax avoidance schemes for wealthy millionaires, to plant trees rather than invest in the jobs and the industries that our people and our communities need?

**Kate Forbes:** The member is right when he reminds the chamber that investment decisions

are operational matters for the bank and are taken independently of ministers. The Opposition would call for those decisions to remain independent, so it is slightly strange when members question ministers about decisions that they do not agree with.

The bank has been set up specifically to invest commercially and generate investment and returns. It needs to invest alongside the private sector in order to deliver its purpose and have the impact that is required of it. The majority of the bank's investments so far have net zero as a primary mission. The bank's board determines how it invests. That investment independence is part of the important arrangements between the bank and the Scottish Government.

The bank's ethical investment policy and the fair work direction issued to the bank in August inform the bank's approach and underpins the covenants that it puts in place when it makes an investment. The bank invests only in businesses or projects that meet its ethical standards or are willing to commit to adopt those.

**The Presiding Officer:** Ms Mackay, unfortunately we are unable to make contact with the minister at the moment, but I am sure that a response will be provided.

## First Minister's Question Time

12:01

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** Before we move to the first question, I have agreed to a request from the First Minister for her to provide an update on the coronavirus at the start of First Minister's question time.

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I am very grateful for the opportunity to update Parliament on today's Covid cases and to repeat my assessment of what we must do in response to the current situation.

Yesterday, 5,951 cases were reported, and 45.4 per cent of cases now show the S-gene dropout that is indicative of omicron. It therefore seems likely that, by tomorrow, omicron will be the dominant strain circulating in Scotland. Omicron's much higher transmissibility will drive an even more rapid increase in cases.

Omicron is spreading exceptionally fast—much faster than anything experienced so far in the pandemic. I am profoundly concerned by the scale and immediacy of the challenge that omicron poses. In response, we are already rapidly accelerating the delivery of boosters, and we will continue to do so. Yesterday, 59,437 boosters or third doses were administered—a further increase on the day before.

We must understand that omicron is currently running faster than even the fastest roll-out of vaccines. A key point is that the immune protection from vaccination is not immediate; it takes a few days. As we speed up the delivery of vaccines, we must also act to slow the virus down. If we do not, the consequences will be significant. Even if omicron's impact on individual health is milder than that of other variants—let me stress that we have no evidence of that yet—many people will still become severely unwell and die, and the sheer number of people infected will present a massive challenge. Indeed, in London, where transmission of omicron is currently the highest in the United Kingdom, hospital admissions are now rising sharply. If we do not act now, what we have feared all along but so far avoided—the overwhelming of the national health service—could happen.

Let me be clear: this is not a choice between protecting health and protecting the economy. A surge in infections will cause—indeed, is already causing—staff absences that will cripple the economy and other critical services.

This is a really serious situation and we must respond accordingly. I therefore strongly underline the advice that I gave on Tuesday. Please reduce

your contact with people from households other than your own as much as you possibly can. For now, please stay at home much more than you normally would and as much as is feasible. Right now, the risk of getting Covid from interactions with others is high and it is rising. Before doing anything that you might have planned over the coming days, ask yourself whether it is as safe as it needs to be and whether it is vital enough to you to justify that risk.

I suspect that what is most important to most of us, over the next couple of weeks, is having time with our families at Christmas. Every interaction that we have before then increases the risk of our getting Covid and so possibly losing that.

More generally, I suspect that what matters most to us—this is strongly my view—is protecting children’s education. By acting to reduce community transmission, we will also be helping to keep schools open—and open safely.

Given what I am being advised about the risk that omicron poses to health and the economy, if I failed to give that advice, I would not be fulfilling my duty or acting in good conscience. I am acutely aware of and deeply concerned about the considerable impact of that advice on businesses, but I repeat that businesses will also suffer if we do not act to slow the virus. Business now needs the type and scale of financial support that was available earlier in the pandemic, but no mechanisms are available to the devolved Administrations to trigger the scale of finance that is needed to support such schemes. We need the UK Government to act urgently and in the same way as some other countries are already doing.

I made that point again yesterday at a COBR meeting, which was chaired by Michael Gove and attended by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, but it now needs the urgent engagement of the Prime Minister and the chancellor.

We must not sleepwalk into an emergency that, for both health and business, will be much greater as a result of inaction than it will be if we act firmly and strongly now. Therefore, this morning, I wrote to the Prime Minister, appealing to him to put the necessary support schemes in place. Such is the urgency, I have asked to speak directly to him later today.

None of us wants to be in that position, but omicron presents a renewed and very real challenge for the whole world—the World Health Organization could not be clearer about that. Once again, the duty to protect the NHS, lives and livelihoods must be uppermost in our minds and it must drive our actions. All of us—Governments and citizens—must do what is required. I ask everybody across the country to play their part again by following the advice that we are giving.

**The Presiding Officer:** We turn to First Minister’s question time. In the light of the First Minister’s update, I will take all constituency and general supplementary questions after question 7. Members who wish to ask such a supplementary question should press their request-to-speak button during question 2. Members who wish to ask supplementary questions specifically on questions 3 to 7 should press their request-to-speak button during the relevant question.

### Mass Vaccination Centres

**1. Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I listened to the First Minister’s statement. She was right to look at what we can do by taking a United Kingdom-wide approach. I will focus today on what we can do in Scotland right now.

Scotland’s vaccination scheme has already delivered a booster to more than half of all over-18s. That is down to everyone in our national health service, our armed forces and all our volunteers. I thank them for making that happen. *[Applause.]*

However, to get ahead in the race against the new variant, we still need to vaccinate far more people. For weeks, we have been calling for the reintroduction of mass vaccination centres. Nicola Sturgeon repeatedly refused until, on Tuesday, she accepted, and agreed about, the need for them. We have learned today that the Edinburgh International Conference Centre and Hampden park in Glasgow will open as mass vaccination centres; we have been calling for exactly that for weeks. There was no mention of it in the First Minister’s statement, so perhaps she can tell us now how many other new centres will open, where they will be and when they will start vaccinating people.

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** Douglas Ross is absolutely right to raise the critical importance of vaccination and the speed of vaccination. Before I come to his question, I underline the point that I made in my opening remarks, which was that, in the context of the race between the virus and the vaccines, we are, of course, going as fast as we can and will continue to pick up pace with vaccination.

However, a person who is vaccinated with the booster today will not immediately get the protection of immunity; it will be some days before that is the case. Right now, cases of the omicron variant are doubling every two or so days. Therefore, no matter how fast we go with vaccination the variant is, at the moment, running faster. Yes—we need to speed up vaccination, but while we do that we must also act to slow down the virus. That is a simple statement of fact. Protection of health and lives, as well as of the

economy and businesses, depends on our doing that.

As Douglas Ross rightly mentioned, yesterday we became the first part of the UK to have vaccinated more than 50 per cent of over-18s with the booster. We still have the fastest vaccination programme in the UK. We are picking up the pace every day, which the figures that I have given today demonstrate. One of the most important things that we are doing—and there is still capacity to be got from it—is that we are shifting our focus from the remainder of the flu vaccination campaign to boosters. In the past two days, each day we administered more than 70,000 vaccinations; some of them—I think there were 14,000 yesterday—were flu vaccinations.

We are also opening up more facilities. For NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, we are using Hampden park. Glasgow central mosque is already available as a mass, or large-scale, vaccination centre. In NHS Lothian, Lowland hall at Ingliston is already operating as a large-scale vaccination centre. In NHS Lanarkshire, there are the facilities at Ravenscraig. We are also seeking to bring in additional facilities for Edinburgh, including the Edinburgh International Conference Centre and the corn exchange. All those are under active preparation for coming on stream.

Given what I said about switching from flu vaccinations, I am confident that we can get to around 70,000 vaccinations a day, as we want to. Everything is being done so that we can achieve that. However, I ask members, please, not to lose sight of the first point that I made, which was that no matter how fast we go, the virus is running so fast that we must also take action to slow it down.

**Douglas Ross:** I certainly will not lose sight of the First Minister's first point. She was right to say that people who get vaccinated today are not immediately protected from the virus. That is why Conservatives have been calling for weeks for the reintroduction of mass vaccination centres. If the Scottish Government had acted when we first called for them—twice after Covid statements in November and at First Minister's question time two weeks ago—we would be further along the road than we are.

In addition, the new variant has meant necessary changes to guidance, but it is not right that, once again, businesses are still waiting to hear what they need to do to comply with the First Minister's statement on Tuesday. She was right to say earlier that the situation will have a massive impact on businesses. However, businesses have told us that they heard earlier this week from Scottish Government officials who told them that new rules could come into effect on Saturday. They were then told that it could be Monday, then they were told to prepare for 5 pm on Friday.

Remember—that was coming from Scottish Government officials. Can the First Minister give the answer that her officials seem to be unable to give, and tell us when the laws will commence?

**The First Minister:** Yes. I will come on to that in a second, but first let me complete a point on vaccination.

I understand why Douglas Ross and everybody else—I include myself—want the programme to go as fast as possible. It is important to give credit, as Douglas Ross rightly did, to the vaccination teams across the country. I repeat—because it is important—that we currently have the fastest vaccination programme in the UK. Although I want it to speed up even more, that suggests to me that what we have been doing, including our mix of facilities, has been right. However, we now have to go faster.

For reasons to do with staffing and people not attending, we do not have mass clinics where the geography does not support them. Many members have raised the difficulties that people have had in travelling to mass vaccination clinics. It is not the case that we would have vaccinated more people had we had more mass clinics instead of several smaller ones. That is not how it works—the situation is not that straightforward. We need the right mix, which is what we will continue to have.

Let us be clear. I hope that every member in the chamber will continue to scrutinise our progress. I absolutely welcome that and think that it is important. However, I also hope that they will, please, accept the assurance that right now nothing is more important to me, to the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care and to the entire Government than getting boosters into people's arms as quickly as is feasible.

On guidance and regulations, the regulations will come into effect at one minute past midnight tomorrow morning, Friday 17 December. In fact, high-level central guidance on the announcement that was made on Tuesday was published immediately after my statement on Tuesday. I said in Parliament then that more detailed guidance would follow this week. That guidance will be available online from today. In fact, I suspect that it will—because I cleared it just before coming here—go online during this First Minister's question time. We have been engaging with business organisations throughout the week on the issues and the guidance for various sectors. This time is difficult for businesses—that is one of the things that I stressed in my earlier remarks.

I will come back to the central point. We are now facing, two years into the pandemic, a variant of the virus that is spreading faster than anything that we have experienced so far. Omicron cases are doubling every two to three days in Scotland. In

parts of the UK, the doubling time is currently less than two days. I expect that it will be the dominant strain in Scotland by tomorrow. It has a reproduction number that some assessments say is above 4.

We do not have time to waste; we do not have time to waste when it comes to vaccination, and neither do we have time to waste in putting in place the protective measures that will help to slow omicron down.

Lives are at risk, livelihoods are at risk and the NHS is at risk. That is why the Government has to speed up vaccination, but we also all have to come together to do what is required to slow down the spread of the variant. The UK Government has to step up and provide the financial support that businesses need.

**Douglas Ross:** Again, I agree with the First Minister: livelihoods are at risk. That is why we need, from the Government, clarity for the businesses that seek it. This morning, the health secretary, Humza Yousaf, who is sitting on one side of the First Minister, was asked when the guidance would be published and he said, that it should be published today.

Sitting on the other side of the First Minister is the Deputy First Minister, who appeared before the Covid-19 Recovery Committee this morning. At that time, he said that the guidance will be published during the course of Friday. The Deputy First Minister, who is also the Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery, also said that the guidance was still being written as he spoke, less than an hour ago. I understand that he has now tweeted an apology—

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney):** I know. It is done. Move on.

**Douglas Ross:** The Deputy First Minister is asking me to move on. He has had to apologise and will write to the committee, but businesses are looking to the Government. They are trying to get clarity and they cannot get it from the health secretary, the First Minister or the Deputy First Minister.

Officials have told businesses three different dates on which the law will come into force. The First Minister has now had to confirm the date in the chamber. The men who are sitting on either side of the First Minister have given confusing and inaccurate advice to businesses today. Can the First Minister accept that that is, at the very least, unfortunate, that it is causing confusion and that businesses need clarity if they are to apply the guidance in just over 24 hours?

**The First Minister:** The guidance will be published, I expect, before we are out of the

chamber. Business organisations have been communicated with throughout the week. Much of what we are asking businesses to do now is what they have done at previous stages of the pandemic. Many businesses—supermarkets, for example—still have some of the measures in place.

The Deputy First Minister accidentally said that the guidance would come out tomorrow instead of today, because regulations come into force tomorrow. He immediately corrected that.

For goodness' sake! We have a virus raging around the country and we are trying to act as fast as possible, because that is our duty. Regardless of whether people across the chamber and the country agree or disagree with me, I hope that nobody doubts how seriously I and this Government take the duty to protect people and the country from the virus.

What I think businesses want and need more than anything right now is the Chancellor of the Exchequer at his desk, putting in place financial support schemes that will prevent them from going to the wall. The fact is that if we act right now, that has implications for businesses—they must be compensated. If we do not act, that will possibly have even bigger implications for businesses.

I take my responsibilities very seriously. I hope to speak to the Prime Minister this afternoon, if he makes himself available, so that we can work together—as we did previously in the pandemic—to put in place support for businesses, and so that we can all make sure that we are doing everything that we can to protect human health and life.

**Douglas Ross:** I have said to the First Minister—I said it in my opening remarks—that it is right to look at what we can do across the United Kingdom, but it is also right that we do what we can in this chamber to scrutinise and try to help the Government. [*Interruption.*] The First Minister said that the Deputy First Minister accidentally misspoke. Did he also accidentally misspeak when he said to the committee that the guidance was still being written? He was also incorrect about that—

**The First Minister:** No, he was right.

**Douglas Ross:** —and can the First Minister— [*Interruption.*] We are trying to get some—

**The Presiding Officer:** Members—I would very much like to hear Mr Ross's question.

**Douglas Ross:** I am grateful, Presiding Officer, because I am just trying to get some clarity. We also need clarity on something that I want to check. The BBC says that it has it in writing from the Scottish Government that the regulations behind the new protections for retail and

hospitality would take effect from one minute past midnight on Saturday, but the First Minister has just said that it is one minute past midnight on Friday. Which is it? That was what the Scottish Government told the BBC on Tuesday. Has that changed? Why has that changed? Surely, with such big changes, the information should come not just in response to a question from the Opposition, but should be put out to businesses straight away, but that has not happened.

The First Minister will also understand that businesses need a measure of good news. This week, she agreed to our demands for emergency cancellation compensation. However, businesses currently do not know when the funds are coming and how much money they will get. This is about people's jobs—

**Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP):** Shameless.

**Douglas Ross:** I am sorry, Presiding Officer. SNP members say that I am shameless, but I am trying to ensure that the money that is made available gets to the businesses that need it. Will the First Minister simply guarantee that businesses will receive that £100 million of support before Christmas?

**The First Minister:** Let me deal directly with all those questions.

First, the regulations come into force at one minute past midnight—tomorrow morning—on Friday. We are trying to introduce them as quickly as possible, and perhaps even more quickly than we first thought would be needed. That is because of the central point, which is that omicron currently rages around the country and cases double every two to three days. Every 24 hours matters with regard to saving people's lives and protecting the health service, which is why we are going very fast and are communicating with business organisations as we go.

Secondly, the Deputy First minister was right to say that the guidance was still being finalised. I think that I said in my first answer to Douglas Ross that I had signed off the guidance just before I came to the chamber, so that it could be issued before we leave the chamber today.

Douglas Ross is, of course, entitled to scrutinise me about anything that he wants to scrutinise me about, but regardless of whether the Deputy First Minister accidentally said that guidance would be published tomorrow instead of today, I have clarified that it will happen today. I am not sure that that is the most important thing that we face now. *[Applause.]*

Lastly, we will get the £100 million—which we have managed to find from other budgets with great difficulty—as quickly as we can. When I last

stood in the chamber, we had heard that the Treasury was going to give us additional money, as we know from many exchanges here. Douglas Ross seemed to think that that was a great wheeze—I will leave others to think whether we should focus on wheezes now. We now know that we are poorer after that Treasury announcement than we thought we were previously. We will get the money as quickly as possible—

**The Presiding Officer:** Briefly, First Minister.

**The First Minister:** However, £100 million is not enough for those businesses, which is why we need the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Prime Minister to do their jobs and to get proper financial support in place for businesses as quickly as possible. *[Applause.]*

## Cancer Services

**2. Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab):** I start by urging members of the public to, please, wear a mask wherever you can, follow the guidance and book an appointment if you have not had your first or second dose or book your booster appointment if you have not done so and you are eligible for it. It is to protect yourself, your families and those around you.

Businesses across the country are anxious about what will happen to their business and employees. They will not appreciate politics or bickering but will expect both the Scottish Government and the United Kingdom Government to work together in the national interest to protect people, their lives and their livelihoods.

The omicron variant is causing anxiety across the country, and we know that Covid still poses a risk to our society. It is right that we remobilise our national health service to confront the virus, but we cannot lose sight of the fact that cancer remains Scotland's biggest killer.

Since the start of the pandemic, almost 30,000 of our fellow Scots have died from cancer. Every one of those deaths—like those from Covid—is a tragedy. MacMillan Cancer Support and Cancer Research UK have both expressed concerns this week over fears of cancer patients who are waiting to be diagnosed or to start treatment. They have said that swift action is needed from the Government and NHS leaders. What action is the First Minister taking to prevent—in Cancer Research UK's words—a “cancer catastrophe”?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I thank Anas Sarwar for repeating the advice to the public at the start of his question. We have many differences in the chamber, and this session is of course about scrutiny, but I hope that we can also come together, as we did at the start of the pandemic, to communicate with one voice to the public. That point is very important, so I am

grateful to Anas Sarwar, and to Douglas Ross, for doing that.

I agree that businesses are terribly anxious right now, and I understand why. I also agree that this is not about politics. In a different context, the comments that I am making about funding would be political. However, here they are not. I have to make those comments because they are statements of fact. I ask Anas Sarwar to reflect on the fact that what I am saying here today about funding support from the UK Government for business is exactly the same as what his Labour colleagues in the House of Commons are saying right now. It is not about politics; it is about all of us, within our own responsibilities, doing everything that we can to meet this challenge. I will do everything within my responsibility, but I must urge the Prime Minister and the chancellor to do more within theirs.

It is absolutely the case that every death from cancer is a tragedy at any time, and it is obviously tragic that anyone, whether they have cancer or any other condition, has had treatment delayed over the course of the pandemic. We are working through investments, particularly investments in early diagnosis through the early cancer diagnostic centres, to ensure that there is speedy, timeous treatment for cancer.

The NHS remains under sustained pressure, which will grow in the weeks to come. However, in the most recent quarter, more patients were treated within the 62-day waiting time standard than were pre-Covid. That is an indication that we were starting to catch up on some of the backlogs. We must keep a focus on that, but if we are to protect the ability of the NHS to do it, we must bear down on the pressure that is being put on the NHS because of Covid.

**Anas Sarwar:** Be in no doubt that I expect the Scottish and UK Governments—that includes Rishi Sunak and the Treasury—to be at their desks doing everything that they can to work together to support businesses across the country. Be in no doubt about that.

I recognise what the First Minister says, but figures that were published this week show that there have already been more than 400 more cancer deaths this year than were expected. That is higher than the 293 extra deaths last year. It is getting worse, not better.

In March, long before omicron, the First Minister said:

“we are now focused on getting the NHS back to normal.”—[*Official Report*, 11 March 2021; c 11.]

However, there are plenty of examples of people having to wait too long for treatment. Here is just one. A 71-year-old man who had previously had

skin cancer contacted his general practitioner in the summer because he felt that it had returned. His GP confirmed that and referred him to a consultant. Months later, he is still waiting for an appointment.

We know that the earlier someone is diagnosed and the earlier they start treatment, the higher the chance of survival. Why has more progress not been made since March?

**The First Minister:** Progress has been made since March, but since then we have had the delta variant, which set back the ability of the NHS to recover, and now we are dealing with omicron. Health services all over the world are struggling to get back to normal because of the continued and, at times, increasing pressure that the virus is placing on us.

We have invested and we continue to invest in the detect cancer early programme. I absolutely agree that the earlier we detect cancer, the more able the NHS is to save lives. In recent times, we have established the first three early cancer diagnostic centres in NHS Ayrshire and Arran, NHS Fife and NHS Dumfries and Galloway. They are about providing a referral route for patients who do not have standard cancer symptoms. We are making significant investments in other parts of the cancer journey to speed up the time for diagnosis and the time from diagnosis into treatment. All that has continued and will continue.

For cancer and other care, we will get the NHS more firmly on the road to recovery the more able we are to bear down on Covid cases. That comes back to the central messages that we all have to communicate: please cut down on your contacts so that we avoid any opportunity that we can for the virus to spread.

**Anas Sarwar:** I know what the First Minister says, but statistics that were published this week show that almost one in five of the most urgent cancer cases are not starting treatment on time and, between July and September—just three months—677 patients waited longer than the Government’s target.

This is a problem that predates the pandemic. The Government has not met its cancer treatment target for almost a decade. As we enter the new phase of the pandemic, we must learn the lessons of the past year. For bowel cancer alone, there is a backlog of more than half a million screening kits; there is still no breast cancer screening for women over the age of 70; and operations are being cancelled. Will the First Minister make a commitment that, as part of any redeployment, cancer services will be protected? That means no pause to screening programmes, genuine accelerations—so we can catch up—and no cancelled cancer operations, because we cannot

have an NHS that chooses between treating a virus and treating cancer.

**The First Minister:** Cancer services have, rightly, been prioritised throughout the pandemic, and that will continue. That does not mean that there has been no impact. The decision on one of the early days of the pandemic—I remember it vividly—to pause cancer screening programmes was one of the most difficult decisions that our clinical advisers had to take. Screening programmes have resumed. The issue with screening older women for breast cancer is correct and we want to get that back to normal as soon as possible.

We have two cancer targets. The 31-day target has consistently been met for some considerable time. The 62-day target, which is a whole-journey target, is not being met. I am not saying that it is good enough, but 83 per cent are seen within the 62-day target. We continue to prioritise diagnosis and treatment and we will continue to take all appropriate steps to do so.

I dearly wish that I could stand here and say that we could somehow protect the NHS generally and cancer services in particular from the impact of the pandemic. I cannot do that, no matter how hard we work. The only thing that will protect the NHS from the pandemic is getting the pandemic under control and driving down the number of cases. I know that Anas Sarwar agrees with and accepts that, and it is why, right now, and yet again, the most important thing to do is get vaccines into people's arms as quickly as possible, and appeal to the public to behave in a way that will stop the omicron variant in its tracks. That is the best thing that we can do right now for ourselves, our loved ones, and the national health service.

### Just Transition (Highlands and Islands)

**3. Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green):** To ask the First Minister how a just transition can be secured for the Highlands and Islands. (S6F-00584)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** We are determined to leave no individuals or communities behind as we move towards a net zero economy. Our national just transition planning framework, which was published in September, sets out how we will develop just transition plans with different sectors and regions. It is critical that those plans build on existing skills and expertise, and that they create good green jobs.

We need bold action to do that. I saw for myself a prime example where, with support from Highlands and Islands Enterprise, the port of Nigg has been transformed into the largest offshore wind tower manufacturer in the United Kingdom.

Our first just transition plan will be published next year with a focus on energy, and that will set out how the transition is managed, ensuring fairness for all communities, including the Highlands and Islands.

