



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Education, Children and Young People Committee

Wednesday 12 January 2022

Session 6



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body

Information on the Scottish Parliament's copyright policy can be found on the website - www.parliament.scot or by contacting Public Information on 0131 348 5000

Wednesday 12 January 2022

CONTENTS

Col.

BUDGET 2022-23 1

EDUCATION, CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE COMMITTEE

1st Meeting 2022, Session 6

CONVENER

*Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)

*Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)

*James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)

*Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)

*Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green)

*Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab)

*Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con)

*Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Graeme Logan (Scottish Government)

Shirley-Anne Somerville (Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Stephen Herbert

LOCATION

The Robert Burns Room (CR1)

Scottish Parliament

Education, Children and Young People Committee

Wednesday 12 January 2022

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:30]

Budget 2022-23

The Convener (Stephen Kerr): Good morning, and welcome to the first meeting in 2022 of the Education, Children and Young People Committee. This is a virtual meeting.

The first item on the agenda is an evidence session with the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, as part of our scrutiny of the Scottish Government budget for 2022-23. I warmly welcome Shirley-Anne Somerville MSP and her officials. Graeme Logan is the director of learning and Alison Cumming is the director of early learning and childcare at the Scottish Government.

As is our custom, I invite the cabinet secretary to make a short opening statement before we move on to questions.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Shirley-Anne Somerville): I will take a few minutes to make a short opening statement. I will then be happy to take questions.

As the committee knows, the Scottish budget was introduced on 9 December. At that time, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy made it clear that the budget cannot deliver the resources that all our partners want. There are areas in which she and, indeed, the Government as a whole would have wished to go further.

Without Covid funding, our day-to-day funding for 2022-23 will be significantly less than it is in this year. The Scottish Fiscal Commission has said that the Scottish Government's budget next year will be

"2.6 per cent lower than in 2021-22"

and that,

"after accounting for inflation the reduction is 5.2 per cent."

That comes at a time when we undeniably need to invest in the economy and help public services to recover, and despite the real and on-going impacts of the pandemic. We have allocated our resources in the best way that we can in seeking to deliver our key priorities.

In the education and skills portfolio, our priority is to ensure that all children and young people, whatever their background, grow up loved, safe

and respected so that they reach their full potential. The overall portfolio budget has increased from £2,814.9 million in 2021-22 to £2,927.1 million in 2022-23, which is a 4 per cent increase in cash terms.

The budget includes record increased investment in teacher recruitment—there is the biggest increase to support teacher recruitment since 2007. We are providing funding of £145.5 million for teachers and classroom assistants, which is enough to employ around 2,500 teachers and 500 support staff. That will enable local authorities to permanently employ additional staff who were recruited during the pandemic. We are also providing a further £2.5 million to deliver additional teacher training places.

We have provided £200 million for the Scottish attainment challenge. That is part of our commitment to provide £1 billion over this session of Parliament to tackle the poverty-related attainment gap and to achieve the best possible outcomes for all our children and young people.

We are providing funding to reduce the costs of the school day and remove barriers to children from low-income families. That includes £11.8 million to maintain the school clothing grant at the increased levels introduced in August 2021; £12 million for local government to continue to remove the charges for instrumental music tuition; and £8 million for local government to continue to remove charges that are sometimes associated with core elements of the curriculum, such as art or home economics.

We have allocated more than £72 million for the continued expansion of free school meals. That will provide lunches for all children in primaries 1 to 5 and in special schools, and it will support the infrastructure that is required to roll out lunches to all primary school children. We will invest £22 million to provide meals during school holidays for the children who need them most. Funding is also being provided to maintain the subsidy arrangements for the provision of milk. My officials will work with partners to develop a phased approach to the delivery of a universal milk scheme, which will be aligned to the expansion of free school meals.

Some £15 million in the budget supports the development of the infrastructure that is required to provide an electronic device for every school-age child. We have provided a further £5 million to tackle digital inclusion in colleges, universities and the community learning and development sector.

The budget includes £544 million for the delivery of free, funded early learning and childcare for three and four-year-olds and for two-year-olds from lower-income households. We are also investing £10 million in holiday childcare for low-

income families and £3 million in the early phasing in of wraparound childcare.

We are providing a further £5 million to renew play parks in Scotland as part of a £60 million programme over the course of this parliamentary session to ensure that children have access to high-quality outdoor play.

As part of our commitment to keep the Promise, an initial £50 million has been provided to establish a whole-family wellbeing fund, which will provide person-centred holistic support for children and their families.

Next year's budget maintains college resource funding at £675.7 million. Capital funding for colleges has increased by £41 million. Resource funding for universities has increased by £21 million, to £789.2 million, to meet the cost of on-going support for the additional places previously added for students affected by the Scottish Qualifications Authority's alternative certification model.

Scotland has a moral imperative to address the wrongs of the past, while recognising that nothing can ever make up for the suffering that survivors of historical child abuse have endured. Some £41 million has been provided to make payments under the statutory redress scheme in 2022-23. That is an increase of £31 million from this year.

Improving the life chances of our children, young people and learners of all ages through excellence and equity in education continues to be a key delivery priority for the Government and this portfolio.

I am happy to take the committee's questions.

The Convener: Thank you for that opening statement, cabinet secretary.

You will recall that the committee wrote to you on 10 November, as part of our pre-budget scrutiny. Having heard evidence, the committee agreed that setting outcomes and clearly explaining how success will be measured are critical to assessing the effectiveness of any intervention. The committee is therefore always keen to find out more from the Government about outcomes. Are you in line with the committee's reasoning about measuring not inputs but the outputs that come from the expenditure that you have just described?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: That is an important point, and I would be interested to hear more about that from the committee. I can give a couple of examples of how we are moving forward with that.

The national improvement framework is one example. We are determined to ensure that spending on the education and skills portfolio has

a direct impact on the national improvement framework and the work from that. That is all about improving outcomes for children and young people. The latest version of the framework was published in December. That is one example of the work that we do.

I also point to the work on the Scottish attainment challenge. There will be £1 billion of expenditure during this session of Parliament. It is vital that we know that the money is being spent in the most effective fashion. That is why my announcement to Parliament included the work that we will do with local authorities on stretch aims so that we will know what the money is being spent on and what schools and local authorities think that it will deliver. We will work closely with local authorities. Once we have that information, Education Scotland can ensure support for local authorities to deliver those outcomes, and we will be able to see what is being done to achieve them.

Those are two examples. The committee raises a fair point, and I am keen to see where we can do further work.

The Convener: As you will appreciate, cabinet secretary, the committee has not plucked that out of the air. Audit Scotland has made direct recommendations to the Government about the importance of setting out in advance in that area of public policy and many other areas of public policy the benefits that we expect will happen because of the money that is committed on behalf of the Scottish taxpayer. I take it that you agree with that.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Yes, I do. Again, the aspects around the attainment challenge funding relate specifically to some of the responses from Audit Scotland in its work on the first phase. We absolutely took that feedback on board and listened carefully to what was said as we went through the refresh for the second phase of the SAC.

The Convener: On 18 August last year, you tweeted:

"£80m of COVID recovery funding to be made permanent allowing councils to offer further permanent contracts to teachers. This is in addition to the £65.5m funding announced last week for 1,000 additional teachers as part of our 100 days commitment."

Just a few days before you sent that tweet, you confirmed in answer to my parliamentary question that 12 per cent of all Scotland's teachers were on temporary contracts. In the light of your tweet and other comments that have been made in Parliament and elsewhere, can you tell me whether there are any teachers on temporary contracts as of today?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: The figures are updated regularly, but not in real time. For

example, we know from the teacher censuses that we have 2,000 additional teachers overall. That is an important reflection of the funding that is going in. However, we still need to see the figures—they are not yet showing up in a teacher census because of the timing of when the census is done—on the move from temporary to permanent contracts. We will see them in the future, in the figures that come out of the teacher census.