**Ariane Burgess:** The pausing of Cambo oil field development shows that the need for secure and sustainable jobs in our Highland and island communities is greater than ever. I was delighted to see the potential for 400 renewable jobs at Nigg.

Scotland has one quarter of Europe's offshore renewable potential. That includes tidal power, and I am pleased that the islands centre for net zero, which is based at Orkney, is included as a national development in the new draft national planning framework. Can the First Minister outline what else the Scottish Government can do to realise that potential to create and sustain new jobs in the Highlands and Islands, and elsewhere in Scotland, as part of a just transition away from fossil fuels?

**The First Minister:** First, we have to fully exploit our renewable energy resources. Offshore wind is one of our greatest assets. Secondly, we need to capture all the economic benefits of those resources throughout the supply chain. As I have said candidly previously, I do not think that we have done that well enough for many years. There is much that the Government is doing to seek to achieve that right now. Another example is the ScotWind leasing round, which recently closed. Applicants for that need to provide a supply chain development statement, which sends a signal of the importance that we place on the imperative of creating jobs in renewable energy developments.

Marine energy is another massive opportunity for the Highlands and Islands, and indeed for all Scotland. As we make the transition, we will continue to focus on ensuring that it brings the jobs and economic benefits that are necessary to ensure that the industries that we are transitioning from are not left behind.

### Household Waste Statistics (Recycling)

**4. Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP):** To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's response is to the latest household waste statistics from the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, which reportedly show a small reduction in household recycling in 2020 compared with 2019. (S6F-00590)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** It is obviously disappointing to see the 2020 household recycling rate fall back, but we must acknowledge the unprecedented and challenging year that everyone has had, including local authorities, as a result of Covid. SEPA believes that the Covid

lockdowns and unavoidable disruption to recycling services, including the closure of recycling centres for a period of time, had an effect on local recycling rates. However, despite the challenges, kerbside recycling increased during 2020, and I know that local authorities worked really hard to keep priority services going throughout the pandemic. I thank their staff for all their efforts.

We are determined to accelerate progress to meet our waste reduction and recycling targets. The Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity recently announced £20.3 million-worth of landmark investments from the recycling improvement fund to help to deliver a step change in our recycling.

**Stuart McMillan:** Recycling is just one way in which we can reduce our impact on the planet. It is obvious that the Covid-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on the recycling activities of local authorities, including those of my authority of Inverclyde Council. That makes it even more important that we try to reuse or upcycle items before we recycle them.

What assistance—including funding to help with capital investment—is available to local authorities to help them to improve their recycling capabilities? What can the Scottish Government do to assist businesses, including small businesses such as InverEco in my constituency, that want to adopt a circular approach to their products so that they remain in use for longer?

**The First Minister:** As I said in my original answer, the £20 million-worth of investment from the recycling improvement fund marks the beginning of one of the biggest investments in recycling in Scotland in a generation. That will support local authorities and, by extension, businesses, including small businesses. It will also make it easier for households to recycle more and drive up rates of recycling. It is estimated that the investment has the potential to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 21,400 tonnes a year, which is the equivalent of taking more than 11,000 cars off the road.

In addition, Zero Waste Scotland provides a range of support to businesses to help them to develop circular economy approaches. That includes support for design, remanufacturing and skills development, to support innovative projects that deliver carbon savings, leverage investment and create jobs.

I will make two further points. Although it is disappointing that the recycling rate fell back during Covid, I repeat that there was an increase in kerbside recycling. Secondly, in 2020, the amount of waste that went to landfill was at its lowest level since records began. Therefore, there

are reasons to be encouraged, but we need to do more to maintain progress.

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** The recycling rate has fallen for two years in a row. That is simply part of a catalogue of Scottish Government climate change target failures. When will the 2013 recycling target be met?

**The First Minister:** If the Scottish Government is failing on climate change, I am not sure what that says about the United Kingdom Government, given that we are further ahead, I think, than it is on—*[Interruption.]*

These are serious issues. It is the case that the recycling rate fell back. Although we are not happy about that, it is understandable, given that, for part of last year, recycling centres were closed for a period. We now need to get back on track and improve the situation. As I said, there was an increase in kerbside recycling and the lowest amount of waste went to landfill since records began. That should encourage us to press forward and make sure that we build momentum.

Earlier this week in Parliament, the Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity set out how we intend to progress towards implementation of the deposit return scheme. *[Interruption.]* It is interesting that the Conservatives complain. They wanted us to delay the scheme further the last time we talked about it.

These are serious issues. There is serious investment and serious action on the part of the Scottish Government, and we will continue to ensure that that is the case.

## Local Government Funding Settlement 2022-23

**5. Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con):** I refer members to my entry in the register of interests, which shows that I am a councillor on Aberdeen City Council.

To ask the First Minister what discussions she has had with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities regarding the local government funding settlement for 2022-23. (S6F-00593)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** Ministers meet COSLA and individual local authorities on a regular basis to cover a range of issues, including the local government funding settlement. The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy met COSLA on 27 October, 11 and 25 November, and again on 8 December, to discuss the local government settlement and the spending review.

**Douglas Lumsden:** It is obvious to us all that the First Minister has now turned her back not only on the oil and gas industry, meaning that thousands of jobs will be lost, but on local government. COSLA has shown that it is clear

from a like-for-like comparison between years that a savage cut has been made to local government's budget this year.

When will the First Minister pick up the phone to COSLA, apologise and provide local government with the settlement that it deserves, given all the work that it has done over the past two years?

**The First Minister:** First, I do not need to pick up the phone to the member, as I can say it directly to him across the chamber: if the Conservatives want to propose that local government be given more money in the next stage of the budget, they can come forward and point to the part of the budget from which we should take that money. That is open to them, and I am sure that the finance secretary will be prepared to listen.

Secondly, if we are talking about savage cuts, let us put some facts on the table. In the period between 2013 and 2020, we delivered a cash-terms revenue budget increase to Scotland's local authorities. Over the same period, local authorities in England, where the member's party is in government, faced a cash-terms revenue budget cut of 14.7 per cent.

My point is that all Governments face difficult issues. We have to make choices. The choices that we make protect local government in Scotland more than is the case elsewhere in the United Kingdom. We will continue to keep public services very much at the heart of those choices.

### **Retail Stores (New Year's Day 2022)**

**6. Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Government will require large retail stores to close on new year's day 2022 so that retail workers can spend the day with their loved ones. (S6F-00579)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I wholeheartedly appreciate the efforts of retail workers, who have worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic. Members have heard me say before in the chamber that I am sympathetic to calls for large stores to close on new year's day.

We have looked carefully at the issue, and the minister set out our conclusions to Parliament not long ago. The Christmas Day and New Year's Day Trading (Scotland) Act 2007 does not ensure that all retail employees would get a day off or, crucially, that they would be paid for that day off. We want to go further than the legislation currently allows by focusing on wider fair work principles across the retail sector. We will do that through our forthcoming retail strategy, as the minister set out in a statement on 26 October.

**Mark Griffin:** The First Minister will know that, despite what she says, there is deep

disappointment with the Government's decision not to use existing powers to close large retail stores on new year's day. The Government has made that decision against not only the overwhelming response from workers, who are in favour of closure, but a Government report that states that closure is unlikely to have a significant negative effect on the economy.

The First Minister rightly alluded to the fact that shop workers deserve the kind of festive break that the rest of us benefit from. However, the Government has not enacted legislation that would do just that for the vast majority of Scottish shop workers.

What would the First Minister say to retail workers who again cannot spend new year's day safely with their families? What are the Government's plans to deliver a decent break for shop workers over the festive period, after they have worked so hard during the pandemic?

**The First Minister:** Like Mark Griffin, I feel strongly about the issue. I set out clearly why the current law is not sufficient to allow us to achieve what he is asking for. I encourage retail employers—particularly large retail employers—to give their staff appropriate time off. I know that some retailers, such as Morrisons, Marks and Spencer, Sainsbury's and Aldi, have already announced plans to close for an additional day over the festive period.

The current law allows us to restrict trading in certain premises. It allows us to insist that stores are closed; it does not allow us to insist that employees get a day off, so stores could have workers in stocking shelves. Crucially, the law does not allow us to insist that any day off that workers do get is a paid day off. It is simply not possible to achieve the outcome.

That is why, as the minister told Parliament, through our retail strategy, we want to look at how we can get to a situation where the ends that I think that Mark Griffin and I agree on can be achieved in a way that benefits workers without inadvertently penalising them.

I hope that Mark Griffin will accept those points and will work with us to reach that outcome in the months ahead.

### **Sexual Assault (Teenage Girls)**

**7. Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD):** To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Government will set up a commission on preventing violence against women and girls, in light of reports that one in five teenage girls have been sexually assaulted. (S6F-00604)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I know that all of us in the chamber and most people in

society will be shocked and appalled that women and girls are still facing assault and violence in our society today. During the recent 16 days of activism, we highlighted in the chamber that we must all stand together against gender-based violence.

The Scottish Government has taken and will continue to take robust action by improving our laws and providing funding to services that support anyone who has experienced domestic abuse, rape or sexual assault. We are delivering our long-standing and well-respected equally safe strategy in collaboration with a wide range of partners. We think that that is the best route to tackle and challenge the attitudes that underpin violence against women and girls and ultimately to prevent it from taking place. However, we will continue to listen to views from across the chamber to ensure that we are doing all that is necessary.

**Beatrice Wishart:** I thank the First Minister for that answer. It is recognised and welcome that the Scottish Government has done work, such as that which the First Minister has just outlined, to address violence against women and girls and change attitudes, and we have gold-plated legislation to tackle domestic abuse. However, as last week's *Sunday Post* report highlighted, 80 per cent of schoolgirls have suffered abuse or harassment or know someone who has; sadly, that is one of many similar findings. Domestic abuse rates are up, rape convictions are woefully low, two thirds of women do not feel safe on our streets, and three in five suffer street harassment.

The culture of violence against women and girls needs to be tackled through a holistic approach. Scottish Liberal Democrats have proposed a commission to look across all aspects of life in order to make societal change. This is about more than justice, policing and education. It is about women and girls being and feeling safe at home, school, work and everywhere. Does the First Minister see the value in a fundamentally new approach?

**The First Minister:** Given the situation that we face, I think that it would be wrong for anyone, and certainly for me, to rule out new approaches, fundamental or otherwise. I take very seriously the call that has been made for a commission, and I want to assure the member that that is something that we continue to give consideration to.

I am not sure in my mind whether establishing a commission is necessarily the right thing to do and the thing that will make a difference. It is really important that we continue with the equally safe strategy and the increased investment for the organisations that are working at the front line. However, I do not close my mind to anything that might help us to make a more significant, fundamental step change.

I am also mindful of the fact that I have my own advisory council on women and girls—we are in the process of refreshing it at the moment—which has done a lot of good work around many of the issues that women and girls face in our society. It may be that the advisory council, in its refreshed form, can look at the subject on that more holistic and fundamental basis.

I undertake to continue to update Beatrice Wishart on our considerations around the matter, and I absolutely give her an assurance that we will consider in good faith any suggestions that are made. I hope that she will accept the absolute determination that I and the Government have to tackle these issues, which are so fundamentally and utterly unacceptable in modern-day society.

**Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP):** The prevention and eradication of violence against women is our shared goal, but while abuse persists, information, support and refuge for survivors remain vital. The joint Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and Scottish Women's Aid guidance on good practice in commissioning specialist domestic abuse services stipulates that there is no statutory requirement to put domestic abuse services out to tender. Will the Scottish Government consider taking action to strengthen local government guidance to ensure that core funding is secure for specialist support services such as those that are provided by Scottish Women's Aid, given that so many survivors rely on those essential specialist services?

**The First Minister:** I will certainly undertake to consider that. It is an important point. We are extremely fortunate in this country—of course, we are not alone—in that we have excellent support and advocacy services for women and girls, in the form of rape crisis centres, Rape Crisis Scotland and of course Scottish Women's Aid. Across the country, there are many other organisations that do fantastic work. Our focus, working with local authorities, is to ensure that they have the support that they need to provide those services to women.

We have increased and are increasing over the current session of Parliament the funding that is available, but ensuring that it gets to the services that have the experience and expertise to help women is important. The point about putting services out to tender, the way in which services are funded and the guidance that underpins that is a very valid one. I will certainly undertake to have a look at that and write to Clare Adamson when I have had the opportunity to do so.

**Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab):** I welcome the First Minister's comments to Beatrice Wishart about the commitment of this Government and indeed this Parliament to our young people, particularly girls. However, given the report in the

*Sunday Post* at the weekend, based on the work of Soma Sara, what is the Scottish Government doing about the responsibility of our local authorities, over whose wi-fi in schools bullying messages and assaults are taking place?

**The First Minister:** I would expect local authorities to take the matter very seriously, as the Scottish Government would.

I am happy to come back to the member in more detail when I have had the opportunity to consider more fully the answer to his question. However, the important general point that underpins the question is that the ways in which young people communicate are radically different from what was the case when we were at school. Therefore, our responses must keep pace with that and with the ways in which young people can be subjected to bullying. Clearly, the internet and technology are absolutely at the heart of that. That puts an added onus on all of us to make sure that our responses are fit for purpose.

On the particular technical points, I will come back to the member as soon as possible.

**The Presiding Officer:** We will now take supplementary questions. I advise members that there is a lot of interest, so the more succinct the questions and the responses, the more members we will be able to include.

#### **NHS Ayrshire and Arran (Hospital Visits)**

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** NHS Ayrshire and Arran has suspended all but what it deems essential hospital visits, such as for those nearing the end of life or with a terminal illness diagnosis. That is despite the First Minister's statement on Tuesday that it is really important that visiting goes ahead, albeit with a sensible limit of two visitors per patient.

No attempt is being made to ascertain the Covid status of visitors, and the confused situation is causing a lot of upset to my constituents and people across Ayrshire. What steps will the First Minister take to ensure that patients in Ayrshire will be able to receive visitors this Christmas?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** We have been made aware of NHS Ayrshire and Arran's decision. I can advise Kenny Gibson that officials have been in discussion with the health board this morning. I appreciate that these are exceptionally difficult circumstances for health boards, but we have been very clear about our expectations around visiting, which are as I set out in my statement and in response to questions on Tuesday.

Scottish Government officials have been assured by NHS Ayrshire and Arran that the decision will be urgently reviewed and that the

board is very mindful of the need to ensure that no one is isolated in hospital over Christmas. We are being assured that the board is supporting all essential visiting.

Obviously, a person's Covid status is really important, and we all need to be aware of that. I take the opportunity to remind everyone who is visiting a loved one in hospital that it is vital to take a lateral flow test ahead of every visit.

#### **Covid-19 (Omicron Symptoms)**

**The Presiding Officer:** I call Sandesh Gulhane. *[Interruption.]* Mr Gulhane, we cannot hear you in the chamber. We will try to make an adjustment, to see whether that makes any difference to us here.

**Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con):** There we go. Is that better, Presiding Officer?

**The Presiding Officer:** It is, indeed. Please begin again.

**Sandesh Gulhane:** The omicron variant affects people differently, especially if they are double vaccinated. The Zoe Covid Study app is showing that, along with the classic triad of cough, fever and loss of taste or smell, omicron also gives people headaches, runny noses, scratchy throats, extreme tiredness, muscle aches and night sweats. We know that those symptoms are also part of having a cold or flu. Would the First Minister raise the issue with the chief medical officers across the four nations of the United Kingdom and consider adding those symptoms to the list of symptoms that require people to take a polymerase chain reaction test?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** That is a very good point. I assure the member that such things are kept under on-going review by the four chief medical officers, and it is an issue that the health secretary and I discuss with our chief medical officer regularly.

I have read the reports suggesting that the symptoms of omicron present differently from the symptoms of previous variants. I know that that is something that the chief medical officers will want to bear in mind when considering whether they should update the case definition advice that has been in place.

My advice to people who are worried that they might have Covid is to make sure that they get a PCR test. Anyone whose lateral flow test device shows a positive result should make sure that they get a PCR test.

As I indicated on Tuesday, I had a slight concern that people might not be going for testing as we got closer to Christmas. I have to say that that concern has been allayed, as there has been an increase in testing rates during the days since.

The point about being vigilant around symptoms is important, and I am sure that the chief medical officer would be happy to discuss the matter directly with the member, if that would be helpful.

### **Autism Assessments**

#### **Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab):**

Recently, a mum and dad contacted me about their difficulty in getting their daughter Emily a formal autism assessment. When my office contacted the local health board about that, we were told that it is only now making appointments for children who were referred for assessment in June 2019. The waiting list is more than two years long. While Emily is left waiting for a diagnosis, her condition is getting worse, her education is suffering, she is unable to access the additional support that she needs and her parents are left unsupported.

To be compliant with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Government must ensure that disabled children have the full enjoyment of their human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with non-disabled children. Can the First Minister set out what the Scottish Government intends to do to address such lengthy waiting times and ensure that children such as Emily are not left waiting years for an autism assessment?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** It is important to make the point that Pam Duncan-Glancy has just made. All services are under considerable pressure right now and, unfortunately, I expect that that will increase rather than decrease in the immediate weeks ahead. However, the points about priority for urgent services and equity and the human rights impacts on children with disabilities in particular are well made. I will look into the specific issue about waiting times for autism diagnosis after I leave the chamber today and I will write to Pam Duncan-Glancy with a fuller answer when I have had the opportunity to do that.

### **Covid-19 (Vaccination Staff)**

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** Will the First Minister join me in thanking every member of our national health service staff, every volunteer and every person who has gone to have their booster jab for their stunning and brave efforts, who have allowed Scotland to become the first UK nation to give a booster or third dose of the Covid-19 vaccine to more than half its entire adult population?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I will. I am sure that the whole chamber will join me in thanking everybody and every vaccination team across the country. They are doing truly heroic

work right now to get booster jabs into people's arms as quickly as possible. I do not think that I can find the words to properly convey the depth of my appreciation and gratitude to every single member of those teams. I encourage them to keep going. We will do everything that we can to support them.

This is a key point. The responsibility on Government, working with health boards to ensure that capacity is there to meet the target that we have set ourselves for the end of the year, is obvious. I accept that unreservedly. However, we also need people to come forward. We need people to get on the system and book their appointments where they can, as quickly as they can. Everyone who is over 18—apart from those in our island communities, where communication is different—can do that using the online portal now. That is the case for mainland Scotland.

Please book your appointment. We will do what we need to do to ensure that the capacity is there. I hope that, together, through this national mission, we can use booster jabs to get us out the other end of the new challenge with omicron.

### **Perinatal Mental Health**

#### **Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con):**

My constituent, Lesley, was admitted to Carseview, following a relapse in her postpartum psychosis and was eventually moved to the intensive care unit. Lesley has been discharged but is yet to receive occupational therapy and it could take weeks to appoint a community psychiatric nurse. The staff are incredible, but a lack of resources means that Lesley is not getting the treatment that she needs.

The First Minister met Lesley during a photo call when funding for perinatal mental healthcare was announced. Lesley has heard the promises. Will the First Minister now ensure that Lesley gets the treatment that she needs?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I remember meeting Lesley and I send her my best wishes. I will look into the particular circumstances.

If memory serves me correctly, the day that I met Lesley at St John's hospital in Livingston, we were announcing significant investment in perinatal mental health, which underlines the importance that we attach to that. There are challenges across all services right now as a result of the pressure of Covid. That pressure increasingly comes from staff absences, which are compounding some of the challenges that were already there.

The importance of getting timely care and services to people is obvious. We will continue to work with health boards to ensure that. As I said, I

am happy to look into the particular circumstances around Lesley's situation.

I come back to the point that I made earlier. We must all do what is required to get Covid cases on a downward path again. As long as they are rising as rapidly as they are right now, those challenges will continue. I accept the Government's responsibility here, but all of us across the country have a part to play in ensuring that we get the national health service back on track.

### **Vaccination Clinics (Queues)**

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** Yesterday, my constituents queued for up to two hours while waiting to get their booster jags. They understand the need to get vaccinated, so they waited patiently. However, around 7 pm they were told that they should go home as they would not be vaccinated that day. Some 200 of them were turned away—and they had appointments for 7.30 that evening. They have since been unable to rebook their vaccination appointments.

We can all accept that there will be glitches, but people in my constituency want to be vaccinated and they want to be vaccinated quickly. Will the First Minister investigate that? Better still, will she ask NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde to put on extra clinics in Dumbarton?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** First, anybody who has an appointment and is not able to have that appointment fulfilled should phone the helpline to rebook, because that is what is required. That is my advice.

We are seeking to do everything to avoid such situations happening. That is one of the reasons why we need a balance of facilities. If we had only drop-in clinics, people would queue, and it would be hard to match supply and demand. I do not want people to be queueing, but if a person turns up and there is a queue, they should wait there and get their vaccination, because it is important. We certainly do not want people to be turned away.

We are working every day to resolve these issues and to ensure that the vaccination programme continues apace. I am not minimising the impact on people who have that experience, but the programme is a massive logistical effort that is being delivered in an excellent way by staff throughout the country, and we will continue to support it as best we can so that everybody who is eligible and comes forward gets a vaccination.

### **Covid-19 (Support)**

**Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green):** I thank the First Minister for her update on Covid. We have heard a lot about the impact on business, but there will be workers in customer-

facing roles who will be terrified about compromising their health or going to work. If the United Kingdom Government refuses to do the right thing, what support might be put in place to ensure that those in retail, hospitality and other customer-facing roles will not have to choose between their health and their income?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** On funding support, I find it impossible right now to contemplate how the UK Government can fail to put schemes in place. This is not an issue that only Scotland is facing; it is an issue that the whole UK is facing. The doubling times for omicron in parts of England are even faster than they are in Scotland right now. We are all in this together. Whatever the politics and the maelstrom around that that we have seen in recent days, I think that it will become unavoidable for the UK Government to act. I hope that it acts sooner rather than later, because that is the issue. The sooner we act, the less of an emergency we will get ourselves into.

We have maximised the financial support that we can give to businesses. That is why it is important that the UK Government acts beyond that. There will always be, as there were in the initial stages of the pandemic, some workers who have to go to work because they provide critical services. That is why it is so important that we support the right mitigations.

Some of the changes in guidance for supermarkets, for example, are as much about supporting staff as supporting customers. On Tuesday, I mentioned the workplace testing scheme. Employers can order tests directly and support their employees to test regularly.

It is very important that, if people have to go to work, we do everything that we can to protect them, not only through financial provision but through the mitigations that are in place.

### **COBR Meetings**

**Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP):** Can the First Minister update Parliament on the most recent COBR meeting?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** The most recent COBR meeting was in the late afternoon yesterday—I think that it was between 5 o'clock and 6 o'clock. That was the second in a week; the previous one happened last Friday.

I welcome the fact that those meetings have happened. It is important that we discuss these things seriously. The meeting yesterday was chaired by Michael Gove, and many things were discussed in it. Obviously, the Welsh First Minister, the Northern Irish First Minister and I raised the points about the need for funding support that I have reported in the chamber today.

Therefore, it is not just the Scottish Government that is raising those points.

These meetings are very important, and I hope that the Prime Minister and the chancellor will engage directly in them from now on, because it is a serious situation that we all face, and it is important that we compare our experiences, share what we are doing and work together where we can. The Scottish Government is ready, willing and keen to do that, and I hope that we see that materialising over the period ahead.