The Government's clear direction, along with encouragement, is that the funding has now been made permanent. We heard from local authorities that one of the reasons why the number of teachers on temporary contracts was so high was that the funding was temporary. We have now taken that challenge away from local authorities. They—not national Government—are the recruiters of teachers, but, now that the funding is in place, we will be able to encourage them to ensure that they change those temporary contracts to permanent contracts. However, that will not show up in the latest teacher census, simply because of the timing—

The Convener: I am sorry to interrupt you, cabinet secretary, but are you saying that you do not know whether that money has been used thus far to make temporary contracts permanent? That is what I think you are saying.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: It is a bit early for us to be able to determine the impact that the money has had, but we are keeping a close eye on the situation. When the figures have been updated through the teacher census, we will be able to determine whether that is happening.

That is certainly the clear wish and encouragement from Government and, to be fair, local authorities are picking up on that, but the figures will not show up until the next teacher census.

The Convener: In an earlier evidence session, I asked the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and one of the teaching unions the same question. They were equally unsure about what is happening to that money.

I will ask you a different question. In the spirit of what I started out by talking about this morning, around outcomes, what would success look like for you, as the cabinet secretary for education, as an outcome from spending that additional £80 million? What should the number of temporary contracts, as a percentage of the total teaching faculty of the country, look like when we get the result that you are looking towards?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: We made a commitment that that funding can allow local authorities to deliver on permanent contracts. We know, to an approximate level, how many teachers that money will be able to recruit. For example, the

£145.5 million that is in the budget is enough to employ 2,500 teachers and 500 support staff. We will be looking at the changing numbers of staff, given how much we know that money will be able to pay for.

Some local authorities may choose to spend more on permanent support staff rather than on permanent teachers. That is a local choice that they will be able to take, depending on what they think is right for their area. There may be some change to that, given local circumstances, but our analysis is based on how much money is going in and how much that funding should be able to provide for teachers and support staff. We will measure on that basis.

09:45

The Convener: I would like to press you on that. That is all good, but what numbers and what percentage are we looking at? The level is currently 12 per cent, which is one in eight of all Scotland's teachers. What is the success that you are looking for in terms of a reduction—I presume that we agree that we want a reduction in that number—

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Yes.

The Convener: How far down can we get that number for the £80 million—[*Inaudible.*]

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Convener, you have frozen on my screen. I do not know whether the problem is at my end or at the committee's end. I do not know whether anyone else on the committee can hear me, but I have lost the convener.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP): He seems to have frozen, as far as I can see.

The Deputy Convener (Kaukab Stewart): In the absence of the convener, I will take over as deputy convener. Good morning, cabinet secretary. Please continue with your answer.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Certainly.

As I was trying to say to the convener, we have more teachers now than we have had since 2008. We have seen that addition in the teacher census that came out. We know how much funding we put in—that is the £145.5 million—and we know how many teachers that should employ. As I said, that is 2,500 teachers and 500 support staff. That is what I am looking to see a change in.

As I reiterated to the convener, there may be changes to that, because local authorities may decide to vary the numbers between teachers and support staff. We cannot put an exact figure on that, because we are not dictating to local authorities how the money should be spent. Quite

rightly, it is up to local authorities to determine local need.

That is certainly the aspect that I am looking at. I know what funding went in, and I know what that funding can produce. We will keep a close eye on the figures to ensure that that is what the funding actually delivers.

The Deputy Convener: You referred to the teacher census. Do we have an idea of when the next teacher census will come out? If we could compare the figures between the most recent census and the next one, that would give us tangible results.

I remember from when I was teaching that a certain percentage of teachers prefer to remain on temporary contracts, for one reason or another. It is important to put that on record. Not every single teacher will want to be on a permanent contract.