### Edinburgh Tram Inquiry

**Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con):** There is on-going national press coverage of, and significant public interest in, the Edinburgh tram inquiry, and that public interest continues to grow. The £500,000 that was allocated to the inquiry in the Scottish budget last week will bring the total that has been provided by the Scottish Government to over £12.5 million. What was once a beleaguered project is now a much-beleaguered public inquiry. Edinburgh residents deserve answers about what went wrong with the building of the trams. Will the First Minister shed light on why an inquiry that was initiated by her predecessor seven years ago is still on-going, although closing submissions concluded in 2018?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I seem to remember that the member's Conservative Party predecessors voted for the trams in the Parliament, but there we go. To be serious here, there is—

**Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** Answer the question.

**The First Minister:** I am going to answer the question. The inquiry is a statutory public inquiry, convened by Lord Hardie. I am not sure whether the member is genuinely asking me, as a minister, to interfere in the conduct of an independent statutory public inquiry. That would be deeply inappropriate. Let me hazard a guess that, if I ever did so, the Tories would be the first ones on their feet complaining about that.

The judge will take forward the public inquiry in whatever way he sees fit, and he will provide conclusions. I am sure that, at that point, Parliament will fully consider and scrutinise those conclusions.

## Edington Hospital

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-01177, in the name of Craig Hoy, on Edington hospital.

*Motion debated,*

That the Parliament notes that the decision has been taken to close six inpatient beds at Edington Hospital, North Berwick, which is NHS Lothian's last cottage hospital, and relocate them from 13 September to the East Lothian Community Hospital on a temporary basis due to workforce pressures; understands that this move has taken place without any community consultation and has raised concerns about the long-term future of the Edington in the community; notes that an online petition, Save the Edington Hospital, has already received over 5,000 signatures; believes that this acts as a demonstration of the level of concern about the move; recognises the hospital's long history in North Berwick and that the construction of it was made possible by a bequest from Miss Elizabeth Edington of Ethandune, Dirleton Court, North Berwick; notes that building work commenced in 1912 and that the hospital was officially opened in 1913; believes that it has been providing good patient care for the population of East Lothian for almost 111 years and that it has been a well-valued and supported service in the town, with its closure leaving many upset and feeling disadvantaged; further believes that the service provided by the Edington Hospital is important, and notes the view that services for communities in East Lothian must be retained, in light of the growing population in the area.

13:07

**Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con):** Local health services are a vital part of local communities. That is why it is an honour to open this debate. The Edington hospital is at the heart of North Berwick, one of the communities that I am proud to represent. However, the cottage hospital's in-patient beds and its minor injuries clinic are currently closed.

From the outset, I stress that I understand the pressures that our national health service is under. In fairness, however, we need to understand that those pressures are not new and that not all of them are Covid related. Healthcare staff across NHS Lothian and the East Lothian health and social care partnership are dedicated, but they are overstretched. They want to do the right thing by patients, and I thank them for everything that they do.

Across Scotland, there is no one-size-fits-all solution to local healthcare provision. The Edington hospital is a well-used and well-loved service at the heart of our community. For more than 100 years it has served the people of North Berwick and East Lothian. The hospital, which was constructed thanks to a bequest by Miss Elizabeth Edington, is operated by NHS Lothian and is supported by the Friends of the Edington Hospital. Prior to Covid and the hospital's closure, it had

nine beds and provided medical care for a range of chronic conditions, mobility problems, respite and end-of-life care. The hospital was staffed by 10 nursing staff, eight clinical support staff and four domestic staff.

Fundamentally, the voice of patients must be heard, even during a pandemic. On 1 September this year, with no local consultation, NHS Lothian announced the closure of the Edington, due to staffing constraints at other facilities. Only last week, it was announced that those services will stay closed for at least another month, with every possibility of its closure being extended further.

Six in-patient beds, and the staff who supported them, have been temporarily relocated from the Edington to the East Lothian community hospital in Haddington. NHS Lothian says that that has provided additional nursing capacity and allowed it to keep 14 beds open at the community hospital in Haddington, but that does not tell the whole story. Writing in *The Scotsman*, a local community practice general practitioner, Claire Doldon, said that the Edington

“was a mainstay of local patient care”.

She added that it

“allowed us to manage patients close to home, without ... admission to an already stretched hospital sector.”

After the hospital closed, I took the decision to undertake a community survey to gauge the views of local residents. I secured the views of 1,929 people, 77 per cent of whom said that they had personal experience with the hospital. Of those who were surveyed, 97 per cent were opposed to the closure. The community voice is clear: they want the hospital services reopened. I hope that the cabinet secretary will, today, add the Government’s voice to that call.

The value of the Edington hospital cannot be measured, by national health service managers or by ministers, on spreadsheets.

**Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab):** I am grateful to Craig Hoy for giving way, and for bringing this important debate to the chamber. Do you agree with me that the nuance of the benefits of the Edington hospital does not seem to be reflected in any NHS assessments of its value, which are based simply on the number of beds?

**Craig Hoy:** Precisely—that is exactly why so many local residents have been in touch with members for South Scotland and for East Lothian in respect of the matter. The hospital provides much-needed high-quality levels of care.

Jane from North Berwick told me:

“My Mother spent her final days there. She was so well looked after and as a former nurse, was happy to be there unlike her stays at the Royal Infirmary and the Western General.”

Local resident Lynda said:

“I have used the Edington since when my son was small. The Edington looks after the community from scrapes and scratches through to respite & end of life care. It is our beating heart.”

East Lothian is the second fastest-growing area in Scotland, and Midlothian and West Lothian are growing fast, too, yet health services across the Lothians have not kept pace. Many of the pressures were there before Covid. Had the Scottish National Party invested at the same level as the United Kingdom Government funding that was given to Scotland during Nicola Sturgeon’s time as Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing, an additional £1 billion a year would be being spent in our NHS.

Had the Government built sufficient workforce capacity when the sun was shining, the system would not have hit breaking point when the Covid storm hit. There are currently 1,011 vacancies in nursing and midwifery in NHS Lothian alone, and 5,761 across Scotland as a whole. When the cabinet secretary speaks, it would be good if he could say how the Government intends to plug that gap.

Local GPs are also concerned about the closure of the hospital and the manner in which it was closed. Dr Andrew Smith is a GP in Gullane, with 25 years’ experience of admitting patients to, and looking after patients in, the Edington. He says:

“I was not informed directly of the decision—I contacted the Director and received a second-hand apology.”

The community council, the local area partnership and Friends of the Edington Hospital say that they have been left in the dark. Responses to their freedom of information requests are sketchy, redacted or still outstanding. They say that hard data is proving hard to find.

Today, my principal ask of the cabinet secretary is that he encourages NHS Lothian to consult fully and to engage better with our communities. I also ask him to help to ensure that data about bed use, the minor injuries clinic numbers and the knock-on effects on other services are put in the public domain as quickly as possible. Lastly, will he bring forward the date on which he plans to meet with local campaigners so that he can hear at first hand their urgent concerns?

The on-going closure of the minor injuries clinic is also adding to the pressure on the accident and emergency department at the Royal infirmary. The expectation that those who are injured should be able to make their own way to Edinburgh to receive treatment is unreasonable for many. Furthermore, we were told that moving nurses to a hospital where there were significant pressures would reduce those workforce pressures, but at least one experienced nurse from the Edington

has chosen to leave the NHS rather than move hospitals.

The decision to close respite and palliative care has put pressure on other facilities in East Lothian, including hospices. In her *Scotsman* piece, Dr Doldon said that closing the hospital had been “counterproductive”. She also said that there had been a

“knock-on effect on central inpatient ... services, the loss of a more personalised local service and an associated high staff turnover.”

Whether it is on staffing levels, pressure on the care sector, respite services or palliative care, the closure of the Edington hospital is likely to have had a negative impact. All the while, beds that could be put to good use lie empty and a minor injuries clinic is closed.

There is cross-community and cross-party support for the rapid reopening of the Edington hospital, so I hope that ministers will listen and agree to work with me and parliamentary colleagues, meet urgently with local campaigners and work to tackle the underlying issues in our NHS so that the Edington is reopened and its future is assured.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I remind members that the only “you” in the chamber is the Presiding Officer and that comments should come through the chair.

13:15

**Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP):** I thank Craig Hoy for securing the debate. Four minutes is not enough time to talk about the Edington hospital, but I will try to cover as many points as I can.

First, I thank all the NHS and care staff in East Lothian and across the country for all their efforts now and in the past 21 months. It has been an incredibly difficult time.

The Edington hospital in North Berwick is an integral part of the psyche of North Berwick and has been a consistent feature in the lifetime of everyone in the town. As Craig Hoy said, there will be few people in the town who have not used the facility, be that the minor injuries clinic, step-up or step-down care, or end-of-life care for loved ones.

The Friends of the Edington group, led by Murray Duncanson, has been a fantastic support for the hospital over a number of years. When the announcement about the temporary closure of the hospital was made, it came as a surprise and a shock to us all. At the time, as the constituency MSP, I pulled together a steering group, which consisted of myself, Craig Hoy MSP, Martin Whitfield MSP, all the local councillors, the Friends of the Edington, North Berwick community council,

North Berwick Coastal Health and Wellbeing Association, local GPs and the local area partnership. That cross-party and cross-agency group has worked really well and has met fortnightly to discuss options to push for the hospital to be reopened as soon as it is clinically safe to do so.

We currently have the unprecedented pressures of the new omicron variant, in what is the most challenging moment that we have faced in the pandemic. I thank everyone who was involved in quickly opening the drop-in vaccine centre at the Corn Exchange in Haddington. The centre, which opened today, was incredibly well put together. There are already queues at the centre.

We all acknowledge the reasoning behind the temporary closure. The pressures on our NHS are unprecedented. In Edinburgh, the Royal infirmary and Western general hospitals are under incredible pressure, and that has been passed down the line to East Lothian community hospital in Haddington. Only this week, East Lothian Council communicated its issues around social care recruitment and pressures on delivering care packages. The push for mass vaccination has resulted in a demand for staff. The pool of staff for the NHS, care work and mass vaccination is being stretched, and it is incredibly difficult to balance those issues. In addition, as Mr Hoy and Mr Whitfield will be aware, we were told last week that delayed discharge cases in NHS Lothian were around 400, with the vast majority in Edinburgh.

The main reason given for the closure of the Edington hospital was the overall staffing pressures in the NHS Lothian hospital estate. We were told that more beds would be available to residents in East Lothian if they were provided at East Lothian community hospital rather than the Edington. I think that it was mentioned that there were 14 at the community hospital, as against nine at the Edington. There is a nuanced debate, which has been mentioned by both my colleagues, regarding the other issues that are impacting on the situation, including the pressures on hospices. There are empty care beds in East Lothian that could be used. More detailed consideration will be needed.

We were also told about recruitment issues at the community hospital in Haddington, which leads me to an ask of the cabinet secretary. The Friends of the Edington and local MSPs have asked for figures on staffing and staff shortages and for the criteria for reopening the hospital in relation to the staff establishment. We have all been told that that information is available only through a freedom of information request. That information needs to be transparent and openly shared in the steering group. That is fundamental—it is one of the key

asks that we have had from the steering group, which met only last night.

The steering group also asked for information on the impact of the closure of the minor injuries clinic and whether that has presented additional pressures on A and E facilities in Edinburgh. Again, we were told that we would need to submit an FOI request. We heard from Claire Doldon, who has mentioned the pressures on local GPs. That, too, needs to be discussed.

The Edington hospital was discussed at a recent meeting of MSPs and MPs. We managed to secure monthly instead of quarterly reviews as well as an assurance that NHS Lothian chief executive Calum Campbell would meet the steering group in the new year to explain the clinical reasoning for the temporary closure and answer any questions.

I conclude with another ask of the cabinet secretary. Can he reassure the people of North Berwick that there are no plans to close the Edington on a permanent basis? The Edington has provided care for many in North Berwick and East Lothian over many years. I hope that it reopens as soon as that is clinically safe.

13:19

**Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab):** I am in the unique position of agreeing with all the statements that have already been made across the chamber. That speaks not just to the heart of how the community feels about the Edington hospital crisis, but to a way of resolving it.

Having opened in 1913, the Edington hospital has a place in the heart of every living person in North Berwick. It became part of the NHS in 1948 and was described as a cottage hospital, which was a smaller hospital where people who were in crisis, had a panic or were sent by their GP, could attend to get any service, from getting a splinter out of their finger, all the way through to dealing with a broken leg.

Because of that versatility, the value of the Edington hospital has wormed its way into the heart of the community. That love is shown by the thousands who have signed the petition, the hundreds who turned up on a cold Sunday to make a heart in the park for their Edington, and those people who will gather later on, Covid permitting, to celebrate with Christmas carols around the Edington.

The community does not just love the Edington hospital; it needs it. The hospital serves myriad purposes from, as we have heard, the nine beds—although, when the location was moved, that number reduced to six—to the minor injuries unit. Both facilities were provided by the same staff and

they allowed people to avoid taking a train or buses to the nearest hospital that could deal with them, or standing outside their pharmacy to try and get help there. The Edington was a location that people could trust. When they were told that the location needed to go elsewhere, they took that advice with confidence. The challenge that has occurred over the closure, due to Covid, is that the way in which it was announced and how it has been handled has flown in the face of the community's experience of its NHS through the Edington hospital.

Community members have had to fight to get answers to their questions and to get people to come and explain the closure to them; even at this time of crisis, that is unacceptable. Through that hospital, people are making choices about the way that they face the Covid disaster that looms in front of us, and they need to have confidence in their NHS. For them, their NHS is, in part, a cottage hospital, where they take the smallest or biggest of complaints to people who work at the local hospital and live in the community.

With all respect, I do not think that any of the community's asks has been unreasonable. There is an economic model that says that, at a time of crisis, we bring all our resources together, but there is another model that says that, if that hospital had been supported, so much pressure would have been taken off the larger hospital units in the other areas that, perhaps, the way through this Covid crisis could have been different.

I know that members have heard about the asks today, including agreeing to meet the steering group and responding to the freedom of information request. That is crucial, because the data belongs to the people who are asking for it. In order to understand the decisions that are being made, they need to see the data and have it explained. I welcome the NHS Lothian chief executive's agreement to meet the steering group and the people who have petitioned on the matter, and I hope that that will happen as soon as possible. That is an opportunity to say sorry to a community for the way in which something happened and to start making it better. However, we need to fill those 1,000 vacancies across NHS Lothian.

13:24

**Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con):** I believe that local health services are a vital part of local communities. The Edington hospital, which opened in 1913, has served the people of North Berwick and East Lothian successfully since then—up until now. Prior to Covid and its closure, the hospital had nine beds and provided medical care for a range of chronic conditions and mobility problems as well as respite and end-of-life care.

On 9 November, I wrote to Maree Todd on the matter. I had raised the closure of the Edington hospital with her at the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee, having visited North Berwick to attend the hands around the Edington rally. In my letter, I voiced concerns about fears that the hospital, which provides palliative care to local residents, was going to be shut down for good and asked whether she would contact NHS Lothian and reverse the closure of the in-patient palliative beds at Edington Hospital.

The minister replied that East Lothian health and social care partnership and the integration joint board were agreeing criteria for the safe reopening of Edington hospital and ensuring that staff were engaged and informed and that there was also full engagement and consultation with local communities, community groups, staff and elected members. She also said that the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care would be meeting with the community hospital campaign group soon to discuss its concerns and future plans for the hospital. As my colleague Craig Hoy said, it is vital for the meeting between Humza Yousaf and the community hospital campaign group to take place as soon as possible.

I am sad to say that NHS Lothian's gold command group met last week to review the decision to temporarily move staff from the Edington to East Lothian community hospital in Haddington, and the decision was taken to keep North Berwick's Edington hospital closed. Ultimately that decision centres on workforce pressures. There are simply not enough staff. I have been calling for resilient and robust workforce planning—indeed, not just a plan but real action—to address the long-term issues with our workforce. These issues have long pre-dated Covid and, in fact, can be attributed directly to decisions taken by the Scottish National Party Government from as far back as 2007, when Nicola Sturgeon as health secretary cut the number of nurse training places.

As we have heard in the chamber, there is cross-community and cross-party support for the Edington's rapid reopening. If the Government cared about community hospitals as much as the rest of us, it would have done something about this. There was no consultation—there was nothing. After everything we have faced over the past 18 months, it should be clear that, if we had more services in communities, we could—and should—manage things better. To decide to close a community service now makes no sense, because we need more services in the heart of our communities.

13:27

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** I congratulate Craig Hoy on securing the debate and all the speakers so far on the content of their speeches.

I was very pleased to join members of the Edington hospital campaign in North Berwick to hear at first hand how much they love and value their local hospital. As we have heard, the Edington is more than 100 years old, and it has been serving the community of North Berwick and its many visitors, of which I have been one, year after year. The community hospital offers a range of services from palliative care to out-of-hours services, but, for me, the critical thing is that it is supported by GPs, allied health professionals and nurses, and it provides much valued and safe local healthcare. I make no secret of the fact that I am a complete fan of local services—and especially so when the service itself is well run and sustainable, as the Edington is.

Let us review what happened. We are all alive to the fact that there is a pandemic, but the decision to transfer services away from the Edington was apparently based on staff shortages. Let me be perfectly clear: these were staff shortages elsewhere in NHS Lothian, not at the Edington. NHS Lothian took the decision on 25 August; it consulted the Scottish Government the same day; and a press release was sent out on 1 September, secure in the knowledge that agreement had been reached with the Scottish Government. As a result, six beds were transferred away from the Edington.

The changes were to be temporary, with a review promised after three months. I wrote to the health board and the cabinet secretary and asked: who was doing the review? Would the local community be involved in the way that they were not the first time round? What were the review's criteria?

I am still to receive a response from the health board or the cabinet secretary, but I had a response from the health and social care partnership. However, there was nothing in it about the current review. It is genuinely appalling that there is so little transparency and that local people and local clinicians were not consulted. That cannot happen again. Information must be shared with the local community and local clinicians.

The health and social care partnership's response was interesting, because it tells me that there is a work programme to review the long-term model and provision in relation to two care homes and the Belhaven hospital and Edington hospital sites. My goodness me, a change board has even been set up to do that. All I can say to local people

in that area is that I have seen some of this before in my area. They need to engage now, because every instinct of the NHS board will be to centralise services and there is a danger that more services will be lost.

The changes that have been made have already had an impact, which others have described. Let me take the minor injuries unit as an example. Many people have ended up going to the front door of A and E needlessly when they could have been seen locally, which contributes to the crisis in our A and Es and hospitals. I will not go on.

I have three asks of the cabinet secretary. First, meet the campaign group, local people and clinicians to understand how much they value the provision. Secondly, ensure that the health board and the health and social care partnership are transparent and share data without the need for game playing and freedom of information requests. Thirdly, please give a long-term commitment to the hospital so that services that are appropriately delivered locally are not centralised and remain in North Berwick.

13:32

**Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab):** I commend my colleague Martin Whitfield for the work that he has done on the issue and for standing so strongly beside the North Berwick community.

A petition that gains thousands of signatures from local residents who care deeply about their hospital and their community is a call for health boards and the Government to listen. Clearly, that call has not been listened to and the views of the public have been ignored in relation to the continued closure of the community ward at Edington hospital.

The pandemic has restricted how we live our lives, but decision makers are still able to do consultations using virtual meetings and other platforms. The fact that the decision has been made without any real consultation with the public, as we have heard, should be a concern to us all, and I hope that the cabinet secretary recognises that it simply should not have happened.

Health services are at their best when they are local—when people are familiar with the setting and environment and have a connection to it. Closing a hospital that has provided more than 100 years of good care and service to its local community will undoubtedly have adverse impacts on the community that it has served for so long.

In the aftermath of a pandemic, people will, and the Scottish Government and health boards should, recognise the importance of local community care. Its importance is heightened that

bit more when the building in which the care is provided has been a staple of the community for so long, with generations brought up knowing the hospital and linking many personal memories to it. We should be doing all that we can to protect, not close, hospitals such as Edington.

We all understand the severe pressures that the NHS is under, and we know that staffing is an issue in some areas—although not at Edington hospital, as we have heard. It is incumbent on the Scottish Government to provide the resources to create new posts and address staff shortages wherever they are, and it is important that people know that their local services are valued.

The NHS has carried us through the pandemic; it is the very best of our country and our proudest possession, but the underfunding and undervaluing of health services by Government has led us to a situation where staff in community care facilities are being moved to centralised health hubs, which should not be the case.

Let me be clear: the Scottish Government's underfunding and undervaluing of the health service long predates the pandemic. Lessons need to be learned and should have been learned long before now.

The people of North Berwick understandably feel as though a big part of the community has been torn away from them. They are understandably unhappy at the lack of consultation and understandably concerned about the future of their local hospital. They have not been communicated with and I hope that the cabinet secretary can give them some reassurance that the Scottish Government is doing all that it can to secure the hospital's future and communicate with the public.

I reiterate a point that I have made throughout the debate: health services are best when they are delivered locally, are easily accessible and serve local communities. The fact that the local hospital that we are debating has such a history and connection to the people whom it serves is an added benefit that should be preserved for as long as possible. The people of North Berwick deserve first-class local services on their doorstep. They deserve to be part of the consultation and to be listened to.

I thank Craig Hoy for bringing the debate to the Parliament.

13:36

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Humza Yousaf):** After being slightly mean to Craig Hoy yesterday, I will attempt some redemption by thanking him—

**Craig Hoy:** I will buy the cabinet secretary a box of chocolates.

**Humza Yousaf:** That is the way to the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care's heart.

I thank Craig Hoy for securing the debate. It is important. If we were voting on his motion, I would vote for it. I see nothing in it that causes me any difficulty. He spoke well, as did all members who spoke—I did not necessarily agree with every word that was said, but I will come to that. I will pick up on the core themes of each of the speeches.

Martin Whitfield gave an excellent speech. He got to the heart of why hospitals, particularly community hospitals, are so important to our communities. They are there from birth to death and everything that goes in between.

Some of life's most difficult moments have taken place when we have been surrounded by doctors, nurses and other hospital workers, who have shown great compassion and care. In such a tight-knit community as North Berwick, Edington hospital has no doubt been a central feature in many of those moments. Of course, hospital staff also celebrate with us in joy. There are many moments in my life that I will not forget, the top of those being when my daughter was born and I got to hold her for the first time, supported by the doctors, nurses and other theatre staff who were there.

Every member recognises the importance of Edington hospital being at the heart of the local community. I reiterate that I understand that, and I know that NHS Lothian understands it, too.

I will touch on and reiterate a few points that other members raised and will give some assurance if I can. There have been three key themes—if I have missed anything out, members are more than welcome to intervene on me—on which members asked for assurance: consultation, transparency and the hospital's long-term future.

On consultation, I think that everybody recognises that, particularly during the pandemic, we cannot expect health boards to do the full level of consultation that they previously did. *[Interruption.]* I will address the point that Craig Hoy makes from a sedentary position shortly.

I emphasise that the health board could not do the full eight to 12-week consultation in the midst of a pandemic, given the rise in cases of different variants—at the moment, the omicron variant. However, members suggested that some consultation could have been done. That is a fair request and a fair issue for the health board to reflect on. Nobody in the community would have expected an extended consultation, but they would have expected some discussion to be had with

them. Equally, having met regularly with the chief executive and chair of NHS Lothian, I know just how rapidly they have had to make some extremely difficult decisions. However, the points on consultation are well made and I will not dispute them.