I also want to ask about supply teachers. The use of supply teachers has been mentioned to me a few times within the profession, especially regarding support for staff absences, which we are inevitably dealing with in the context of Covid. Any comments on the use of supply teachers would be helpful.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: The census is annual. It comes out in December, so we have not had it long. In the interim period, we have to rely on our on-going discussions with local authorities. As I said, the official teacher census is published every December. We will monitor the situation very closely with local authorities in the interim, but that will not involve official statistics until that point.

The issue of supply staff is key and it ties into the point that you have made. Although there are teachers on temporary contracts who would wish to be in permanent employment—that is what the Government wants to see, and that is why I have made the funding available—there are some people who wish to be on a temporary contract and who want to work in that way. We will never change that entirely, because part of the workforce wants to be flexible. What is key is that we do everything that we can to encourage local authorities to have permanent contracts, where at all possible. The number of supply staff is exceptionally important to allow for a flexible workforce, particularly at this time.

I should make the committee aware that, earlier in the pandemic, we put a call out via the General Teaching Council for Scotland for retired teachers to come back into the profession for some time, should they want to. The uptake of that was exceptionally low—a very small number came forward from that call. I understand that the uptake was similarly low in other countries that have tried that method of approach. However, we are looking to do that again to see whether any difference can

be made. We expect the numbers to be low again, as in other countries, but we think that that is something that should be approached.

The Deputy Convener: Bob Doris has a brief supplementary question.

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): I want to explore the line of questioning that the convener previously explored in the evidence session with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. Just for clarity, are the additional moneys that are now baselined in next year's budget ring fenced, and—if this is not contradictory—are they ring fenced with a degree of flexibility so that, for example, there must be—*[Inaudible.]*—permanent contracts but the balance between classroom assistants and teachers is up to each local authority to decide on the basis of what best meets local needs? I would get that.

In addition, other than the teacher census, what is the reporting exercise for this? If we increase the number of teachers, that might not involve a significant fall in the number of temporary teachers, because temporary posts could be converted to permanent posts and new teachers could come in for specific projects on a temporary basis—it would not tell the whole story. Will we have a consistent reporting exercise across 32 local authorities, to better understand what is happening with teachers and classroom assistants in Scotland? If the teacher census could do that, that would be great, but, if it cannot, can the Scottish Government do something else so that, in a few months' time, as part of on-going budget scrutiny, our committee can see what progress has been made?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I certainly think that it is something that the teacher census can look at. I am very conscious of the fact that, just as the Government is looking to ensure that the money delivers over this year, the committee has a key interest in that as well.

We do not dictate to local authorities how the money should be spent. It is important that local authorities are the recruiters of educational staff. They are able to determine what is best in their local area, so we do not provide the funding on the basis that it has to be for a certain percentage of teachers or support staff. That would be the wrong message to send to local authorities. We are keen to ensure that it is delivered locally by them.

We have to be careful not to overburden local authorities with reporting duties on this matter, but we keep in close contact with councils and COSLA right across the year in order to be able to determine what is happening. Numbers are very fluid—they change from week to week depending on what is happening in local authorities. It is not a static exercise. We will continue to keep a close

eye on the situation and we will keep the committee updated in any way that we can.

The Deputy Convener: I believe that the convener is now back online, so I will hand back to him.

The Convener: Thank you for stepping in Kaukab. I apologise: my computer suddenly decided to shut down. Perhaps it did not like my line of questioning.

I have a couple more quick questions, cabinet secretary, and I would like quick responses. It would be fine for you to be brief.

How would you rate teacher morale in schools?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: A recent survey by the Educational Institute of Scotland showed that this has been an exceptionally difficult time not only for teachers but for other school staff, too. This is a very difficult time for everyone as we go through the pandemic. Teachers have had to adapt very quickly to what has been happening, which has been exceptionally difficult. I pay tribute to them. We have taken teacher wellbeing very seriously and have invested £2 million in that. We will continue to ensure that there is support from Education Scotland for teachers, because we recognise that this is a very difficult time for them.