I will talk about what is happening at present before I look forward. When I met Paul McLennan a number of months ago, he raised with me the issue of transparency and data in relation to Edington hospital, and he spoke well again today. It is not unreasonable for the local community and its representatives to ask for transparency in the decision-making process. It is not always as clear as having metrics. We can use metrics and spreadsheets, and we can analyse the numbers, but, as many members have said, we also have to take into account the experiences of the local community. Qualitative experiences can be as important as our quantitative data analysis.

Many members have requested that NHS Lothian release such data, as opposed to freedom of information requests having to be made. I will certainly take up that issue with NHS Lothian. I would like to know the reasons why it is taking its approach, to see whether they are reasonable. If they are not, I will certainly ask NHS Lothian to engage in a fully transparent process, because the last thing that we need is for people to mistrust NHS Lothian and to question its intentions in relation to what it is doing. During the pandemic, NHS Lothian has done what it has done for very good and important reasons.

Paul McLennan, Craig Hoy, Jackie Baillie and others talked about the long-term future. I have said clearly in written communication that there are no plans to permanently close Edington hospital, and I reiterate that today. I hope that members will understand that at this moment, in the midst of the pandemic, it might be difficult to say which services will be available in the long term.

**Craig Hoy:** I just want to ensure that the cabinet secretary does not complete his remarks without addressing one ask that was made. He is due to meet the campaigners at the end of January, which will be after the next review period.

I understand that the cabinet secretary recently visited the community hospital in East Lothian but that he did not inform me, Mr Whitfield or Mr McLennan, whose nose was, I think, slightly put out of joint. The next time he visits, the kettle will be on, the chocolates will be out and we will be very happy to meet him.

Will the cabinet secretary accept the campaign group's core ask, which is to meet its members before the next review, so that he can be fully appraised of their concerns?

**Humza Yousaf:** I am afraid that my immediate priority, given the current pressures that I am under, is dealing not only with the immediate concerns relating to the omicron variant but with the booster campaign, on which the First Minister took a number of questions today. The member's party leader highlighted just how important the booster campaign is. Therefore, I will stick to the meeting that is in the diary early in the new year. Notwithstanding the importance of the issue that he has raised—I hope that I have reassured him and the community on its importance—I hope that he will understand that I have some immediate pressures and that I need to fulfil my duties in that regard.

If Craig Hoy, other regional members and, indeed, the constituency member were not informed of my visit to East Lothian, I apologise for and regret that.

As I said, I plan to meet North Berwick community council, and my intention is that local members will be at that meeting, too. I hope that, at that point, we will have a clearer picture of where we are. Given the difficulties that we are facing, particularly with omicron, I am not necessarily envisaging much change, but let us allow the review to do the job that it needs to do. I understand the importance of the issue to the local community, and I look forward to meeting the campaigners in the new year.

13:44

*Meeting suspended.*

14:30

*On resuming—*

## Portfolio Question Time

### Constitution, External Affairs and Culture

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** Good afternoon. I remind members of the Covid-related measures that are in place, and that face coverings should be worn when moving around the chamber and the Holyrood campus.

The next item of business is portfolio questions on constitution, external affairs and culture. If a member wishes to ask a supplementary question, they should indicate so during the relevant question by pressing their request-to-speak button or entering the letter R in the chat function.

#### Independence Referendum

1. **Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what preparations it is making for holding an independence referendum in the first half of the current parliamentary session. (S6O-00540)

**The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson):** On 7 September 2021, the First Minister announced, as part of the programme for government, that the Scottish Government will work to ensure that a legitimate and constitutional referendum can be held within the current parliamentary session and, if the Covid crisis is over, within the first half of the session.

Since the announcement in the PFG, work has begun to scope what will be required to take that commitment forward and to provide the people of Scotland with the information that they will need in order that they can make an informed choice about Scotland's future.

**Kenneth Gibson:** Although independence supporters understand the need to wait until we are clear of Covid, the chaos and ineptitude of the United Kingdom's shambolic Government, which is clearly determined to undermine the existing devolved settlement, have increased the urgency of Scotland's need to re-emerge as an independent, sovereign state that is equal among nations. Will the cabinet secretary commit to making a statement to Parliament, as soon as we are through the pandemic, on the road map to an independence referendum and beyond?

**Angus Robertson:** I would be more than happy to make a statement to Parliament on the matter. The case for independence is a strong one, and this Government will present it openly, frankly and

with confidence and ambition. An independent Scotland would have the power to make different choices, including about how we manage public health challenges with different budgetary options, and it could make the choices that are best suited to Scotland's interests.

The Scottish Government has a clear mandate to hold a referendum, and it is the people of Scotland who will have the right to determine the future of Scotland.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Donald Cameron, who is joining us remotely, has a supplementary.

**Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** Given the serious concerns around the omicron variant, does the cabinet secretary agree that the very last thing that we should be doing today is discussing a second independence referendum? Does he further agree that all available financial resources that are currently earmarked for referendum planning should be immediately reprioritised and used in our collective effort against Covid?

**Angus Robertson:** No, I do not agree with the Conservative front-bench spokesman. As is so often the case, together with his colleagues, he ignores the result of the Scottish Parliament election. The people of Scotland elected a Scottish National Party-led Government, and it was elected with a mandate to hold a referendum.

In addition to the work that we are clearly doing on battling the Covid pandemic—our number 1 priority—we have the full panoply of Government work that we need to pursue. Part of that is making the preparations for the referendum that will take place when the time is right and the Covid pandemic has passed.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Karen Adam is joining us remotely.

**Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** When I stood for election in May this year, it was on a manifesto commitment to hold an independence referendum. I was elected by the people of Banffshire and Buchan Coast, who gave me that mandate. People want that choice presented to them.

People in the north-east have been putting money into the UK coffers for a long time, and they have now been hammered by the UK Government's damaging Brexit and its mediocre, drop-in-the-ocean investment, which does not come close to what they have paid in for decades.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that the people of the north-east are entitled to choose who decides their future, particularly given the circumstances around a fair and just transition?

**Angus Robertson:** Yes, I agree with my colleague. The member is entirely correct: the people of the north-east of Scotland and Scotland as a whole have a right to exercise a choice about independence.

The Scottish Government is committed to supporting and facilitating a just transition. That is demonstrated by the just transition fund for the north-east and Moray: a 10-year, £500 million scheme that was announced earlier this year. We asked the UK Government to match that ambition, and to date it has not.

In October, the UK Government also failed to award the green light to the cluster led by the Acorn project at St Fergus. That is extremely disappointing for the north-east. Currently, the Scottish Government does not hold all the necessary legislative and regulatory levers to support the cluster, as they were retained by the UK Government. That decision jeopardises the opportunities to deliver a just transition in our energy sector and for Scotland to achieve our ambitions. It must be up to the people of Scotland to decide how Scotland is governed.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 2 was not lodged. Question 3 is from Rhoda Grant, who is joining us remotely.

Ms Grant, could you please ask your question again? We did not hear it. Thank you.

### Creative Industries (Rural Areas)

**3. Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** Apologies, Presiding Officer. To ask the Scottish Government what support it provides to creative industries in rural areas, including in relation to young people wishing to pursue a career in this sector. (S6O-00542)

**The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development (Jenny Gilruth):** The Scottish Government supports the creative industries in rural areas through a range of activities that are delivered through our enterprise and skills agencies, as well as direct activity. The support includes XpoNorth, the year-round support programme for the Highlands and Islands, and skills training that is funded by the Scottish Government's national transition training fund.

Young people also receive mentoring and support through LevelUp!, LevelUp! digital and the Treòir | Voar | Virr programme. From next year, support will also be available through the £20 million rural entrepreneurs fund.

**Rhoda Grant:** The Inverness Creative Academy Wasps Studios provide affordable studio accommodation for those in the creative industries. However, there are few such opportunities throughout the Highlands and

Islands. In the light of rural depopulation and the fact that the creative sector has been hit particularly hard by the effects of Covid, how does the Scottish Government plan to encourage similar ventures to ensure that young people who are working in creative industries are not forced to leave the area to pursue their careers?

**Jenny Gilruth:** Rhoda Grant raises a number of important points and the Inverness academy is an important example of the work that is being done. I am keen to have a bit more of a conversation with her about that work and how we might be able to better support such activity.

Rhoda Grant mentioned some of the impacts of Covid on the creative sector. Right now, the sector is suffering from the very real impacts of the omicron variant, not only in relation to the events sector but more broadly in relation to the cultural sector, which has been one of the worst hit by the impacts of the pandemic. I will certainly take away that example as a good example of the work that we are currently focusing on, which is about helping the sector to recover from the impacts of the pandemic.

**Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP):** Scotland is a sought-after destination for film and television production, so it is important that we continue to invest in developing the sector. On that basis, will the minister outline how the funding allocated in the Scottish budget will support the sector to grow?

**Jenny Gilruth:** That funding will help to build the skills, talent, support-system and studio infrastructure to enable our film and TV industry to capitalise on unprecedented interest in production in Scotland. It will also further develop our sustainable creative economy. The new £11.9 million Kelvin hall studio, which the cabinet secretary announced last week and which will be funded by the Scottish Government and Glasgow City Council, is a prime example of the confidence that we have in Scotland's fast-growing screen sector. Investing in Scottish skills and talent and opening up new opportunities are the best ways to ensure that our storytelling and creativity drive what is on the screen and represent us authentically, here and around the world.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 4 is from Joe FitzPatrick, who is joining us remotely.

### International Relationships

**4. Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee City West) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the steps that it is taking to strengthen Scotland's international relationships. (S6O-00543)

**The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson):** Scotland is a proudly internationalist nation and embraces opportunities to strengthen our international relationships. Our new global affairs framework will be grounded in a values-based approach and will set out the basis on which the Scottish Government will prioritise our international activity. Our international offices enhance Scotland's international reputation and create domestic opportunities. We have plans to strengthen our office in Brussels and open offices in Copenhagen and Warsaw in the coming years. We will also continue to use our growing international development fund and enhanced climate justice fund to work with partners in the global south.

**Joe FitzPatrick:** Maintaining close relationships with our friends in Europe and across the world is integral to building a stronger, fairer and more prosperous Scotland. Will the cabinet secretary provide more of an update on the work of Scotland's international offices in promoting Scottish interests overseas?

**Angus Robertson:** Our new offices in Copenhagen and Warsaw will promote Scotland's interest and expertise in the Nordic and central European regions, attracting investment and supporting the exchange of knowledge and best practice. Our international presence creates domestic opportunities, broadens our horizons, attracts investment and ultimately benefits the people of Scotland. Our policies and actions abroad will be consistent with our focus on fairness and inclusion at home.

The programme for government emphasises our commitment to reviewing our approach to future policy and economic engagement, with a view to enhancing Scotland's global reach and presence.

**Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab):** Does the cabinet secretary agree that the US blockade in Cuba, which has been imposed for more than five decades, must now be ended to allow the Cuban economy to recover from the pandemic and trade freely with key markets?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I think that the question might be a bit wide of the initial one, but I note your enthusiasm to respond, cabinet secretary, so please do.

**Angus Robertson:** I am always pleased to respond.

Even US Administrations have pursued the normalisation of relations with Cuba over recent years, with the opening of trade and the ability for Cuban exiles to file remittances to relatives in Cuba. I am at the front of the queue to acknowledge the fact that the human rights record of the Cuban state, which a one-party Government

runs, is not something that we would seek to support. However, I stand in support of improved relations with Cuba, while supporting the importance of human rights on that island.

**Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP):** An integral part of fostering good relations is to build trust with international partners. The decision of the Home Office to force European Union citizens with pre-settled status to re-apply for their rights to live and work in the United Kingdom is therefore an affront and, potentially, yet another breach of the withdrawal agreement to which the UK Government signed up.

What engagements has the Scottish Government had with the Home Office regarding the impact of that decision and what it will mean for EU citizens who have made Scotland their home?

**Angus Robertson:** The Scottish Government has always been clear that EU citizens should not have to apply to retain the rights that they enjoyed when the UK was a member state of the EU. The UK Government should have chosen a declaratory statement rather than force people to suffer the indignity of applying to the EU settlement scheme.

We have consistently said that all successful applicants to the EUSS should be granted permanent settled status rather than the less secure pre-settled status. We fully appreciate and support the position that the Independent Monitoring Authority for the Citizens' Rights Agreements has taken and call on the UK Government to remove the requirement for pre-settled status holders to make a second, stressful application to the EUSS.

#### **Robert Burns Cultural Assets (Dumfries and Galloway)**

**5. Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it has taken to support the promotion of cultural assets connected to Robert Burns in Dumfries and Galloway. (S6O-00544)

**The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development (Jenny Gilruth):** The Scottish Government has provided a £47,000 museum development fund grant through Museums Galleries Scotland this year to redevelop and relaunch the Future Museum website, which will benefit the Robert Burns Centre and Robert Burns house; a total of £28,941 of funding to the Robert Burns Ellisland Trust over the past 2 years; and £30,000 to support the Big Burns Supper festival in Dumfries in 2022, through EventScotland.

In addition, VisitScotland and EventScotland offer a range of promotional support to Burns-

related attractions and events throughout Dumfries and Galloway to encourage tourism.

**Oliver Mundell:** Calls to do more to capitalise on the cultural value of Burns are nothing new. In October 2019, we saw the publication of the Scottish Government funded Pittock report, following sustained calls from our former colleague Joan McAlpine, whose contribution on the issue is much missed in the chamber. What has been done to implement the report's recommendations—particularly recommendation 5, which highlights the opportunities to promote more integrated Burns trails and the significant untapped potential of Ellisland farm and museum?

**Jenny Gilruth:** As Oliver Mundell alluded to, in May 2018 we commissioned Murray Pittock, of the centre for Robert Burns studies at the University of Glasgow, to produce the report. The report found that Robert Burns is worth in excess of £200 million a year to the Scottish economy—largely through tourism, but also through food and drink and culture spend. It talks about the brand value to Scotland of almost £140 million a year that is attributable to Robert Burns.

On the specifics of Oliver Mundell's question, he asked, with reference to Murray Pittock's report, whether the Government could do more with regard to Robert Burns and his impact on the economy. He mentioned my former colleague Joan McAlpine's contribution in the chamber on the issue, which is one that, as an MSP, she was very involved in driving. Now, she is very much involved in the Robert Burns Ellisland Trust. If Oliver Mundell would like to meet me and Joan McAlpine, I would be more than happy to address the key actions that resulted from the report.

#### **Global Recovery (Covid-19)**

**6. Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government how its work with overseas partners is helping to tackle Covid-19 and support global recovery. (S6O-00545)

**The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development (Jenny Gilruth):** Since the start of the pandemic, the Scottish Government has allocated £3.5 million from our international development budget for Covid support in our partner countries of Malawi, Rwanda and Zambia.

In addition, in September, we donated £11.2 million-worth of surplus NHS Scotland personal protective equipment kit to our three partner countries in Africa and provided £250,000 from our international development fund in contribution to the transportation costs for those materials.

In the next financial year, we will increase our international development fund by a further £1.5 million to £11.5 million, specifically for initiatives

that respond to Covid-19 in our three African partner countries.

**Brian Whittle:** After announcing further funding for overseas aid last month, will the minister outline what more, if anything, is being planned to supplement the efforts to vaccinate people in our partner countries, in the light of the rise in Covid cases as a result of the omicron variant?

**Jenny Gilruth:** I thank Brian Whittle for his question. I do not know whether he was in the chamber two weeks ago when I made a statement that was focused on our Covid response in our partner countries. The Scottish Government's Covid-19 pandemic response in those countries has been largely focused on preparing them for vaccination roll-out, rather than on the vaccination roll-out itself. That is because we are not members of the COVAX—Covid-19 vaccines global access—programme, so there are a number of challenges involved.

Last year, we conducted a review of our international development offer. I instructed that review because of the new reality that Covid presented in our international development roll-out. Last year, for example, we awarded £2 million to UNICEF to help with its Covid-19 response, including on vaccination preparedness, which I mentioned, and on delivery.

More recently, I visited the University of Glasgow with colleagues from Malawi's Kamuzu University of Health Sciences to learn about some of the work that we are funding with it that is focused on genomic sequencing capacity in Malawi. That project brings together the expertise of Kamuzu and Glasgow universities to learn about how the virus intersects with the vaccine in our partner countries, in order to impact on the Covid-19 pandemic to the benefit of the Malawian and Scottish populations. The primary objective will be to determine the magnitude of the immune response to Covid-19 vaccines in the Malawian population.

Although we are not directly involved in vaccination, I hope that that will give Brian Whittle some assurance that we are very much involved in vaccination preparedness and in the wider learning around how the vaccine is developing in our partner countries, which we know is absolutely crucial in terms of what we face right now from new variants, particularly omicron.

**Foyso Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab):** The fight against climate change must always be our priority in supporting the global recovery. In April, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees released data showing that 21.5 million people have been displaced by climate change-related disasters since 2010. It pointed out that

"in addition to sudden disasters, climate change is a complex cause of food and water shortages, as well as difficulties in accessing natural resources."

Statistics show that there could be a rise of more than 200,000 in the number of displaced people in the years to come. Those people and refugees are doubly hit by Covid-19 outbreaks, with limited access to healthcare and vaccination.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Choudhury, could we have a question, please?

**Foyso Choudhury:** What steps is the Scottish Government taking to prevent further tragedies and to support refugees who are in need?

**Jenny Gilruth:** Foyso Choudhury is right to point to the impacts of climate change on developing countries in particular. He will know that the Scottish Government's response is primarily through the climate justice fund, which sits with my colleague Màiri McAllan. Nonetheless, it is important to point out that the Scottish Government recently increased that fund.

Additionally, we have increased our funding for loss and damage with a new fund that is specifically available for our partner countries to tackle the loss and damage aspects of climate change impacts.

Foyso Choudhury asked how we can respond to pandemics and the challenges that are presented by climate change in our partner countries. We primarily offer assistance through our humanitarian emergency fund. He might be aware that, earlier this week, we announced funding for the roll-out of support in Afghanistan, which is, of course, facing a huge challenge. That work is being addressed through use of the humanitarian emergency fund, but there is more of a link with Màiri McAllan's ministerial responsibilities in respect of the climate justice fund.

However, it is important that we have policy coherence on those issues, so I will meet Ms McAllan in January to discuss how we can link our international development work with our climate justice fund.

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** I welcome the compassionate approach to international co-operation and development that the Scottish Government has pursued in recent years. Can the minister provide any further detail about how Scotland's ambition to enhance its reputation as a good global citizen will be served by the 2022-23 Scottish budget?

**Jenny Gilruth:** International development is a key part of Scotland's global contribution within the international community. It encompasses our historical and contemporary core values of fairness and equality. The increase to our

international development fund from £10 million to £11.5 million during the next financial year—in contrast with the UK Government, which is cutting development funding—is a clear indication of this Government's ambition to further enhance Scotland's reputation as a good global citizen.

### Cultural Infrastructure

**7. Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the investment it is making in Scotland's cultural infrastructure. (S6O-00546)

**The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson):** I am pleased to be given the opportunity to do that.

The Scottish Government is investing £14.2 million in the current financial year in a range of capital projects, including the Scottish national gallery refurbishment and the Museum of Flight. As I announced on 9 December, we are committing a further £2 million to support cultural recovery in the museums and galleries sector, including £1 million for the Scottish Crannog Centre and a further £1 million for the sector to adapt to the challenges of the pandemic. The 2022-23 budget that was published on 9 December allocates £30 million to my portfolio for capital expenditure to support a range of infrastructure projects.

**Tess White:** The 19th century A-listed Aberdeen art gallery recently won the 2021 Doolan award for Scotland's best building after a transformational development project. It has, however, experienced significant damage to its exterior by the urban gull population. In the north-east, gulls do not just attack people; their droppings are a persistent problem. What action is the Scottish Government taking with local authorities and Historic Environment Scotland to conserve our building heritage and protect it from such pests?

**Angus Robertson:** As somebody who lived in Aberdeen for four years while studying in that great city, I understand the dangers that Tess White is describing. I also recognise the point that she makes about the challenge to our built infrastructure, both within the stock that comes under Historic Environment Scotland and more generally.

Given that Tess White has asked a specific question without advance notice, I will be happy to write back to her so that she has the fullest information that I can provide. I appreciate that she and her colleagues will want to be sure that as much as possible is being done to protect our historic environment across Scotland.

**Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** In the light of the new restrictions that were announced after last week's budget, will the Scottish Government commit to ensuring that future funding criteria do not require venues and organisations to exhaust their reserves, as they will be critical in enabling the sector to get through the next few months and to rebuild for the future?

**Angus Robertson:** I welcome the opportunity that is given by Sarah Boyack's question to comment briefly on the situation in which we find ourselves.

We are in a very fast-moving situation because of the omicron variant of Covid-19. The Government is doing everything possible, within the constraints of the devolution settlement and finance, to find the resources that we want to support the culture and arts sector.

As we come out of the pandemic, are there lessons to be learned about how finances can be managed during the type of challenging situation that we are currently living through? There is no doubt that lessons can be learned, but I assure Sarah Boyack that I, Jenny Gilruth and other colleagues in the Scottish Government are doing everything that we can to secure funding to support the culture and arts sector, as we get through the pandemic.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 8 comes from Claire Baker, who joins us remotely.

### Live Performance Sector

**8. Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government how it is engaging with, and investing in, the live performance sector to support its recovery. (S6O-00547)

**The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development (Jenny Gilruth):** Since the start of the pandemic, the Scottish Government has provided £175 million of financial support to the culture, heritage and events sector. That recognises the significant impact that the pandemic has had, and continues to have, on the live performance sector.

We are committed to working with the sector and our public bodies to support the sector's recovery. We have also continued to engage with the national performing companies and commercial music stakeholders.

**Claire Baker:** Since I lodged my question last week, the situation has changed from one of recovery to one of crisis. The income from the festive season is particularly important for the live performance sector. The Byre theatre in St Andrews has already halted its pantomime, as well

as festive film screenings. Refunds are being issued, but those costs will need to be covered.

I appreciate that the current situation is very challenging, but what is the minister's understanding of the compensation that can be provided for closures and cancellations, whether through support from Government or through insurance policies, to support the sector? What discussions is she currently engaged in?

**Jenny Gilruth:** I thank Claire Baker for her very timely question. She is absolutely right to point to the very real challenges that exist in relation to live performances, particularly given where the culture sector currently finds itself.

It is important to remember that the culture sector did not fully recover from the impact of the previous lockdown. In May 2020, the gross domestic product for the arts, culture and recreation sector had decreased by 56 per cent from pre-pandemic levels. The sector has still not fully recovered: the latest statistics, which are for September of this year, show that GDP for the sector was 12 per cent lower than pre-pandemic levels, whereas for the economy overall it was just 1 per cent lower.

Although the sector currently remains open, I am alive to the challenge that exists in terms of audience confidence. On Tuesday, I met the Federation of Scottish Theatre. Yesterday, I met the Scottish commercial music industry task force and, later this afternoon, the Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture will meet stakeholders. As Ms Baker will know, the First Minister confirmed on Tuesday that further funding, to the end that she identified, will be forthcoming.

However, there is a limit to that support. It is also important to remember that the arts and culture organisations in Scotland, unlike organisations in England, have still not received the full amount of outstanding culture consequential that were promised to the sector in March. As the Scottish commercial music industry task force told me yesterday, cultural organisations in England can still apply to the arts recovery fund until the end of January. I do not begrudge organisations and venues in England having access to that funding; all I ask is that the Treasury reimburse organisations in the Scottish culture sector on an equal basis.