The Convener: You are clearly concerned about teachers' morale and wellbeing.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I am always concerned about teachers' wellbeing. During a pandemic, there is a particular responsibility on the Government to take that seriously.

The Convener: Are you also concerned about teachers' morale?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Yes.

The Convener: In September, the Scottish Government put in place a partnership with Place2Be to support teachers' mental health. What has been the uptake of that scheme? How would you rate its performance so far? What outcomes do you expect it to deliver?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I do not have figures about the uptake, but I would be happy to provide that information to the committee. The feedback that I have seen is that the scheme has been widely welcomed and that teachers have found such schemes useful. Education Scotland has also delivered on some aspects of teacher wellbeing. It is important to look at those things in the round. The feedback that I have had is that the scheme has been well received and well used. I do not have the exact figures to hand, but I can supply them to the committee.

The Convener: It would be very useful if you could bring us up to speed on the uptake.

Other members may pick this up later. You said in the chamber in December that the reduction in contact hours—which some people call chalk-face hours—of 90 minutes per week would happen in the next academic year, which begins in August. How is that going? What has been the outcome of your negotiations with the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers? Do you expect to achieve the target that you have given yourself, which is important in the light of the study from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: We would certainly like to deliver that. It is important that the Government sets itself a very challenging target, and we want to deliver that. However, that is not something that the Government can deliver; it is something for the SNCT to look at. We must look at the planning and modelling. If the reduction is to go ahead in August, as the Government would wish it to, what does that mean? Can it be delivered? We might have to move forward on a phased basis. Would that be an easier way of changing the system? The Government is keen to move forward with that from August, but we must look at the planning and modelling to see whether that is feasible across the education system.

The Convener: Is it an aspiration more than a commitment?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: It is not something that the Scottish Government can deliver. We must work with local authorities and trade unions. We would like to move forward quickly, with the trade unions. Our wish to deliver on that comes down to the brass tacks of planning and modelling whether that can be achieved, but we are pushing towards that. It will have different implications for different local authorities, for different sizes of schools and for primary and secondary schools. We need to get into those fine details.

The Convener: People will be concerned by the response that you have given to my last couple of questions on contact time. Your words in the chamber on 14 December were clear. You talked about the Government's

"commitment to reduce class contact time for teachers by 90 minutes per week".—[*Official Report*, 14 December 2021; c 61.]

You made a commitment, but it sounds as though you are now stepping back from that commitment and saying that someone else will have to deliver it. That is how it is coming across to me. Is that how you mean it to come across?

10:00

Shirley-Anne Somerville: We are committed to driving the work forward. The Government would like that to happen in August, but the Government

cannot make it happen. The Government is absolutely committed to doing everything that we can, on our side, to make that happen, but it is not just up to the Government. The Government is willing to do that, and I know that our partners in local authorities and trade unions will be looking at the matter very carefully, too. There is a willingness to make that happen, and there is an absolute commitment from the Government to do everything that we can to make it happen, but we have to look at the very fine details of how we make it happen in every school. We have to consider the different sizes of schools and local authorities. We will start by then if we can.

The Convener: Will all the costs of the reduction in contact time be met by the Scottish Government?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Yes. In many ways, we are determined to drive up teacher numbers so quickly to ensure that we can move forward on reducing class contact time.

The Convener: Thank you so much for answering my questions. I think that I have taken more than the time that I should have taken, because of all the high jinks with the technology.

I now turn to my deputy convener colleague, Kaukab Stewart. Do you wish to come back in?

Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): While you were offline, I was able to ask my questions on teacher recruitment and numbers, so, if it is okay with everyone, I will move on to my line of questioning.