With regard to Ms Baker's questions on compensation for closure, I hope that I have reassured her that the Scottish Government is doing all that it can do to look at what additional funding might be available for the sector. However, there will be a limit to that. We really need the UK Government to step up and provide

the outstanding consequential that are due to the Scottish culture sector.

## Parliamentary Procedures and Practices

### **The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):**

The next item of business is a debate without motion on behalf of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee on shaping parliamentary procedures and practices for the future.

I invite Martin Whitfield to open the debate on behalf of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee. You have up to eight minutes, Mr Whitfield.

14:58

### **Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab):**

Thank you, Presiding Officer. It is truly a pleasure to see you in the chair for the first of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee's debates.

In essence, we chose to debate the subject of future procedures and practices here, in this building, because of what Donald Dewar said on the opening of the Parliament—albeit that that ceremony was held in a different place. He said:

“Wisdom, justice, compassion, integrity; timeless values. Honourable aspirations for this new forum of democracy born on the cusp of a new century.”

He went on to say:

“I look forward to the days ahead ... when this chamber will sound with debate, argument and passion. When men and women from all over Scotland will meet to work together for a future built on the first principles of social justice.”

Those principles are equity, access, participation and rights.

I am joined today by members of the committee, who will offer their own contributions. We are at the start of the sixth session of Parliament. These may be the Parliament's terrible teenage years, when we can talk about things that our parents would gasp at and can suggest ideas that others may laugh at. The environment allows us to consider how we go forward to maturity, so that we can respect and represent the people of Scotland.

This is a time to look at our rules, conventions, procedures and practices. Some of those have crept up on us; some have been thrust on us by circumstances outwith our control. I thank the Scottish Parliament information centre for producing a helpful report on the changes that the Covid-19 pandemic has forced on Parliament and on the way that those who decide on our procedures took the opportunity to make sure that we stayed open and relevant and that we could

hold the Government to account and represent the people of Scotland.

We find ourselves in the great debating chamber that is the centrepiece of the architectural Parliament. It is also the room that best sums up the intentions of this Parliament. We are not to scream and shout. We do not have to be to sword lengths apart. We do not have to sit so far back that a thrown shoe cannot hit someone who is speaking at the front. We are here to see each other and to hold a debate in which we can agree or disagree and in which we can put forward ideas that hold other ideas to account.

Is this a controlled arena? Those of us who are old enough can remember the wrestling on 1970s television, when the end was known before the match began. Is this a bear pit, where we tear others' ideas asunder? Is this a debating chamber where we can inquire about ideas, push people further in their thinking and perhaps make them consider whether they are in a cul-de-sac? The people of Scotland look for answers from this venue.

### **Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):**

I do this because I know that the committee convener has encouraged interventions to his speech. This is the first debate that I can remember in which we have considered how we do business here. I appreciate the committee bringing the debate forward. Does the committee intend to continue with this and to return to the chamber in the future, so that we can continue contemplating our development, or is this a one-off?

**Martin Whitfield:** The intervention allows me to offer the opportunity for all who are here to contribute their ideas and thoughts when the committee calls for evidence in the new year. This debate is the seedling that will start that process. Ideas, pros and cons can be put on record so that we can consider them as part of our evidence. There will also be an opportunity for people from across Scotland to contribute their ideas.

We want to look at debate. I will put that idea to one side. I have exercised my mind, but I am desperate to hear others' ideas before sharing my own.

We want to consider the functionality of BlueJeans and Teams. I raise that subject with some trepidation today, after the BlueJeans system was cut off yesterday. That issue goes to the heart of whether we see the value for our political community of having hybrid meetings in committees and in the chamber. Does that make us more family friendly? Does it draw in a wider group of people who might be interested in making a contribution? What are its implications for us as individuals and parliamentarians? It might affect

work patterns and workloads, travel practices, constituency work and—I raise this because it is important—family life.

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** I am grateful to the committee's convener for giving way. He alluded to tea-time wrestling on "World of Sport" and likened our proceedings to a pre-baked formula. Has the hybrid meeting arrangement, particularly in the chamber, not just cemented the feeling that proceedings are sometimes a little sterile and that there is not enough engagement? What does my friend think?

**Martin Whitfield:** I thank Stephen Kerr for his excellent intervention. I am going to take the lawyer's approach, which still hives at the back of my brain, and say that I will listen to others rather than throw in my conjecture. However, the need for and existence of the information technology certainly creates a different perspective, given the control that is needed for events to work.

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** On the point about hybrid meetings, does the member agree with my feeling that the norm should be for us to be in the chamber but that there should be exceptions for various reasons, one being that some members have constituencies that are much further away?

**Martin Whitfield:** I thank John Mason for that intervention, to which I will respond with the same lawyerly philosophy—again, I will listen to what is said and comment on the subject later. However, he raises a very important point. What expectation do the people of Scotland have of their MSPs? What is it to be an MSP? What are the responsibilities that go with that? Where should they be crafted and carried out? Should that happen in the chamber? By necessity, particularly given the diverse nature of Scotland, the distances that are involved and members' travel arrangements, it is sometimes impossible for them to make it to the chamber.

That brings me to a question on which I have been cornered by a number of people, and which I wish to put on the record. Should criteria be developed for circumstances in which Government ministers may participate virtually in parliamentary proceedings or should they always be in the chamber or in front of committees?

The final issue that I will mention, merely to ask the question and not to close down any ideas that are offered, is proxy voting for members who are ill or on parental or maternity leave. Should they have the right to exercise their vote through a colleague? They still represent their constituents. They are at a time when, I think it is fair to say, the debates and statutory instruments that come before Parliament might not be at the forefront of their minds, but why should their constituents lose

out on the opportunity to express their views through their representative when there is a vote?

Having made that point, I intend to sit. I encourage as many members as possible to contribute to the debate. The committee will soon start to take evidence on the subject, and I look forward to the speeches that members will make this afternoon, which will help enormously. I finish by again quoting Donald Dewar, who looked forward to the days

"When men and women from all over Scotland will meet to work together for a future built from the first principles of social justice."

15:07

**The Minister for Parliamentary Business**

**(George Adam):** I thank Mr Whitfield for his excellent speech in opening this extremely important debate. I did not get his reference to wrestling in the 1970s, being too young. [*Laughter.*] I certainly did not know that it was on just before the football results, in any event.

I welcome the fact that the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee has brought the subject to the chamber for debate. As we all know, the Covid pandemic of the past 20 months has brought us many challenges, including for how the Parliament functions day to day—but function it must, and Parliament must continue to be flexible as we deal with the many challenges that we face.

It is no exaggeration to say that it has been essential to the delivery of democracy in Scotland that this Parliament has continued to meet and hold the Government to account over the past 20 months, but it has not been a simple process. Over the past 20 months, we have had all kinds of problems and we have had to understand new ways of working. The Government has had to deal with that, as have MSPs, and the parliamentary authorities have had to adapt to the ever-changing situations that we have found ourselves in.

It has been a strange time for us all, including me. I love people, and I love it when this place is full of people, when there are events and when we are moving forward. We truly see the best of this place when we have a fully functioning Parliament.

However, we have had to deal with the challenges that have been in front of us, such as working in hybrid form, with some members working from home and some of us working from Parliament. It has been a difficult time for us.

I have seen the changes happen. I have had a front-row seat on the Parliamentary Bureau, first as an observer in my role as the Scottish National Party's chief whip, and now as a participant in my role as the Minister for Parliamentary Business.

Things have not been easy, and we have had problems along the way. I put on record my gratitude to all parliamentary staff, who have managed to get us to a position in which we have the option, via technology, of hybrid working. I know for a fact that, during the many meetings that we had in the early days of the pandemic, the ability to work in a hybrid way came from a standing start. The technology was not there for us to use or even to push that approach forward. I thank all parliamentary staff for ensuring that, as a Parliament, we have been able to continue. They have kept Scotland's democracy functioning by creating a virtual Parliament from nothing, enabling us to work in hybrid form in the chamber and in committee.

There have been many teething issues along the way. I will admit that there have been times when even I have become extremely frustrated by it all, but who has not at some point?

**Daniel Johnson:** I agree with the minister: what we have managed to do in a short space of time is remarkable.

However, I think that it would be a mistake if we were to approach the debate assuming that everything was perfect prior to the pandemic and that it was merely a question of adapting to the circumstances. Does the minister not think that there is a question about how we used the chamber prior to the pandemic and how we use it in future? Critically, is there not also a question about how the Government uses the chamber? I question whether the Government uses the chamber enough to think out loud. It uses its time to congratulate itself a bit too much, rather than to think about the big topics of the day. Does the Government not need to consider that?

**George Adam:** Mr Johnson brings up some valid points that I agree with. When we look at the processes that we have had to deal with and work through over the past while, we can see that there are many new ways in which we can work, and many different ways in which this place can work. We can adapt to take on board some of the ideas that we have had. However, I believe that the whole point of the debate is for us to step back, take a deep breath and think about how we as a Parliament decide to move forward.

We are moving back to holding our proceedings online. As I have already said, there have been many teething issues along the way, but issues such as the one that we experienced yesterday have been in the minority. Most the time, when issues have arisen, it has been a member's broadband that has been at fault. I have to admit that that has happened to me on many occasions.

**Stephen Kerr:** Indeed. I recall some difficulties of late with the minister's home broadband.

I am not sure that the minister gave Daniel Johnson a definite answer to his question. Does the minister accept that, prior to the Parliament's meetings during the emergency of the past 20 months, there were procedural issues with how business is conducted in the chamber and elsewhere in the Parliament that could be improved or reformed?

**George Adam:** I think that I said to Mr Johnson that we can take this opportunity to look at the issues and move forward. There have been many new ways of working and many new ideas have come up. We have ensured that we are having this debate. We are moving forward.

I for one recognise the value of today's debate in allowing us to reflect on the changes that we have had to make and the lessons that we have had to learn to enable Parliament to adapt during the pandemic.

I find that, in a time of difficulty, it is good to keep a clear, positive attitude. I always have a glass half full attitude to such debates. During these testing times, we have to be positive and look at what has worked and how we can make things better.

It is extremely important that the Parliament looks at what we can continue to achieve with the technology.

**Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green)**  
rose—

**John Mason** rose—

**George Adam:** I have a couple of points that I want to make first.

I appreciate that not everyone is a fan of virtual or hybrid proceedings. We can all acknowledge that the debates and the statements have a different character in those circumstances. However, such proceedings offer a clear advantage: they have kept us all safe for the past 20 months.

**John Mason:** Will the minister give way?

**Gillian Mackay:** Will the minister take an intervention?

**George Adam:** I will take Gillian.

**Gillian Mackay:** I thank the minister for taking the intervention and apologise to Mr Mason. Does the minister agree that we need to keep the hybrid system? It has been hugely important for those of us in the chamber who have a disability, and it could be important for those who might have a long-term health condition in future?

We congratulated ourselves on electing a more diverse Parliament this time round. If we are to

continue to keep attracting new people, we need to keep that hybrid way of working.

**The Presiding Officer:** I appreciate that we are discussing ways of working, but we use members' surnames, too, minister.

**George Adam:** I apologise for that, Presiding Officer; I think that it is the first time in 11 years that I have made that mistake.

I agree that hybrid meetings give us the opportunity to include those who have a different type of lifestyle. For example, my wife has multiple sclerosis, and for someone with multiple sclerosis who could be great one day in the chamber and the next day unable to come to work, the hybrid system would clearly make the Parliament more accessible. There is something for us all to look at there.

As we look to the future, which I admit seems difficult in current times—

**John Mason:** Will the minister give way?

**George Adam:** Okay then.

**John Mason:** I thank the minister for his generosity. One of the things about hybrid meetings that I find difficult is that those of us in the chamber cannot intervene on people who are participating remotely, on screen, and those who are participating remotely cannot intervene on those of us in the chamber. I hope that there is some way around that because it is a big disadvantage. Does the minister agree?

**George Adam:** The parliamentary authorities will need to look at that. We have often asked at Parliamentary Bureau meetings how we can find a way to make the technology more interactive for hybrid meetings. I agree that we need to find a solution.

I hope that I manage to get a few lines in before I end up with another intervention, Presiding Officer.

The benefits of hybrid working can be seen in our carbon footprint, as many of us have stayed at home, including those who live in other parts of the country.

We can use the technology to help with other ideas, too. We have to look at that. For those who cannot come into Parliament regularly, or find that difficult, technology gives the option of working from home and offers a future in Parliament to people who are thinking of putting their name forward.

At the end of the day, we have had a very difficult 20 months and have had to find new and important ways of working. The Parliament has done that and, as we move forward, we can find in many other ways of doing that. Let us not forget

why we did that: we were trying to find a way to keep ourselves, the parliamentary staff and our own staff safe, while still serving the people of Scotland.

15:17

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** I welcome the debate. It is an enormous privilege to be a member of the Scottish Parliament. We have all been sent here to do a job, which is to scrutinise and hold the Scottish Government to account, regardless of party or constituency. However, I often feel that I am doing that task with one hand tied behind my back.

I will begin by relating some of the specific issues that I am referring to. On 25 November, I submitted three separate questions to the Government, relating to the national transition training fund. I received a single answer on 6 December, and not one of my questions was answered—I refer members to question S6W-04621. That is the just the tip of the iceberg of unsatisfactory parliamentary answers.

**John Mason:** Will the member accept that it works both ways and that some members, including the member, misuse points of order?

**Stephen Kerr:** I do not agree with John Mason in the slightest about the inappropriate use of points of order—that is ridiculous.

I return to the subject of unsatisfactory parliamentary answers. Funnily enough, I raised the issue as a point of order on 18 November.

**Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP):** How was that a point of order?

**Stephen Kerr:** I think that it was an appropriate point of order.

I asked question S6W-01381, on suicide prevention, and was told that the Government did not maintain data on the topic. The lack of data held by the Scottish Government is a matter for a different day, but it speaks volumes that the Government is unable to answer such significant and important questions. All members deserve better answers. As I said to the committee, and to my friend, the committee convener, we need a revolution in parliamentary questions.

For example, why do we need to read out the questions that are already printed in the *Business Bulletin*? Why do we need to lodge questions so far in advance? Next week, we have to lodge specific questions to be answered three weeks from now. Why oh why do ministers not answer questions succinctly? They read out lengthy briefings that have obviously been prepared for them by civil servants and special advisers.

**Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP):** I understand where Stephen Kerr is coming from, having previously served with him as a member of the Westminster Parliament, where there is a different style in relation to reading out initial questions. However, does he not accept that while members may understand what the initial question is, our constituents at home—some of whom might have accessibility issues—may not understand, and that reading them out is very helpful to ensure that they know what we are asking about and that everyone understands the proceedings?

**Stephen Kerr:** Neil Gray makes a very fair point. However, the question is obvious from the first answer that is given and from the supplementary, which is really the meat in the sandwich when it comes to asking parliamentary questions in a debating chamber.

**Daniel Johnson:** I am grateful to Stephen Kerr for giving way, especially as he had only just got back on to his feet.

Are supplementaries not the nub of the question? A supplementary question should be impromptu. It should be a response, so it should not be read out any more than the minister's response to it should be read out. Do we need to tackle the reading of supplementary questions?

**Stephen Kerr:** That is a first-class point, and I definitely welcome that intervention. I will talk further about spontaneity, because we need to develop spontaneity in the chamber.

I am afraid that one of the reasons why ministers stick so rigidly to their answers is that there is a degree of contempt from the Government towards the Parliament. I will give a current example. Last Friday, the First Minister announced various new measures, restrictions and substantive policy matters relating to Covid-19 in a television studio. That was not the first time that that happened.

**George Adam:** I will make a simple intervention. Does Stephen Kerr believe that what he has just said is complete and utter nonsense and that what he said was not the case? We have had that discussion in the Parliamentary Bureau on numerous occasions, and he cannot seem to just let things go. Can he not accept that what he has just said is complete and utter nonsense?

**Stephen Kerr:** I will tell the minister what is complete and utter nonsense. The Scottish Government claims that a press release that was issued by Public Health Scotland at 5 o'clock last Thursday, after the Parliament had risen, was somehow unknown to it. The Scottish Government is renowned for its grip on and control of everything to do with its remit. What I have said is far from nonsense; it is highly relevant to the

debate. That was not the first time that the First Minister resorted to a TV studio.

**Neil Gray:** Will the member give way?

**Stephen Kerr:** I will give way one more time, although I do not want to strain the patience of the Presiding Officer.

**Neil Gray:** I can understand where Stephen Kerr is coming from on ministers reading out answers, but does he accept that there were similar occurrences when we served at Westminster and ministers read out responses? There are often very good reasons for that, which include legal reasons and ensuring that correct information is given. Sometimes there have to be very carefully worded responses to questions that we ask.

**Stephen Kerr:** Neil Gray knows well that, had some of the ministers in Westminster attempted to read answers the length of those that we get in this place, the Speaker would have been all over them. That is exactly what does not happen here. We need some temperance on the part of ministers when it comes to their answers.

The Scottish Parliament is the forum of this nation, and it should be respected. In my opinion, it is not appropriate for the Government to resort to external means of delivering substantial statements to the people of Scotland, other than in front of those who have been elected to represent the people of Scotland. It is an enormous privilege to be a member of the Scottish Parliament, and I would come in here on a Friday, a Saturday, a Sunday or a Monday, and I would stay after 6 o'clock or come to the chamber before 2 o'clock to hear statements of such importance. I know that many members, especially my colleagues, would be delighted to do so as well.

I want members to know that we held six meetings of the Parliamentary Bureau in a very short period over the weekend. All were attempts on the part of the Labour Party and myself, for the Conservatives, to call a meeting of the Parliament so that the First Minister could be scrutinised in relation to what she said in a TV studio. However, all those attempts were blocked by the Government parties. That cannot be right. No Parliament should be so totally in the control of the Executive that it cannot meet to scrutinise the actions of the Executive. It is just not right that journalists from *The Scottish Sun* or the *Daily Record* have the opportunity to scrutinise the First Minister and her Government, but the Scottish Parliament does not.

Some might say, cynically, that the media might ask better questions than we do. That is not the point, however. It is our responsibility—  
[*Interruption.*]

Can I give way one more time, Presiding Officer?

**The Presiding Officer:** I ask Mr Kerr and the minister both to take a seat. I remind members that the Parliamentary Bureau's discussions are private until the minutes are published. The bureau came to decisions that were taken forward.

I will now allow the meeting to continue. Is Mr Kerr content to accept the minister's intervention?

**Stephen Kerr:** I am, yes.

**George Adam:** I am happy to intervene and to give Mr Kerr some time to calm down and bring it down a couple of octaves.

As you rightly said, Presiding Officer, we had our discussion at the Parliamentary Bureau. There was no point in bringing in the Parliament when there was nothing new to say. That was the whole point of the discussions that we had. Mr Kerr seems either to have had a lapse of memory or to have decided not to report what was said.

**Stephen Kerr:** I am only reporting factual information to the Parliament about what occurred in those meetings. I respect what the Presiding Officer has said about the nature of the meetings but, when the minutes are published—if they have not already been published—they will show that we sought to have a meeting of the Parliament.

I recognise that I am now testing the patience of the Presiding Officer.

**The Presiding Officer:** Yes—we have time in hand, but please wind up.

**Stephen Kerr:** I will do my best to wind up right now.

We have a culture of conformity in this place, which needs to be broken. Members should feel free to stand up for a principle greater than party loyalty—and I remind members that I am the chief whip for my party, so I take a risk in saying that. They should stand up for something greater than party loyalty: for an idea, for representing a constituent or for championing a cause.

There are many other issues that I would like to raise.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Kerr, but I need to ask you to conclude your remarks at that point.

15:26

**Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** I thank the members of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee and its clerks for the work that they did to produce the report. It could not be more timely and this afternoon's debate must be part of an on-going discussion. I also

thank all our parliamentary staff for the fantastic work that they have done to enable the changes that we have made over the past few months and for enabling us to have safe working practices as an option throughout the pandemic, whether by socially distanced or virtual working. As other members have said, there have been huge challenges, but we have kept this place going, and that has been critical.

We are here to represent our constituents, to raise the issues on which they need answers urgently and to ensure that views are properly considered in this place. Critically, we are here to hold the Scottish Government to account as effectively as possible. As others have started to debate, that means that we need to make the maximum use of our time, not just here in the chamber but in committees, too. Slots for Opposition days, committee debates and members' business are all critical. They are at the core of our scrutiny and representation as they are not automatically decided by the Government. There is a degree of conversation across the parties about how we use our time.

I particularly wish to focus on topical questions. This session, it feels as though topical questions are being used more flexibly. They are an important way for members to raise urgent issues, rather than waiting for months for a minister to respond to a parliamentary question. I suspect that that is partly to do with the number of letters that we are all writing, but there is a real issue, during the pandemic, about urgent constituent concerns, and it would be worth considering adding another slot, perhaps on Wednesdays, in addition to the slot on Tuesdays and the greater flexibility that has been introduced for First Minister's questions. There have been some very good changes.

The Presiding Officer and the Deputy Presiding Officers have started to tell us to think about the brevity of our questions; they have also told ministers to think about the brevity of their answers. I have been in both positions, and I know that ministers get incredibly lengthy options, but there is something in editing down and cutting to the chase.

To return to an earlier point, we need to make the best use of our time here, because it is not infinite. I will come back to that.

**Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Will the member take an intervention on that point?

**Sarah Boyack:** If it is brief.

**The Presiding Officer:** I should say that we have some time in hand for interventions.

**Alexander Stewart:** I very much concur with what the member has said. There is no doubt that

there is frustration from many members across the chamber that time constraints sometimes do not allow us to get through the questions that are set by the Parliament on working days. I believe that there is an opportunity for us to take more urgent and topical questions during the week.

**Sarah Boyack:** I thank the member for that helpful intervention. We are coming through a pandemic, but we are not yet through it, so this is a good chance for us to think about and cast a fresh eye on how we do things, and to think about why we are here.

Members have mentioned that we can be proud of our Parliament being diverse. It is currently the most diverse in our history, but that creates challenges for us, in particular with regard to how we ensure that parliamentarians can fully participate in our work.

One key challenge that we have faced concerns the last-minute changes to parliamentary business that we often get, in particular regarding decision times. That is hugely disruptive to members who have family or caring responsibilities. I totally understand why it happens, but we need, collectively, to try to avoid it as much as possible in the future.

I know from talking to colleagues that the impact of such changes in the previous session was a massive disruption to people's family life, so I am glad to hear from Martin Whitfield that the committee is thinking about addressing that issue. That is critical, because in the previous session of Parliament we had experienced female MSPs who decided not to stand again. We can be proud of the fact that we have the most representative Parliament that we have ever had, but we have to make it work effectively, day to day.

**Daniel Johnson:** Would the member like to give way on that point?

**Sarah Boyack:** Again, if the intervention is brief.

**The Presiding Officer:** I reiterate that there is time for interventions.

**Daniel Johnson:** Would Sarah Boyack agree that it is important not only that we do not have endless flexibility on decision time, but that hybrid procedure actually makes family life a lot more possible for members who are parents, especially of younger children?

**Sarah Boyack:** Definitely. I am not speaking from personal interest here, but I have spoken to colleagues and I think that we need to tackle that. Hybrid working can also be a challenge, as I understand from MSPs who have younger members of the family who can appear unexpectedly, but we can live with that.