I can pick up on the previous thread quite nicely. Policy agendas, commitments and priorities are set at a Government level, but the responsibility for delivering those obviously lies at a local government level. In relation to local government responsibilities, there is a balance to be considered between having ring-fenced money for specifics and having discretionary funding. I would like to explore the strengths and weaknesses of each distribution method. How has the Government assessed the strengths and weaknesses of providing ring-fenced money and of providing discretionary funding?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: The key strength of providing specific funding for specific purposes is that that ensures that all the money that is provided for a certain purpose goes to that purpose. I point to the example of the expansion to 1,140 hours of early learning and childcare. Such projects have very much been a shared priority of the Scottish Government and local government. Such funding has allowed the Scottish Government to move forward with the commitment to provide that early learning and childcare via local authorities.

I appreciate that ring fencing funding reduces local authority discretion in some areas, but it is worth noting that, although ring-fenced funding is for increased investment in services such as schools and nurseries, 93 per cent of the funding that we will provide is not formally ring fenced. We recognise that local authorities have called for less ring-fenced funding, and the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy has committed to reviewing all ring-fenced funding as part of the resource spending review. We will continue our constructive engagement with local government on education areas that are ring fenced.

Kaukab Stewart: I take your point about the fact that ring-fenced money allows a specific route to ensure the delivery of Government policy. However, we are all aware that the needs and priorities of local authorities can vary across the country. Several questions have been put to me about the consistency of delivery across all local authorities. Is there a role—I imagine that there is a pretty strong one—for the Government in ensuring consistency across all local authorities in Scotland? What is that role, and has any work been done on monitoring and assessing the consistency of delivery?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: You have raised an important point. As funding leaves national Government and moves to local government, it is—absolutely—for local government to determine how that money is spent if it is outside ring-fenced budgets.

It is very important that we all have a close regard to the variation in outcomes in education, which should be a shared concern for us all. The variation of how things are done in education is absolutely to be encouraged, because we should not have a one-size-fits-all policy set from Edinburgh. However, variation in the outcomes for children is something that we are determined to look at. I would point to some of the key aspects in the Scottish attainment challenge funding, which I raised with the convener earlier, that we are determined to move forward with and that look specifically at variation.

In other areas, we will, of course, set outcome frameworks for what we expect from those programmes. There are outcome frameworks for the 1,140 hours policy, so that there is an understanding of what is delivered for the funding that goes in. It is important that not just the Scottish Government but local authorities know what the outcomes of ring-fenced funding are and that they have an awareness of what happens with the funding that leaves national Government and goes to local government.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): I will stick with the previous line of questioning about teacher recruitment and numbers.

The £145 million that was announced as part of the budget, which the cabinet secretary mentioned in her opening statement, is the largest single increase for teacher recruitment since 2007. However, I want to drill down into the detail of that. Subsequent to the publication of the budget, that number was subject to some negotiation with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities—as is normal, because local authorities will deploy the fund. My understanding is that that £145 million, as well as being broken down by 32 local authorities, is broken down into what are essentially five funding streams, which are listed as funding for teachers, primary teaching staff, secondary teaching staff, special schools and teacher pay.

Will the cabinet secretary, in the first instance, explain what the distinction is between funding for teachers and the three streams of primary, secondary and special schools? It appears that funding for teachers is the largest single amount. For example, Aberdeen City Council is first on the list and there is £2.6 million for it in funding for teachers, but there is then £800,000 for primary teaching staff, £900,000 for secondary teaching staff and £240,000 for special schools. What are those three additional columns for if they are separate from that stream of funding for teachers?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: You have raised a very important point about how that money goes out to local authorities and local authorities' discretion to move it forward. Yes, the money will go from the Scottish Government to local authorities to allow them to make the decisions that they wish to make, within the funding streams that we put out.

Alison Cumming or Graeme Logan may wish to give more detail of that.

Graeme Logan (Scottish Government): It is clear that there is some discretion for local government, because we want local authorities to use the funding for additional teachers to meet their needs locally—for example, through providing additional support for learning, given the figures of pupils with additional support needs. Every teacher in mainstream education now supports children with additional support needs. We want to provide as much flexibility as possible across primary, secondary and special education in order to meet local needs, which can be challenging in areas where there are different shortages in particular subjects or specialisms. There is a lot of flexibility in how the funding can be used to employ the teachers that are needed locally. We look at that carefully in relation to workforce planning so that, for example, we do not end up with too many primary teachers and not enough other teachers.