Working in a hybrid way has been really important, because it has enabled quite a few colleagues to attend evening meetings, deal with correspondence from constituents and prepare for committee meetings. It has given us different options, which is something to reflect on.

**Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Sarah Boyack:** Yes—again, if it is very brief.

**Finlay Carson:** As a father, the most important thing to me is certainty. If I know that decision time is going to be at 5 or 6 o'clock, that is fine, whether the meeting is hybrid or I am sitting in the chamber. I can make sure that my wife or my mother-in-law knows that I am going to be home at a particular time. In the previous session, the biggest problem was the lack of certainty over decision time, which was generally to do with failures in the voting system.

**Sarah Boyack:** I absolutely agree with that. We should have a strong preference for keeping to our decision time, and we should keep it at a reasonable time. We can plan ahead, by adjusting timings, in order to give people as much advance notice as possible. It is good to see that there is cross-party agreement on that.

As we come out of the pandemic, the provision of childcare in the Parliament needs to be considered. I welcome the fact that there has been a questionnaire. However, with regard to the needs of visiting constituents, staff and MSPs, we need to go back and look carefully at the provision of childcare, because there are many benefits to enabling parents, and women in particular, to use this place as much as possible.

The SPICe briefing is useful in giving us a sense of what we can learn from different approaches. Other members have mentioned the use of proxy or remote voting for those who are ill or on maternity or paternity leave, or for those who have crisis childcare or caring responsibilities. I hope that the committee will look at that issue. Just as important is the need for guidance to ensure that, if we introduced such changes, we could prevent people from abusing those options. There is an issue with ministers, as has been mentioned, and the unique responsibilities and duties that they have. We need to ensure that if we are more flexible, the accountability feature is still absolutely built into how we operate.

I will briefly mention travel disruption. Recent floods and storms meant that roads were closed and public transport services were cancelled, so we also have to think about the impact of future extreme weather issues on the capacity of colleagues to attend the Parliament.

It is also worth thinking about the work of the committees. Most of the discussion thus far has been about what happens when we are in this room. However, the ability to have witnesses give evidence to committees without having to be in the committee room is a potential bonus. In the past, that has been done in exceptional circumstances—for example, we once heard from a representative from the northern isles—but this morning, the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee heard from witnesses in Brussels, Germany and London. It was an excellent session.

I am being asked to wind up—I should not have taken those interventions.

I am not suggesting that we should not travel in future, but we need to ensure that we have a mix, so that we still have the personal connectivity that works, while also having the option of hybrid meetings. Post-COP26, I want to briefly flag that we should think about hybrid cross-party groups.

The past few months have turned our worlds upside down, but we have an opportunity today to think about how to change how we work, how to work more effectively and how we use our time as effectively as possible. Hopefully, the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee will think about how we can learn from other approaches across the world.

Although Covid has resulted in a massive change in how we work, we need to seize the moment. We need to think about what changes we can make and go back to our initial ambitions for the Parliament 20-odd years ago. We need to make our work democratic and accountable, and do it to the best of our ability.

15:35

**Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green):** I thank the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee for bringing the debate to the chamber. It will probably not be the most exciting debate of the year—no offence to the committee's members or its work—but I really appreciate the opportunity to contribute.

How we conduct ourselves, do our business and deal with the issues that we have to deal with in this place—how we work—is really important for us to consider. How we can build on the hope and optimism of the Parliament's beginnings, as Martin Whitfield outlined, and how we serve our constituents, our communities and our country are vital issues, because how we do our jobs is as important as what we do in our roles.

How we do what we do is about our cultures of debate, of engagement and of inclusion, all of which contribute to the culture of politics. I do not

mean just the political discussions that we have in this chamber or in the committee rooms in this building, or in the exchanges that we have on email or on any of the other platforms that we use regularly. More broadly, the culture that we generate and sustain in all those processes affects the trust and confidence that the people we are here to serve have, not only in we MSPs, but in politics more generally.

I want to focus on the culture of our debate and exchanges, drawing on work done by the Young Academy of Scotland of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. YAS's charter for responsible debate, of which I and several members in this place are signatories, aims to create a set of norms for debate that enable us to better make decisions together. It does that by setting out a number of principles that underpin responsible debate. Those principles are based on the belief that joint decision making should be informed, respectful and inclusive. They speak to issues of accuracy, diversity and honesty. They require careful, empathetic listening, the use of respectful language and acknowledgement of persuasive points. They challenge us to communicate in ways that unite rather than divide, to address imbalances of power and to seek to identify common ground.

We can all think of times when those principles have not been adhered to. We can all think of times when we, personally, have probably not met those high standards. There are many significant issues on which we need to reach agreement, perhaps not unanimous agreement, but some way of coming to a place from which we can move forward. Those issues range from the climate emergency to how we govern data, how we understand artificial intelligence and the impact that it has on our lives, our freedoms and the freedoms of those we serve. We must, therefore, create the conditions for debate in which we can interact and adapt our positions—

**Tess White:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Daniel Johnson:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Maggie Chapman:** I will take an intervention from Tess White.

**Tess White:** Thank you for taking my intervention. Bearing in mind that the minister is on first-name terms with an Opposition colleague, whose party is in coalition with the minister's party, is it right that the Green Party should have the same allowances for questions and challenges in debates, now that they are all one together?

**Maggie Chapman:** I thank Tess White for that intervention. She and everybody in this chamber should be well aware that we have a co-operation

agreement with the Scottish Government, not a full coalition. I know that she is very fond of using that word, but that is not where we are. My colleagues in the chamber this afternoon and I remain Opposition MSPs.

We have important issues on which we need to reach agreement, so we need to make sure that we can get to that point of agreement or point of moving forward in a way that we can live with and which takes our citizens and constituents with us. That is the aim and the challenge for us in this debate.

**Stephen Kerr:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Maggie Chapman:** Yes, I will.

**Stephen Kerr:** I am very grateful to Maggie Chapman for giving way. Does she have any concerns about the Parliament's ability to hold the Executive to account?

**Maggie Chapman:** Thank you for that question. Accountability is really important for us all. We have probably all been frustrated by how questions are answered and issues are dealt with. The way to deal with those frustrations, however, is not to shout at each other across the chamber, but to speak to each other with the principles of respectful, empathetic ears and open listening. Just in the past few months, there have been many examples where that has been far from what we have seen in this chamber.

Three themes can help us to think about the ways in which we can be better at the job that we have to do. We need to be informed, which means that we need a strong understanding of risk. In that context, the recommendation of the Royal Society of Edinburgh's Post-Covid-19 Commission that we create an institution to help us with foresighting and futures is of vital importance. I would welcome the committee's view on that over the course of the coming months.

Rather than seeking to reinforce our own positions all the time, we need to be respectful of different viewpoints, allowing each other to change our minds and positions and not be ridiculed for that change.

**The Presiding Officer:** Please conclude, Ms Chapman.

**Maggie Chapman:** We also need to be diverse. There has already been much discussion about how we can create structures in order to hear the voices that we do not always hear.

In closing, I offer my immense thanks to the Scottish Parliament's participation and communities team for the incredible work that it does to get other voices into this building; that

must be one of the aims that we take forward over the next parliamentary session.

15:43

**Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP):** I rise to speak on this topic as a newly appointed member of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee. I have only three meetings under my belt and I am a new parliamentarian who had no real working experience of this place before the advent of Covid-19 and the pandemic. Of council chambers, I could write "War and Peace", but of this Parliament, I know only social distancing, Teams, masks and BlueJeans.

All of us who were participating virtually yesterday experienced what happens when a worldwide internet system crashes; it was frustrating and meant that some who were due to speak remotely were unable to deliver their speeches and those who were in the chamber endured delays and frustrations.

However, I do not characterise that as the norm for the virtual or hybrid space that we currently inhabit. Like many, I have experienced those sudden and intense itchy-oxter moments when, on joining a BlueJeans session that is already in progress, I am that weird little swirly thing up in the left hand corner of everyone's screens. We cringe as the youngest child enters the room and loudly demands a snack, the dog turns into the hound of the Baskervilles as a parcel is delivered, or the family chicken decides that it wants five minutes of fame and hogs the airwaves. All of that rapidly detracts from the salient points that we were trying hard to communicate.

Those frustrating and sometimes amusing moments have been borne with levity and a sense of pragmatism. We all recognise that, in order for us to represent our constituents, create impactful legislation and perform our scrutiny function, quickly ensuring that remote working was possible has stood us in good stead.

There is an old saying often used in Ayrshire: huv tae is a guid maister. To get the folk of Scotland through the pandemic, this place and all its component parts had to respond swiftly by suspending standing orders, amending procedures and passing emergency legislation, all with an army of amazing tech support in the background working night and day to create a virtual world, the idea of which was previously unthinkable and often dismissed. Sometimes it takes an extreme event to provoke change. It is now up to us to ponder what we want to keep and what we cannot wait to dispense with.

Before coming to Parliament, I was the wellbeing spokesperson for the Convention of

Scottish Local Authorities for several years, but I was not just a spokesperson; I was a co-spokesperson. I shared the role with Councillor Kelly Parry, who required support to be able to undertake maternity leave, just like any other woman right across Scotland. It was, and still is, amazing to me that such role sharing had never happened previously at COSLA, nor indeed in any council setting. The concept caused a bit of a stramash when it was first introduced—but *huv tae* is a *guid maister*, and with the support of officers and council group leaders, the benefit to all of that role being shared between two councillors meant that she did not lose out on her role or her earnings by having a baby. Her rights as a parent and as a woman were protected. By breaking out of that custom and practice, Kelly Parry and I helped to pave the way forward, and I see some parallels with what we must do now in this place.

As a family-friendly legislature, we need to recognise that this country might be small, but the nature of its constituencies and regions mean that some members travel nearly a whole day to get home. It takes me three hours to get to Ayrshire by train—an hour and a half by car, but three hours by train. The crèche is closed due to the pandemic, but were it open, votes being held later and later in the day would still cause issues for parents relying on that facility.

Some form of continued hybrid system that can allow for parents or those of us who care for older or disabled relatives to be at home must be on the cards. I am sure that many members have experienced the abject terror that is associated with remote voting when there is the usual after 5 pm moment when everybody is arriving home and demanding dinner and you are shushing them and kicking them all—including the dog—out of the room that you are in as you try in vain to hear what the Presiding Officer is talking about and which vote we are on, especially if it is a stage 3. If it means that a member can be at home to breastfeed a new baby or get dinner ready for their elderly mother, I think that those stressful moments are worth it.

Widening access to this place for more women, young parents, those with disabilities and those with caring responsibilities is a must, and this is one way in which we can do it. As Sarah Boyack has already said, we just have to look at the talent that we lost when several MSPs did not stand again in 2021 because they could not balance their work/life and constituency/parliamentary duties in such a way as to ensure that they could remain MSPs. Think for a moment about all the talent that left.

**Daniel Johnson:** I very much agree with the member's points about virtual working. However, would she agree with me that we also have to

bear in mind that virtual appearances can be a disadvantage for certain people with disabilities, such as those with sensory impairments or those who, like me, have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, who really struggle to stare at a screen?

**Elena Whitham:** I absolutely agree, and that is why we need to have hybrid proceedings going forward, in my opinion. We need to look at everybody's needs and address them effectively. If that means that we need to create some kind of justification for why a member needs to meet in a given way, as another member has mentioned, that is fine. I think that hybrid working, and not one or the other, is the way forward for sure.

The same can be said for those who give evidence to committees. We are hearing from new voices—from those for whom the trip to Edinburgh was too arduous and too expensive and took too much time out of their days. Their evidence is invaluable and totally reflective of the wider population we serve. Indeed, the international voices that we now hear are hugely important, too.

As we have already heard, such a system saves us money by reducing costs and expenses, and it reduces our carbon output.

**Stephen Kerr:** [*Inaudible.*]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** Mr Kerr, could you speak into your microphone?

**Stephen Kerr:** I am very sorry—I beg your pardon. It is hard to look in this direction while speaking to someone over there, which is another thing that we could discuss.

Would the member agree that, although she is making lots of fair points about committee structure, it is still vital that Government ministers appear in person before committees, rather than appearing virtually? That is a very difficult format for scrutiny and holding ministers to account.

**Elena Whitham:** I am not so sure that I agree with that. I have taken evidence from ministers in the committees that I have been on so far, and we have been able to scrutinise them quite fairly in that situation. If a minister is self-isolating or dealing with another illness, their opportunity to give evidence should not be taken away, but I get the point that sometimes it is easier when they are in the room and members can see the whites of their eyes.

Stephen Kerr talked about being in the building at any time and being able to be recalled and said that we should all be up for that. I have a disability that means that I cannot do that and I would not be able to do that. We have to remember that this is a family-friendly and an MSP-friendly situation that we are in and we have to be mindful of everybody's situation.

I look forward to hearing from colleagues; there will be conflicting views—we have already seen that. It has been quite eye opening so far. However, let us get the evidence and get the inquiry off to a roaring start.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Jackson Carlaw—you have a generous six minutes, Mr Carlaw.

15:50

**Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con):** I come to the debate with no fixed agenda; I have been mulling over the issues involved. I was interested in Martin Whitfield's speech and I thank him for the debate that he has initiated.

I have had an interest in parliamentary procedure over the years that I have been in the Parliament, and I am the last serving MSP who sat on the Commission on Parliamentary Reform as an MSP in the previous session, albeit that Pam Duncan-Glancy was there as a lay member. I also published a rather contentious report at the end of my first session here in 2010.

The report was contentious because I observed, as somebody who had come from a business world to the Parliament, that I was surprised at the number of colleagues who turned up for work at the crack of noon back then. I also commented on what I felt was a disparity between the workload that I had as a regional member and the workload that constituency members appeared to have. I think that the workloads have balanced out in many respects over the years.

A lot of the points that I made were subsequently picked up, and some came about in the Commission on Parliamentary Reform. When I looked at my report today, I was struck to see that on First Minister's question time I had observed that

"What we have in First Minister's Questions each week is 30 minutes of tedious verbal torture. Despite the repeated and determined efforts of the current Presiding Officer, there is clear need for procedural change."

We have reformed. Ken Macintosh made it 45 minutes of "tedious verbal torture" and today we managed more than an hour.

I also noted that I quoted something that Lord Foulkes, who was a member in that session of Parliament, said:

"Question Times are pathetic rituals of questions which are read, often badly, and answers drafted by civil servants with no apparent input from the minister delivering them."

I feel that some of those criticisms are still true today. However, I note that nobody who joined the Parliament in May has yet sat in it as a full chamber of members. That is regrettable, but I am not sure how fundamentally important I have come

to believe it is. For all the reform as a result of the commission, the most radical reform of the Parliament was brought about by the events of the pandemic—reforms that we would never have contemplated in any other circumstance. The hybrid arrangement that we have arrived at works very well. As a constituency member, I find that my time is far better deployed by not being here on a day when I have no particular contribution to make.

**Gillian Mackay:** Would the member support retaining the hybrid working system to allow more people—as Elena Whitham said, that might be committee witnesses or MSPs—to access Parliament in the future?

**Jackson Carlaw:** Yes. Those points have been well made and I support them, which is not what I might have expected to hear myself say when we began this experiment. I think that the hybrid arrangement has worked well and that it would be a retrograde step to decide that we cannot function in that way. It has its faults. We have seen its positives and its negatives. The comment made by John Mason about the lack of ability to intervene in a hybrid arrangement is a valid one and sometimes, of course, the technology has failed, which has caused its own issues.

I might say and may consider whether we need to have decision time at the end of business. Could we not have it at the start of the next day's business? Some people might say that that would interrupt the vote and the passion of the debate, but we are having yesterday's votes tonight. It would give us a more fixed certainty if we knew that we were going to have decision time for the previous day's business at 2 o'clock every day. We would then be without the extended uncertainty about when decision time might come.

**Martin Whitfield:** Could I push you on a point over the way that we vote? I ask this just to listen to your answer. Another event that—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Speak through the chair, please, Mr Whitfield.

**Martin Whitfield:** —electronic voting.

**Jackson Carlaw:** I missed that.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Could you direct the comments through the chair, Mr Whitfield?

**Martin Whitfield:** My apologies, Presiding Officer.

Would Jackson Carlaw give his view on the use of electronic voting, which was another thing that Covid brought in?

**Jackson Carlaw:** I am in favour of electronic voting. To be able to deploy my time as a constituency member more efficiently, I am not

here on certain days when I am not contributing to the proceedings of the Parliament. It follows that being able to vote remotely is fundamental. If we move to a more permanent arrangement in which remote voting is allowed, I hope that we will be able to evolve a more robust technology that we can rely on.

I was slightly concerned yesterday that parliamentary proceedings went ahead when it became apparent that the BlueJeans network had failed. I am not sure that, as a corporate body, we have approved that process as an operational practice for the Parliament. My understanding is that we have approved a hybrid process for Parliament, which, as far as I know, does not include a provision that one can watch the proceedings on television and that is in any way satisfactory. If we are going to have a hybrid arrangement, it has to work within rules and not be adjusted ad hoc, as we ended up doing yesterday.

I finish with a particular point that relates to lengthy answers and questions. One of the problems that the commission established is that the Presiding Officer's powers are limited. The Parliament would be required to agree to enhance the power of the Presiding Officer to the equivalent of that of the Speaker of the Republic of Ireland's Parliament, who is able to set a limit of 90 seconds on ministerial responses, after which their microphones switch off. He is also able to say to ministers that they have not answered the question.

When I spoke to the Speaker, he said that, in practice, he never had to do either, because ministers had now disciplined themselves to answer within 90 seconds and to answer the question—to be upbraided in the chamber for not doing so is seen as a serious offence against Parliament. We could have something similar.

To come back to Sarah Boyack's point about concise answers and questions, I do not know what the time limit would be. Unfortunately, we have never successfully achieved or implemented the voluntary arrangement or admonition to us all to proceed on that basis. If we think that the matter is important, we would require a procedural change to enhance the power of the chair. I am in favour of that because, at times, our struggling along with interminable speeches—not questions and answers—undermines the cut and thrust and the import of the job that we are trying to do.

I offer that contribution because Mr Whitfield has said that this is the beginning of a process. These are some of the thoughts that I have had in the time that I have been here.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Carlaw. As you proceeded to talk about the enhancing of the powers of the Presiding Officer, I

was disappointed to see you stop, but stop you must.

15:38

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** I found the opening remarks of my friend Martin Whitfield, the convener of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee, interesting and important. We need to keep asking ourselves the question about the kind of Parliament that we want this to be.

I find myself in wonder that I am in the place that I hoped would come into being in the 1990s. I passionately believed in the need for and importance of a Scottish Parliament. We need to ask ourselves whether this place lives up to the promise of Parliaments in general, and to the potential of the Scottish Parliament in particular. We need to think about what makes a good Parliament and about whether we are doing politics differently, because that was what many of us hoped would happen when we created the Scottish Parliament.

Unfortunately, some of the things that we put in place to bring about the latter have actually stymied the former. Some of the rules, practices and procedures have prevented the flow of debate and the reflection that we need and, ultimately, have reduced our ability to hold the Government to account. We have already heard thoughts about that. In particular, I was interested in Maggie Chapman's points on the importance of the way in which we conduct debate—the culture of debate—as well as her points on reflection.

What is important in the Parliament is not debate per se, but reflection and dialogue. The Parliament is not just a platform for delivering speeches; it is meant to be a space where ideas are exchanged and where there is the possibility of changing minds—that is sometimes missed. That is the difference between parliamentary and presidential democracy, which is just about holding the executive to account. It is also the difference between parliamentary and direct democracy, in which people make decisions without necessarily being provided with space for reflection. It is really important that we consider whether we are doing that.

Let me just say one slightly impudent but important thing. If there were one change that I could make in the chamber, I would get rid of the lecterns. They hold us back, because they mean that members come here and read out speeches. I know that it is difficult, but if the words that we say in this space have not changed from the night before when we typed them out, we are doing something wrong. It is really important that, when

we debate, there is the possibility of changing our views and minds.

**Elena Whitham:** Does Daniel Johnson agree that there are some circumstances when we need to have a speech in front of us? I am going through menopause—there will be other women in the chamber who are doing so—and I lose my train of thought if a hot flush overtakes me. That has happened several times in here and, if I did not have my words in front of me, I might have ended up greetin and sittin back down.

**Daniel Johnson:** I thank Elena Whitham for that intervention—we certainly do not want her greetin after making a speech. She makes an important point. I am not saying, “No words”; I am saying that perhaps we could consider rules whereby members are encouraged to refer to other speeches in the chamber. Our standing orders say that we must be “relevant”. I argue that to be relevant we should reflect what other members have previously said in the chamber. We should perhaps also think about timings and whether, to get their full time, members should have to take interventions.

**Stephen Kerr:** I am grateful for Daniel Johnson's thoughtful speech. I point out that Winston Churchill, no less, wrote out his speeches and referred extensively to his notes—I do not think that anyone would criticise his debating style, although I do not think that that is what Daniel Johnson is saying by any stretch of the imagination.

I invite Daniel Johnson to give his thoughts on the fact that the speakers who appear in debates have been chosen by their business managers. As an incomer to the Scottish Parliament, it seems strange to me that the parties stage manage debates. What are the member's thoughts on that?

**Daniel Johnson:** I very much agree.

Some of the points that Jackson Carlaw made are really important—I was going to come on to them myself. We need to think carefully about the role of the chair. We need to empower the Presiding Officer to determine whether things are relevant; to shape the time that is given to agenda items so that, if something transpires and needs to be given more importance, time is given to that; and to make a determination on whether answers, as well as questions, are relevant.

I can understand the need for notes for speeches but, for supplementary questions, I wonder whether—I have already mentioned this in an intervention—it would be more helpful, and help spontaneity, if we discouraged that practice.

The role of the Presiding Officer is important in another way. At times, the Parliament is guilty of

proceduralism. When the Scottish Parliament came into being, we were determined to get rid of the flamboyant flummery of and all the nonsense that happens in Westminster. However, by the same token, we have extinguished flexibility and the ability of the Parliament to be dynamic. Critically, some structures, such as the Parliamentary Bureau, the role of the business managers and, to an extent, the role of the clerks have stymied debate. The bureau can sometimes be little more than a formalised smoke-filled room with clerks acting as gatekeepers. As parliamentarians, we need to take back a bit of control and we need to empower the Presiding Officer a bit more.

I realise that I am running out of time, but I would like to make the point that we must hold on to hybrid proceedings. In contrast to what some other members have said, the key point is to get these things right. The issue with hybrid proceedings is not that the people are remote; it is that we need to make sure that they are relevant to the debate. If we get that right, some of the problems with hybrid proceedings would be taken care of.

Being consistent about decision time while being flexible about how we meet around it is absolutely vital.

I wish that I had more time, because I would like to talk more about some of these critical points as we consider the issues.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I feel as though I ought to leap to the defence of the clerks, who are unable to contribute to the debate, but I will not.

16:05

**Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP):** It is a pleasure to follow Daniel Johnson, which I do while reading from my heavily annotated notes. Daniel Johnson is looking to empower the Presiding Officer and I say, with some self-interest, why should we stop there? Why not look also at the committee conveners? We should all be thinking about those points.

It is a pleasure to speak in the debate. I thank colleagues on the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee for bringing it to the chamber. It has given me the opportunity to reflect on my first six months here and compare them to my previous six years at Westminster. Like all workplaces, the Scottish Parliament has had to make major changes to its way of working to ensure that we keep people safe during the pandemic while doing our important work in scrutinising the Government and raising our constituents' concerns.

It has been crucial to keep MSPs, our staff, the staff of Parliament and everyone who is involved in the running of this place safe, and that is why we have kept our hybrid proceedings going. I reiterate our thanks to the staff for everything that they have done and continue to do to implement that. That safety-first approach is now paying off as we face the rise of omicron. Because we have a hybrid Parliament, I have been able to keep doing my work while limiting the amount of time that I have had to be here, which has also reduced the number of times that I have used public transport to get here. It is the sensible thing for us to do. I find it crazy that, for months now, Westminster has been cramming people into narrow benches and voting lobbies.

Hybrid working has also increased opportunities for us to engage more widely. The Social Justice and Social Security Committee, which I convene, has heard from people with lived experience of poverty, debt and fuel poverty who we otherwise would not have heard from for a number of reasons. As welcoming an institution as the Parliament is, with wonderful staff, it can still be intimidating to contemplate coming here and sitting opposite a group of MSPs. It can be a major challenge to get people here from a wide geographical spread, and it can be difficult for people with disabilities or caring responsibilities to take part in our proceedings.

Obviously, we want as many people as possible to visit and to experience our Parliament, but there is no doubt that virtual proceedings have broken down many barriers and enriched the evidence that we receive on the crucial issues that we are interrogating.

**Stephen Kerr:** I had the pleasure of observing Neil Gray at work in the House of Commons, where he was very much a vibrant contributor. Does he accept that the hybrid arrangement and the virtual setting do not facilitate the type of debate that I know he enjoyed in the other house?

**Neil Gray:** I did indeed enjoy that, but I lament the fact that colleagues such as Amy Callaghan were blocked from taking part in debates because of their illness and because they were not able to travel. There is a real lesson for Westminster colleagues there.

From a family-friendly perspective, hybrid working has also been transformational. How many of the colleagues that we lost at the end of the previous parliamentary session might have stayed if virtual voting and participation had been in place prior to the pandemic? It gives us all much more flexibility to do our jobs well, as Jackson Carlaw rightly said. Just as being stuck in London for three or four days a week meant that I could not keep the family and constituency plates spinning as fast as the parliamentary ones, so it

must be for many other colleagues, including you, Presiding Officer, who have to stay overnight in Edinburgh when they come to Holyrood.

Of course, we all want to be here to make our contributions, but having the virtual option is important for us to be effective here and in the areas that we represent, as well as making sure that we are there for our families.

**Daniel Johnson:** I completely echo Neil Gray's points, but does he agree that we must also reflect on how we can improve hybrid working and allow interventions to ensure the relevance of contributions? I sneak in my agreement with his point about committee conveners. Does he agree that committee conveners should be elected by members of the Parliament?

**Neil Gray:** I absolutely agree that the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee should look into that.

On Daniel Johnson's point about using the technology to allow members to intervene on colleagues who participate remotely, reflecting on what John Mason said, it is absolutely right that, rather than do away with the technology because we want to have better debates, we should seek to improve the technology. That is how we should go about it.

As an institution, we must reflect on the fact that four incredibly able MSPs—Aileen Campbell, Jenny Marra, Gail Ross and Ruth Davidson—all cited an inability to balance working at Holyrood with family life as the reason for standing down. We should never allow ourselves to be in that situation again. Frankly, it shames us that we did not do more to ensure that they felt that they could stand for election again. How many more would have stood for election if we had had the technology?

A linked area of concern, and one where I feel that we have gone backwards, is about voting time—specifically, the apparent fluidity of what should be a fixed voting time. I absolutely concur with Sarah Boyack on that. Having a fixed voting time gives certainty to us all when colleagues have caring responsibilities. Sometimes, there are understandable reasons for the voting time to shift—it might have to do so for technical reasons that are outwith our control, or if an emergency statement has had to be made or a piece of emergency legislation considered—but we must do better on that.

Having such a shifting voting time has certainly made it challenging for me, as a father of four, to perform the careful logistical childcare balancing act at home, but it also has implications for our staff and for the staff of Parliament. I reiterate that I am fortunate in that I live a 20-minute train

journey away; the situation is much more challenging for colleagues who live further away.

With regard to what Sarah Boyack said about childcare, I welcome the fact that there is a consultation on that, but I lament the fact that we are still considering only a three or four-hour window of opportunity. If a much longer period of childcare was available, people such as me might be able to enjoy the service.

Hybrid working has enhanced our Parliament and has made us even more relevant, accessible and relatable. It has given all of us with caring responsibilities or geographical challenges the opportunity for more flexibility to do our jobs well, it has helped to ensure that we can contribute equally, without the discrimination that we see at Westminster, and it has kept us and everyone who works for the Parliament safer during the pandemic.

As Daniel Johnson said at the start of his speech, we must reflect on what we want to be as a Parliament and where our priorities lie. I hope that being a family-friendly Parliament remains a priority. I very much welcome having had the opportunity to take part in the debate, and I thank Martin Whitfield for leading it. I look forward to further engagement with the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee as it does its work.

16:12

**Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con):** I, too, am proud to be a member of the Parliament. It is a diverse Parliament, 45 per cent of the members of which are women, and we are working to make it more inclusive. I do not want to be dictated to, and I also want my lectern to be up.

This debate is set against the background of the public health constraints that have been necessitated by the outbreak of Covid-19 and how the Scottish Parliament has adapted its procedures and practices to meet those challenges. I thank parliamentary staff for the support that they have provided to all MSPs during the pandemic, which has allowed this legislature to operate safely at a time of crisis and deep uncertainty.

More than two decades after the Scottish Parliament was created, today's debate is an opportunity to look at how it operates not just during Covid-19 but more generally. It is, after all, a nascent Parliament but one that is steeped in history and one of which expectations are very high.

There is a wide spectrum of parliamentary experience in the chamber. For my part, I am

contributing as a new MSP, with what I hope is a fresh pair of eyes.

The Parliament was created 22 years ago to address a perceived democratic deficit in Scottish politics. I, too, was interested in the reply from Maggie Chapman on culture. A different kind of deficit exists now. As my colleagues have pointed out, rather than having spontaneous debate, too often the process is scripted, with the First Minister reading out prepared answers to planted questions from Scottish National Party back benchers, and responses are often drawn out to fill the time.

Just a few weeks ago, when the First Minister read out the wrong pre-scripted answer twice in two weeks, the Presiding Officer said that the content of MSPs' contributions is not a matter for her. MSPs are often pulled up by the Presiding Officers on the relevance of their contributions to parliamentary debates. It should therefore follow that a representative of the Scottish Government who fails to answer a question that has been posed to them should also be reproached.

As we have been reminded this week, the threat of Covid-19 still looms large. It is more important than ever that MSPs can scrutinise the decision making and actions of the Scottish Government. We have far too frequently seen the First Minister announce new restrictions from a podium during a press conference, not in Parliament. In June this year, the Scottish Government's decision to impose a travel ban between Scotland and Manchester had a direct bearing on the north-east of Scotland when EasyJet decided that it was no longer commercially feasible to operate a new route between Aberdeen and Manchester. The travel ban was announced by the First Minister on a Friday—a non-sitting day—during a press conference and with no opportunity for scrutiny by MSPs. That was a contemptuous move.

The Scottish Government's evasiveness in written answers to parliamentary questions is also worrying, as is the time that it takes to respond to those questions. Those issues were highlighted in the previous SPPA Committee's legacy report. On 20 September, I lodged a written question about the maintenance of hospital estates. That question was especially important because of what has been happening at the Queen Elizabeth university hospital in Glasgow. I did not receive a response until 15 November, almost two months later. The standing orders require that written questions receive a response within 10 working days. That response was not good enough. Parliament is too often sidelined by this SNP-Green Government. That should not be allowed to happen.

When the Scottish Government does engage with the parliamentary process, we often find ourselves debating matters outside the

Parliament's devolved remit, as part of a grievance-stoking exercise. That is not the accountability that the public deserves or expects.

My final comment relates to parliamentary privilege. It is well-known that MSPs do not have the same parliamentary privileges as our Westminster counterparts. In order to facilitate free speech and effective scrutiny, I would encourage the SPPA Committee to reflect deeply on whether it is possible to extend and strengthen parliamentary privilege for MSPs.

**Daniel Johnson:** Will the member accept an intervention?

**Tess White:** I am in my last minute. You could have asked earlier.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I can give you back the time.

**Tess White:** I will take an intervention. Go for it, Mr Johnson.

**Daniel Johnson:** I am grateful, and I will be brief. The New Zealand Parliament recently passed an act entrenching parliamentary privilege. Does the member believe that that could act as a model for this Parliament, and should this Parliament study that?

**Tess White:** That is a good question. We have a good example from the New Zealand Parliament. During our committee meeting this morning, we heard a good example from the Canadian Parliament. Our committee's role should be to bring together different ideas. Ms Whitham joined us a few weeks ago. We are a diverse committee with two female members and three men. We have different experiences. We should pull together and discuss the best practice from New Zealand, Canada and other parts of the world. We need to look at parliamentary privilege—I am glad that the member agrees with me on that. We should extend members' privileges and can look at the example of other countries.

As a member of the SPPA Committee, I hope that the remit of the inquiry that we will undertake in 2022 will include those and other issues.

If we want to ensure that we can serve our constituents to the best of our ability, can effectively and robustly scrutinise legislation and can hold the Scottish Government to account, it follows that we must honestly evaluate how this Parliament works and how it can work better.

16:19

**Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP):** It is a pleasure to take part in this lively and timely debate. In solidarity with Tess White—those are words that I did not think that I would say—I am also going to use my lectern.

The committee's inquiry has the potential to make considered recommendations on how this Parliament works, not just for us, as members, but for the people we serve as elected representatives. I will focus on three important issues that I urge the committee to investigate in depth—the work of the committees, flexible working and support for parliamentarians.

As one of the newest members of the Parliament, I have experienced only the current procedures and practices. I welcome the views of more experienced members and those of my colleague Neil Gray, given his experience of the House of Commons, no matter how archaic it sounds, particularly to people such as me.

The House of Commons is often held up as a model of good governance and parliamentary effectiveness, but I understand why, in 1999, the consultative steering group was adamant that a new Scottish Parliament must be better. The CSG got its principles right. To paraphrase, it said that the Scottish Parliament should embody and reflect the sharing of power between the people of Scotland, the legislators and Government; that it should be accountable to the people of Scotland; that it should be accessible, open and participative in the development, consideration and scrutiny of policy and legislation; and that it should promote equal opportunities in all its operations.

As the first woman of colour to be elected to this Parliament, I recognise that it has taken a bit of time to implement the fourth principle. This place is now looking and sounding more like the communities that we serve, but there is more to do. "Nothing about us without us" is an important principle.

The first two principles, on the sharing of power and the Parliament being accountable to the people, are often regarded as the "taken for granted" element of a fully functioning legislature, but I hope that we will take time to take stock of them.

However, I believe that it is the third principle, on being open and accessible, that the impending inquiry is most relevant to. We truly live in a digital age. Against the backdrop of Covid, we all became accustomed overnight to online meetings of all shapes and sizes and to online teaching for all children. Information and communication technology has evolved beyond expectations.

Last night, I read the report of the nine original CSG members, who met in 2019 at the Festival of Politics to reflect on how their report had fared after two decades of implementation. It makes for interesting reading. For instance, it was always envisaged that the committees would be more powerful, consensual and innovative in developing policy. Through successive Scotland Acts, the

volume of legislative business has increased way beyond what the consultative steering group envisaged, and, as a consequence, the more aspirational role for our committees might have been lost somewhat. Perhaps now is the time to have a subject committee that has no involvement in scrutinising proposed legislation and can focus purely on how the ideals of the CSG can be enacted in the light of what we now know.

On the practicalities of conducting parliamentary business, I note that hybrid and online meetings have been a blessing for many. Some of our more experienced members may have misgivings, but I have not experienced business in any other way, and the current procedures have demonstrated to Scotland that our democracy can work from our kitchens as well as from the chamber.

The Scottish Parliament's original design principles included the need for it to be more family friendly in its working hours. To be frank, that has been eroded. If hybrid and online meetings can contribute to achieving that specific aim, that is a lesson that we can benefit from. Some may have concerns about costs, but we should ask what the cost is of not being flexible and inclusive. I hope that the committee will explore the economics of our current parliamentary practices but balance them against the social cost of non-inclusive practices.

Being an effective parliamentarian requires good support systems as well as the flexibility to respond to and engage with constituents and stakeholders. That is as much about the team that we parliamentarians employ to help us to carry out our duties. I urge the committee to broaden the remit of its inquiry to consider the impact of the procedures and practices of the Parliament on MSP staff and not just on elected members.

I would like to see a broader range of data and evidence gathered in investigating the impact of our current practices on the staff of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body as well as on the staff employed through members' resources. There is a lot of anecdotal evidence, but perhaps now is the time for the committee to commission its own research, either directly or through the corporate body.

If there is one thing that the status quo is teaching me, it is that a one-size-fits-all approach to chamber and committee procedures does not necessarily make for good governance. I have not heard anything that suggests that parliamentary democracy can be effective only if we are physically present. The committee should broaden the remit of its inquiry, fulfil the consultative steering group's aims and include everyone who plays a part in our democratic ecosystem.

Perhaps we all need to rely more on the robustness of debate rather than on the robustness of our tables. Perhaps we all need to talk a little more softly and listen a little bit more loudly.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Graham Simpson, who is the final speaker in the open debate. You have around six minutes.

16:26

**Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):** That is extremely generous, Presiding Officer—I was not at all planning on speaking for six minutes.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Up to six minutes.

**Graham Simpson:** Yes, it is up to six minutes.

I am not on the whip in this debate, which is a rarity. We would not often come across any speaker in this Parliament who is not on the whip. Normally, in my group, Stephen Kerr chooses who gets to speak and who does not. I was not on the list for this debate, so I had to approach the Presiding Officer, and your good office said that I could speak. That does not normally happen. That seems entirely wrong to me. When I saw the topic of the debate, I felt that I had something to contribute. All parties need to look at their practices and allow members in that position to do so.

**John Mason:** I agree with that to some extent. Does the member agree that it is up to back benchers to challenge, to some extent, those on the front bench of their own parties?

**Graham Simpson:** How refreshing to hear an SNP back bencher say that. Yes, I agree with that.

Presiding Officer, you said at the start—

**Martin Whitfield:** Will the member give way?

**Graham Simpson:** Just a sec—allow me to make this point at least.

The Presiding Officer mentioned the time limit at the start of my speech, Stephen Kerr mentioned spontaneity and Daniel Johnson mentioned the issue, too. MSPs are very often limited by time. I think that they write out their speeches so that they can fit in with that time. If we were to be more flexible—

**Stephen Kerr** rose—

**Graham Simpson:** Mr Whitfield wanted in first.

**Martin Whitfield:** Does the member agree that a convention that has grown up is that individuals in parties dictate who speaks? There is nothing contained in the standing orders about that. What is the member's view on limiting the time that

members get to speak in debates to allow a broader number of people to contribute?

**Graham Simpson:** That idea is worth looking at, because the more members that contribute, the better. One of the good things about this debate so far is that we have heard a lot of really good contributions. Interventions have been made because people have not felt constrained by time.

**Stephen Kerr:** I wish I had eyes in the back of my head. I was going to make a point—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I doubt that that would just be for making these sorts of interventions.

**Stephen Kerr:** I was going to make a similar point to Martin Whitfield's. It is not a convention, as such, that the parties choose the speakers. Every week we get an email asking us to submit the lists of speakers and it is all very controlled. Is not that aspect of party control the very thing that is driving out the spontaneity that the Parliament badly needs?

**Graham Simpson:** I completely agree. Mr Kerr could take a lead on that in our own party and perhaps introduce some reforms in our whip's office to allow more spontaneity. I look forward to that happening.

I wanted to speak today because I will be launching a consultation on a member's bill in January. One aspect of the bill cuts right across some of the issues that we are discussing today. If the bill gets beyond the consultation stage, it will eventually come to the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee.

There are several aspects to the bill, but I will discuss just one. I want to replicate the situation in councils: if councillors do not turn up for work or do not do any work for six months, they can be removed as councillors. That is a matter of law, but it is not one that applies to MSPs. It struck me that that is entirely wrong. If someone effectively decides to stop work, they should not be allowed to do that job.

That simple idea occurred to me before the pandemic. Since then, we have changed the way that we work. However, I have proceeded with the bill, and the consultation will deal with some of the issues that we have discussed today. A big question now is what constitutes work. It was quite easy before—we just had to turn up, vote or take part in proceedings here—but now it is not so simple. The consultation paper will raise those questions. I encourage all members who have taken part in today's debate, since they obviously have a keen interest, to contribute, because I am interested to hear people's views.

**Daniel Johnson:** This is somewhat of a cheeky intervention. Is not the real point that doing this job

properly means doing a great deal more than simply showing up and voting?

**Graham Simpson:** Absolutely. The consultation addresses that point. I encourage Daniel Johnson to take part in it.

I have gone over the time allocated to me—I did not expect to do that. It has been a fascinating debate and I look forward to engaging with the committee.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Simpson. There was never a doubt that you would fill the six minutes. We will move to the winding-up speeches.

16:33

**Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab):** It has been a great pleasure to listen to members' contributions to this extremely important debate. I thank the convener of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee in particular for bringing the debate to the chamber. He reflected on the original ideas behind the establishment of the Scottish Parliament and the Constitutional Convention that gave birth to it, as well as on Donald Dewar's reflections on the idea of quality of debate being essential to the performance of the legislature.

I am minded of the comment by Ron Davies, the former Secretary of State for Wales, who said:

"Devolution is a process. It is not an event".

We cannot be prisoners to the initial ideas of what the Parliament should be like. Rather, there should be iterations and the institution should be constantly responsive. The debate is necessary in order for us to reflect on how things have been done well over the past 21 years and on how things could be changed and reformed. Members have offered some worthwhile suggestions in that regard.

Maggie Chapman mentioned the tone of debate and the quality of being able to disagree well. We can all reflect on how to do that better in the chamber. Fundamentally, the common themes that came out today were the role of members and the inherent tensions that the job presents. A member of the Scottish Parliament is simultaneously a legislator, a scrutineer of Government in committee and someone who has to undertake the duties of representing the people as a constituency or regional representative in the Parliament, as well as being a community troubleshooter, leader and campaigner. It is quite a hybrid role, and it requires a myriad set of skills. Some people are better at some things than others are, and the role requires a significant level of capacity that often comes at significant personal cost, as we have heard from members.

The Minister for Parliamentary Business made some good points about the huge learning curves that have been required over the past year by the institution as a whole in building, virtually from scratch, an online system for participation and in moving towards a hybrid Parliament. I think that there has been broad consensus that that has been highly effective at opening and improving the performance of the legislature, and that we definitely want to build and improve on that in the future.

It is important to recognise the purpose of the Scottish Parliament in its foundations. That drives at the heart of some of the tensions between the Executive and the legislature and the roles that are performed therein that have been described. Devolution was not just a big-bang event in 1999 in which everything was suddenly devolved from Westminster. In effect, the Scottish Government has existed as a discrete body of power since 1885 and the creation of the Scottish Office. The post of the Secretary of State for Scotland was created in 1926, and the construction of St Andrew's house on Calton Hill, which was built between 1935 and 1939, was a direct result of that. The evolution of Scotland's governance needs to be reflected on.

The Parliament's purpose is not simply to sit here as a forum for ministers to broadcast their views on things; it is very much a vigorous forum for the scrutiny of Government power. That seems to have been somewhat forgotten in the past 20 years.

**Daniel Johnson:** Does Paul Sweeney agree that we need to re-examine our standing orders, particularly on what is a relevant comment, and require ministers' and members' comments to be relevant and germane to the topic of debate? Does he agree that that might improve the quality of debate?

**Paul Sweeney:** Absolutely. I was struck by the mention by the member for Eastwood of the Dáil and the privileges of its Speaker in being able to hold ministers to account in respect of time limits on responses and the relevance of the contributions. That is well worth further inquiry.

I want to reflect on the nature of the Scottish Parliament as an evolution from the Scottish Grand Committee in the House of Commons. The House of Commons is so constrained by time that the Scottish Grand Committee was not able to effectively perform the duties of a legislature—hence the creation of the Scottish Parliament. However, there are still constraints on the capacity of the legislature to hold Government to account that we have to deal with.

A lot of frustrations about that have been expressed—for example, about the capacity and

flexibility to hold the Government to account in topical questions and the time constraints in First Minister's question time. Perhaps the Government having prior sight of people's questions gives a degree of intelligence that is not afforded to the Prime Minister at Prime Minister's question time, for example. There is a sudden-death hit, and the Prime Minister simply has to be very responsive in dealing with that, because he or she does not have any prior knowledge of what will be put forward. There are certain tweaks to the system that can definitely improve the scrutiny of Government.

There are many contributions to the debate to refer to, and I am mindful that I have already eaten up five minutes of my time. I am not sure how much time I have remaining.

On the discussion about the balance with family life, the member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley made a very important point about life flexibility. Having maternity leave flexibility could be a way of reforming the chamber and improving access. Proxy voting is another alternative. I know that many women members of the Parliaments at Westminster and Holyrood have described the pressures that impinge on their ability to perform their functions and duties as members.

My friend the member for Edinburgh Southern made a point about getting rid of lecterns. Sometimes they can be useful, but I take the point that they can create a psychological gap and block in debates. The importance of iterative debate was brought up, and several members brought up the issue of breaking the control of business managers. Allowing the Presiding Officer's office to determine who is called to speak in debates could improve their quality.

The role of the member as a parliamentarian first and party hack second should be another focus in trying to foster a greater culture of back-bench interventions and contributions that are not necessarily governed by the whips.

**Neil Gray:** I can understand the point that Paul Sweeney is making about power, but will he reflect on the fact that the Speaker of the House of Commons has the power to take speeches from parliamentary colleagues at Westminster? I do not think that that has particularly changed the element of party hackism at Westminster compared to here.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I ask Paul Sweeney to start winding up, please.

**Paul Sweeney:** No problem.

That was a fair point for Neil Gray to make. There is something worth testing there, to check whether we can improve the situation. This is intended to be an iterative process and the

beginning of a series of inquiries that will no doubt present some really interesting alternatives for how we do our business.

I will wind up now, even though I have taken so many notes about other members' contributions—which I do not have time to address, unfortunately. Fundamentally, we must consider the question of power in the Parliament. It is the role of the Parliament to hold the Executive to account, and there are so many more ways in which we can improve that capacity and ability to do so, but in a way that is powerful and that includes people in the process. That is where the great opportunity of the reforms to create a hybrid Parliament has shown great promise, particularly in committees, in involving more people in shaping the debate of the country.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I note the comments that various members have made about the interactive debate that we have been able to have. I can advise members that we have now exhausted all the additional time that we had in hand, so I will have to be a bit more draconian with speeches from here on in.

Rather trepidatiously, I invite Edward Mountain to wind up.

16:41

**Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** Thank you very much, Presiding Officer, for allowing me to give the “wind up” speech, as you call it. Let us see if I can do just that.

I welcome today's debate and have listened to all members' speeches with huge interest. Let us be clear: we have a huge impact on our constituents with the work that we do in Parliament. However, the Scottish Parliament is 22 years of age, and I do not believe that it is wearing well.

The Parliament prides itself on being a modern Parliament, but it is clear that we are poorly served by our broadcast information technology and by the protocols that go with it. I remember raising this very issue as convener of the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee in 2017. We held virtual meetings in the bowels of the Parliament building, because there was only one screen and one room that could do it. I sometimes wondered whether tin cans and a piece of string would have been a better option.

The pandemic has forced us to focus our minds on resolving such issues, but progress has been painfully slow. Parliament saying continually that we have a robust system and that it has everything in hand does not work for me. Although Parliament can go virtual, when I deliver a virtual speech—as I am doing now—all I see on my

screen is myself. I can see part of the chamber, but I cannot see a clock, and there is no way of taking interventions. Indeed, I tried to make an intervention in this debate, but I was refused. I would like nothing more than to allow interventions on my speeches.

All that leads to sterile lectures, not debate. Take my word for it: I have been virtual for all of this term since September, but not through personal choice and it has been pretty rubbish. I have contributed as fully as I could to Parliament. The sterile lecture is now the norm for the chamber, I fear. Having four-minute speeches, with many members not taking interventions, kills debates. That is why the majority of people in Scotland are not tuning in to watch Parliament. Who can blame them?

When it comes to questions—I am not talking about the patsy questions that are asked by Government party back benchers—who ever gets a real answer? Presiding Officer, I believe that it should fall totally within the remit of your office to resolve that. I implore Parliament to drive forward on the matter. Questions need answers, not political statements.

I remind Parliament that it is not just the Irish Parliament that sets time limits; so does the Canadian Parliament—[*Inaudible.*]—think more about that and set time limits on questions and answers.

I believe that although Parliament continues to function during the pandemic, it is a pale imitation of the real thing. I can say that, having not been there since September. I do not think that it is good for democracy and accountability to do everything remotely. We need more accountability, we need people in the building, and we need to be able to talk to one other—and not just across the chamber.

We also need strong and effective committees. Having been a convener in the previous session, it is my experience that a committee functions at its best when party politics are left at the door. I was sorely disappointed on the many occasions when that did not happen.

I will give members a perfect example. When the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee considered the bill that became the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019, an SNP committee member publicly spoke out, in the months preceding the vote on it, about the introduction of a workplace parking levy. The next month, when the vote came along, he caved in as a result of party pressure and voted with the Government.

The Government might deny that there is whipping in committees, but in the previous session that was very clear and commonplace. It is clear that the committee system is broken and

needs a complete overhaul—a complete rethink. Until that happens, we will have a Government that can do what it wants, when it wants, however it wants. To be honest, I say that that is not a good or effective way to make legislation. In fact, it is an embarrassment to the people of Scotland and to parliamentarians who try to use Parliament to change things.

I will turn to some of the key points that have been raised in the debate. Our SPPA Committee convener made many important points—perhaps the most important of which was about the need for debate, which, by definition, is when opposing ideas are discussed and not just put forward without discourse. The number of interventions that the convener took during his speech proves that he favours debate, and that he is a man of his word.

I am slightly disappointed that the Government minister, George Adam, did not identify any of the key failings of parliamentary procedure that are clearly evident to other members of the Parliament.

I was struck by Stephen Kerr's point that questions need answers, and not just an answer that has been prepared weeks in advance. I also take Sarah Boyack's point on the verbosity of ministers; it was well made.

Jackson Carlaw made some valid points and comments about the need to reform FMQs and the format of all questions and answers. I look forward to finding a way around that. I agree with Daniel Johnson that Parliament should be about dialogue, which means debate, which means reaching out and talking to each other.

I was struck by the plea from my colleague Tess White that Parliament be used to make announcements so that the Government can be questioned on them, rather than using the media to slip out the statements that it will not make in Parliament.

I am conscious that my time is running short, but I want to make one point entirely clear. I have benefited from the fact that there is a hybrid Parliament in which I can take part from home. I do not propose that we change that, but it should not be the norm. It should be used with care and sparingly, when it is needed to allow members to contribute. After all, we are better if we negotiate with each other face to face, when that is possible. I support the hybrid format, but I do not want it to be the only way we operate.

There is a lot that this Parliament needs to do to evolve and mature after the 22 years since it was originally set up. From the chamber to the committee rooms, we need changes that nurture debate and encourage scrutiny instead of encouraging lectures, blind loyalty, patsy

questions and no answers being given to Opposition members or, indeed, to members of the party that is in government. I do not believe that the Parliament will be working for the benefit of the people of Scotland until we make such changes.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Mountain. I gave you a little extra time as you were not able to intervene during the debate.

16:48

**George Adam:** I will start with Mr Mountain. It is good to see that his time at home has not stopped his feistiness and his ability to put his point of view across. That gives us an example of how the system has worked for us, and where members have been able to use it. I know that Mr Mountain said that in his speech.

Mr Mountain talked about being able to see himself on his screen—surely that is a good thing. Nonetheless, even someone as vain as I am finds it off-putting to see myself on screen, so we can maybe look at that, as we go on.

An issue that has been brought up during the debate—Maggie Chapman, in particular, made this point—is our culture and how we work and deal with one another in Parliament. Mr Mountain and I are perfect examples—we get on well one to one, and we talk and engage with each other all the time. That is one of the things that we need here. I said the same to Stephen Kerr. When he was appointed chief whip, I said to him that we can fight all we like in the chamber, but as long as we are out of the chamber, we will talk to each other like human beings and get on with the business in hand. That is important in relation to the point that Maggie Chapman made about how we conduct ourselves and the importance of the culture of the Parliament.

This has been an interesting, constructive and valuable debate about the future and how we can achieve flexibility. We have proved already that flexibility has been extremely helpful to every one of us.

I have made suggestions in the past 20 months that the Presiding Officers did not think were a good idea. I suggested putting a “Countdown” clock from the Channel 4 show up there at decision time, and playing the “Countdown” theme music, to make it a wee bit more interesting and guarantee that we get there. There have been times when we have lost members and decision time has ended up being almost like the Eurovision song contest, with members phoning in from other places and saying, “My app didn't work.” Decision time can sometimes be as long as the Eurovision song contest, although that has not been the case on the majority of occasions.

The exception was my friend and former colleague Gil Paterson. It seemed that every single night Gil could not work the technology. My argument, however, having been in bureau meetings for the past 20 months, is that a lot of the time the problem has not been the technology on the Parliament side. The problem has been on members' side—it has been a user problem or broadband issues.

**Stephen Kerr:** Once again, the minister is, not incorrectly, looking at the hybrid arrangements and discussing their merits. I would be grateful if he would comment on suggestions about procedures in Parliament that pre-date changes that have been introduced because of the Covid emergency.

**George Adam:** I was coming to that; I will go through bits and pieces from what colleagues have said.

Ms Boyack acknowledged that we need to retain the hybrid system, and she mentioned the length of questions and answers. Let us not kid ourselves: the questions are sometimes as long as the answers. As anybody does when they are asked a long question, we automatically want to give them value for money and a long answer.

Question times can be quite difficult for ministers, because if we give a short answer, an Opposition member might say, "That was a terribly short answer. This is a very important issue, minister, and I want you to take it seriously." I admit that there is a balance to be struck. I tend to try to keep answers as short as possible, because I was trained under the tutelage of Tricia Marwick when she was Presiding Officer, and she made sure that I cut my questions as short as possible.

We need flexibility, because we are dealing with the on-going Covid situation. Sarah Boyack and other members mentioned that business can be changed at the last minute. I agree with what they said. I try to ensure that that does not happen, because I understand that everyone has a life; everyone has to be in other places and members have their constituencies to deal with, too.

However, there are occasions on which an issue must be dealt with straight away. For example, in the case of the Deputy First Minister's statement on storm Arwen, we had to deal with that right then, on the Tuesday. I grant that the change was at the last minute. On the whole, however, I try to ensure that we do not have to debate issues at the last minute.

I mentioned culture earlier. How we present Parliament to the world is extremely important. My colleague Stephen Kerr and I had one of our usual wee barneys earlier, which is not necessarily what the public want to see from their legislators. We might enjoy it, but we know, from talking to the public, that it is not really what they want. Maggie

Chapman made a very interesting point about culture.

Elena Whitham spoke about the practical issues of home working. Home working can be difficult—for example, when the computer starts buffering—and we worry about that. However, such issues have got better as time has passed.

Stephen Kerr spoke about just about everything that he and I have spoken about over the past two or three weeks, and I will probably have the same discussion with him next week. I will therefore move on to what other members said.

**Daniel Johnson:** Will the minister take an intervention?

**George Adam:** I will finish. I need to talk about some of members' remarks.

I appreciated a lot of what Jackson Carlaw said. He said that colleagues come in at the crack of noon. He and I worked in the same industry, back in the day. We all had to work hard, and it was not a case of just coming in at the last minute. That is part of the culture here, but members need to accept that this is a workplace like any other. I see that Stephen Kerr is nodding in agreement. However, we have to give members flexibility so that they can work around their lives.

On the whole, the debate has been very good and interesting. We need to have debates like it more often.

**Sarah Boyack:** Will the minister take an intervention?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** No, the minister is winding up.

**George Adam:** When we consider any type of reform, we cannot do it piecemeal; we have to look at reform in its entirety. I hope that the committee and the Parliament can look at the debate as a way forward for us.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you, minister. I apologise to members for cutting across them, but we are almost out of time. I call Bob Doris to wind up the debate on behalf of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee.

16:55

**Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP):** As others have done, I start by thanking parliamentary staff, who are the glue that have kept this Parliament going in the most difficult of times. From the cleaners and catering staff to the kitchen and IT staff, they have all faced massive challenges, and I thank every one of them.

I also thank every member who has spoken in the debate. I am keen to express a variety of views on some of the comments, but I am speaking on behalf of the committee, so I will be reflective rather than pejorative about some of the comments that I have heard this afternoon.

In particular, I thank the convener, who started the debate with an excellent tone, which members mostly followed, although, since the convener mentioned 1970s wrestling, I thought that the exchange between Mr Kerr and Mr Adam felt more like Big Daddy and Giant Haystacks than a parliamentary exchange.

Parliament has reformed through necessity, but we have to reflect on that and innovate, so, this afternoon, we are here together as a Parliament to tease out a starting point from our committee. We must embed the progress that there has already been and be open and honest about where that progress has not been what we would have liked it to be. We must identify and rectify shortcomings and innovate differently, perhaps by trying something completely different.

Of course, there were issues in Parliament before Covid and before 2007, but, when we look through the lens of this debate, let us try to do so in a non-tribal way and come together as a Parliament. Let us shape, mould, nurture, develop and co-produce what the Scottish Parliament of the future will look like.

I will spend some time talking about a hybrid Parliament. By and large, there is almost unanimity that, although we should perhaps reform how it works, we should stick with a hybrid Parliament. Gillian Mackay mentioned how those who have disabilities can benefit, and Kaukab Stewart said that it could promote diversity. The minister mentioned people who think that coming to Edinburgh routinely would be a barrier to standing for election, so a hybrid Parliament would encourage more people to stand for election. Sarah Boyack was very clear about how the hybrid Parliament allowed for the flexible management of casework by busy MSPs and constituency offices, and Jackson Carlaw made a very similar point.

I will spend a little time on the aspect of family life, which Daniel Johnson and Neil Gray mentioned, which I absolutely agree is important. I became a dad shortly after being elected for the second time. I have to be careful how I phrase this, but I have found it a huge challenge to balance my parliamentary and constituency duties with being a good dad and husband at the same time. Something has to give, and, quite often, what gives is that my wife does more than she should have to. Quite bluntly, we have to think about the balance of family life for men and women, whether they are members in this place or partners back at home.

**Finlay Carson:** Being in the same position, I absolutely share Bob Doris's view. One of the main factors is uncertainty because, otherwise, we can generally plan. We cannot have everything our own way, and being an elected politician is never going to be a normal life, but the difficulty with the way that Parliament is at the moment is the uncertainty over when we can get home and when we are expected to be in the chamber. That needs to be tackled as a matter of urgency.

**Bob Doris:** I absolutely agree with Finlay Carson, who slightly went on to the issue of decision time, which I was going to come on to later but which I will deal with now. Yes, it gets pushed back later and later on many an evening, and it can change at very short notice. It is not possible to plan around that, and that situation is simply not acceptable. Jackson Carlaw made an interesting point about setting decision time at the start of business the following day, and that could be a way forward. We absolutely have to look at that.

Finally, it is fair to point out that we have to make sure that the dynamic is not lost in hybrid working, and interventions absolutely have to be part of that. I want to put that on the record.

There was a wide-ranging debate on the scrutiny of Government in relation to pre-prepared questions and supplementaries from Government back benchers, Opposition members and ministers. There was discussion of the balance of Opposition time, members' business debates and committee debates; the use of topical and emergency questions; and the idea of scripted speeches. I think that there was an acknowledgment by Graham Simpson that scripted speeches often come not just from Government but from the Opposition as well, and there is a carved-out position in advance of a debate. I think that that is a political reality in this place.

I will not say much about my own committee because of time, but I wish that folk had spoken more about committees, because they are the lifeblood of this Parliament's scrutiny. The major scrutiny will not happen in this chamber, which is for set-piece debates. The committees are the absolute lifeblood of scrutiny.

Elena Whitham spoke about job sharing with Councillor Kelly Parry at COSLA. Job sharing is something that we have to start thinking about if we are to be realistic about work-life balance and being an inclusive Parliament.

Elena Whitham and others also mentioned remote voting in relation to those who have an elderly relative, for example, or other caring responsibilities. Neil Gray mentioned how Amy Callaghan had been frozen out of voting at

Westminster. I am not allowed to comment on that situation, as I am speaking on behalf of the committee, but I wanted to reflect that it had been mentioned in this chamber.

We do need to reform. We have to bring Parliament together in doing that, and we have to strike a balance. Hybrid proceedings must not and will not replace human face-to-face contact. They must complement it and they must support it. We must seize the opportunities of hybrid working but also address the pitfalls.

Relationships are also the lifeblood of this Parliament, even when we disagree with each other. Those relationships are often fostered not online or by virtual contact but face to face, before committee, after committee, in the canteen or at parliamentary receptions. Those relationships have still to be forged by many of the people in this place, because they have simply not had the chance to do that. That really has to happen, and it is important to put that on the record, too.

In the very limited time that I have left, I will say this. Let us shape parliamentary reform not on the basis of any individual's self-interest or any party's self-interest, nor on the basis of whether we are in government or in opposition. Let us get the tone right as we shape Scotland's Parliament moving forward. Let us get the relationship right between Government and Opposition in the legislature. Let us get the scrutiny right. Let us make sure that Parliament remains accessible, transparent and fit for purpose. Let us also remember that many good things exist in the Parliament right now—let us not dismiss them, either.

Let us shape Scotland's Parliament going forward in the best interests of all the people of Scotland—non-tribal, non-partisan, open-minded, bold, innovative and inclusive. That is no small challenge for our committee, but it is one that I know we are up for and one that I am absolutely convinced that Parliament is up for, too.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes the debate on behalf of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee on shaping parliamentary procedures and practices for the future.

## Business Motion

17:03

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):**

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-02563, 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 21 December 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 Debate: A New Deal for Tenants

*followed by* Committee Announcements

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Wednesday 22 December 2021

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:  
Justice and Veterans;  
Finance and Economy;  
Education and Skills

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: Protecting and Improving the Water Environment

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Approval of SSIs (if required)

3.45 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 23 December

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

12.45 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 11 January 2022

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 12 January 2022

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:  
 Covid Recovery and Parliamentary  
 Business;  
 Net Zero, Energy and Transport

*followed by* Scottish Government Business  
*followed by* Business Motions  
*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
*followed by* Approval of SSIs (if required)  
 5.00 pm Decision Time  
*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 13 January 2022

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 11.40 am General Questions  
 12.00 pm First Minister's Questions  
*followed by* Members' Business  
 2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:  
 Rural Affairs and Islands  
*followed by* Scottish Government Business  
*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 5.00 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 20 December 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.*

## Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:04

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** The next item of business is consideration of two Parliamentary Bureau motions. I call George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motions S6M-02565 and S6M-02566, on approval of Scottish statutory instruments.

*Motions moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016 (Register of Persons Holding a Controlled Interest in Land) Amendment Regulations 2021 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Best Start Grants and Scottish Child Payment (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2021 [draft] be approved.—[George Adam]

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

## Point of Order

17:05

**The Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights (Patrick Harvie):** Presiding Officer, I wish to raise a point of order regarding exchanges at the end of yesterday's debate on backing the north-east economy. It is undeniable that feelings were running high in that debate, and I was, of course, frustrated when Douglas Lumsden misquoted my comments about party-political support for the development of new fossil fuel extraction. I acknowledge that I do not know whether he had, in fact, ever bothered to check what I had actually said or whether he merely accepted at face value a false media report and repeated it without knowing.

Of course, I accept that matters of accuracy are not something that you are able to rule on, Presiding Officer. You and previous Presiding Officers have frequently been annoyed by accuracy matters being raised in that way, so I could and should have found a different way to challenge the inaccuracy and to ask Mr Lumsden to correct the record.

However, it is very clear that what followed was far more serious than a slightly annoying use of a point of order. In relation to a physical attack that took place against his local office, and speaking in direct reference to me, Mr Lumsden stated:

"I am not telling the police how to do their job, but perhaps they should consider that a member of this Parliament instigated that attack."—[*Official Report*, 15 December 2021; c 63.]

Presiding Officer, in both his words and his body language, he made it perfectly clear that I was the member he was referring to. Let me be equally clear. This allegation of instigating an attack on his office is utterly baseless and deeply offensive. I consider it to be clearly defamatory, and, if it had been made anywhere else but in the chamber of Parliament, I would be taking legal advice.

Conduct in the chamber is regulated by the code of conduct and by your own role as Presiding Officer. We surely cannot permit a situation in which a member is able to level a completely spurious allegation of serious criminal conduct against another member without consequences. To do so would signal to all members that such disgraceful behaviour is acceptable. So, I ask you, what are the consequences for Mr Lumsden's shocking abuse of his position in Parliament and how can all members be assured that they will be protected from such behaviour in the future?

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** I thank you for the advance notice of the point of

order, Mr Harvie. Having reviewed the footage of the exchanges, I spoke privately this morning to Mr Lumsden and then to you, Mr Harvie. Feelings were indeed running high yesterday afternoon, and some of the remarks made in the chamber fell short of the standard of conduct required of members of this Parliament. As part of my discussion this morning, as you know, I asked Mr Lumsden to reflect on his language, and I do not expect any repetition. I consider the matter closed. Thank you.

## Decision Time

17:08

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):**

There are seven questions to be put as a result of yesterday's business and today's business.

The first question is, that amendment S6M-02552.3, in the name of Michael Matheson, which seeks to amend motion S6M-02552, in the name of Liam Kerr, on backing the north-east economy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division. There will be a short suspension to allow members to access the digital voting system.

17:08

*Meeting suspended.*

17:12

*On resuming—*

**The Presiding Officer:** We come to the division on amendment S6M-02552.3. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is now closed.

**Siobhian Brown (Ayr) (SNP):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I apologise, but my app does not appear to be letting me in at this stage. I would have voted yes.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Ms Brown. We will ensure that that is recorded.

**Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app did not work. I would have voted no.

**The Presiding Officer:** 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)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 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)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (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)  
 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)  
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 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)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 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)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

### Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)

Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the vote on amendment S6M-02552.3, in the name of Michael Matheson, is: For 66, Against 52, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S6M-02552.2, in the name of Colin Smyth, which seeks to amend motion S6M-02552, in the name of Liam Kerr, on backing the north-east economy, be agreed to.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S6M-02552, in the name of Liam Kerr, on backing the north-east economy, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

The vote is now closed.

**Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app is still not working. I would have voted yes.

**The Presiding Officer:** 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)  
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (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)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 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)  
 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)  
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (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)  
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 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

Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (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)  
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (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)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (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 vote on motion S6M-02552, in the name of Liam Kerr, on backing the north-east economy, as amended, is: For 84, Against 34, Abstentions 0.

#### *Motion, as amended, agreed to,*

That the Parliament recognises that the global climate emergency and the aims set out in the Glasgow Climate Pact require all countries to achieve the fastest possible Just Transition for the oil and gas sector; reaffirms that, for such a transition to be just, it must support the 70,000 workers whose employment depends on the sector in Scotland; understands that the growing domestic and global renewable industry provides a major employment opportunity for Scotland; welcomes the Scottish Budget for 2022-23, which will see almost £2 billion invested in tackling the climate emergency, including the first £20 million of the £500 million Just Transition Fund for the north east and Moray, calls on the UK Government to match this investment in the industries and jobs of the future; further believes that the Scottish Government must significantly

step up its efforts to support the retention and creation of energy jobs in Scotland, and calls on the Scottish Government to set out a clear industrial plan, in consultation with trade unions and workers, particularly from the oil and gas sector, to secure a Just Transition for workers across Scotland.

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S6M-02553.3, in the name of Keith Brown, which seeks to amend motion S6M-02553, in the name of Jamie Greene, on ending the not proven verdict, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

The vote is now closed.

**Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. There was a problem and I could not vote. I would have voted yes.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr McMillan. We will ensure that that is recorded—*[Interruption.]* I can confirm that your vote was 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)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (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)  
 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)  
 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)  
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 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)

### Against

Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Dowe, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (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)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (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)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (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)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on amendment S6M-02553.3, in the name of Jamie Green, is: For 91, Against 27, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S6M-02553.1, in the name of Pauline McNeill, which seeks to amend motion S6M-02553, in the name of Jamie Greene, on ending the not proven verdict, be agreed to.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The question is, that motion S6M-02553, in the name of Jamie Greene, on ending the not proven verdict, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

The vote is now closed.

**Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My screen jammed with the wrong vote recorded. I was trying to vote no.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Mundell. We cannot change a vote that has been recorded, but your correction is on the record.

### 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)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (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)  
 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)  
 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)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 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)

## Against

Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (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)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (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)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (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)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on motion S6M-02553, in the name of Jamie Greene, on ending the not proven verdict, as amended, is: For 92, Against 26, Abstentions 0.

### *Motion, as amended, agreed to,*

That the Parliament recognises concerns held by many about the current three verdict system, including issues raised in independent jury research that suggest jurors may have inconsistent views on the meaning and effect of the not proven verdict; further recognises the concerns raised by the complainants of particularly heinous crimes, including gender-based violence, rape and domestic abuse, that the not proven verdict is more often applied in crimes of rape and attempted rape compared to other crimes; notes the strong case that can be made for the abolition of the not proven verdict; further notes that the Scottish jury system is a complex, inter-related system and that verdicts must be considered alongside other key aspects of jury size, majority and corroboration, and against the background of wider, related work, including the recommendations of the Lord Justice Clerk's review on the management of sexual offence cases, encourages all those with an interest to consider and respond to the current Scottish Government consultation on the not proven verdict and related reforms; recognises that many survivors of sexual crimes find their experiences of the justice system to be re-traumatising, and believes that improving the experience of victims will require improvements throughout the criminal justice process and that this must start with clearing the backlog of court cases, which disproportionately affects access to justice for women and children, as a priority.

**The Presiding Officer:** I propose to ask a single question on two Parliamentary Bureau motions. Does any member object?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** The final question, therefore, is that motions S6M-02565 and S6M-02566, in the name of George Adam, on the

approval of Scottish statutory instruments, be agreed to.

*Meeting closed at 17:26.*

*Motions agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016 (Register of Persons Holding a Controlled Interest in Land) Amendment Regulations 2021 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Best Start Grants and Scottish Child Payment (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2021 [draft] be approved.



This is the final edition of the *Official Report* for this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

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