Ross Greer: That is a useful clarification of the purpose of those additional three columns. I have one other technical question about the fifth stream of funding, which is teacher pay. I will use Aberdeen City Council as an example, because it is first on the spreadsheet that I can see. We are told that £200,000 is allocated for teacher pay as part of Aberdeen City Council's allocation of the overall £145 million. What exactly does teacher pay mean there? I presume that the overwhelming majority of the money in the other four columns will be spent on teacher pay. A small amount will go towards the admin payroll and so on, but the £145 million will overwhelmingly be spent on paying additional teachers, so what is the purpose of the specific allocation for teacher pay within that?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: There is no specific allocation within the overall Scottish Government budget for teacher pay. As Mr Greer rightly points out, the budget for teacher recruitment is, in effect, for teachers' pay. That is what it is spent on. The committee will be aware that we are still going through the process of seeking an agreement on teachers' pay for this financial year. The committee will also be aware that an offer was made by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, which is currently with the trade union members for discussion and decision.

With the committee's forbearance, I will not say too much about the current teacher's pay situation, because we are clearly in the middle of the process. That process has gone on for an exceptionally long time, and I appreciate that teachers are very frustrated about how long it is taking. We need to come to agreement on teachers' pay, but it needs to work its way through the SNCT, as per the usual process.

The Scottish Government stands by to make any changes that it can to allow that process to move forward, but the Government has already put in additional funding to the overall local government settlement, which assisted with the wider local government workforce planning and is a demonstration of how we have played our part in moving things forward. The process must now run its course through the SNCT.

Ross Greer: I have a final question on the issue. You have just been in discussion with the convener about the Government's commitment to reducing teacher contact time. What is the relationship between the additional funding for teacher recruitment and the objective of reducing class contact time and getting a more balanced workload for the existing teaching workforce?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Teacher recruitment is absolutely integral to partners moving forward with the reduction in class contact time, which is exactly why the Government has invested so

heavily in that. We are aware that there are practical challenges in bringing that in, of which timetabling is one, and that schools continue to be under pressure due to dealing with Covid. We know that there is a lot of pressure on the system, but one of the ways in which we can assist—if we can—is through a reduction in class contact time for teachers. Going back to an earlier point that we discussed, that is important for staff welfare.

Ross Greer: Thanks very much for that.

I have probably taken up enough time, convener. I would be keen to come back in later, regarding the costs of Covid, but I am sure that other members will want to contribute before you come back to me.

10:15

The Convener: Thank you, Ross. Yes, I will try to get you back in when you indicate.

We will now go to Stephanie Callaghan.

Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): I have a couple of different questions. One is on free school meals and another is on qualitative data.

On free school meals, I am delighted with the £72 million investment and the £22 million for school holiday clubs, although it is a bit concerning to hear that there is expected to be a 5.2 per cent real-terms reduction next year. I trust that those things will now be prioritised.

On the school holiday money, we know that part of the thinking behind having free school meals for primary children is the fact that it increases uptake among the most vulnerable children and it reduces the stigma.

This is a point for clarification. North Lanarkshire Council and South Lanarkshire Council have approached this differently. North Lanarkshire Council is running its holiday lunch time clubs only for those children who currently get free school meals, whereas South Lanarkshire Council's clubs are open to everyone. I would like some clarity on the funding for the school holidays. Is it expected to cover all children, or is it specifically for vulnerable children?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: The support that we can provide to young people in general during the school holidays has been an important development in our approach to Covid, and it is something that we are keen to move further on as we eventually see the back of Covid.

The entitlement is for those who receive free school meals. It is targeted. However, that is the minimum, and we know that some local authorities will have gone further and will go further. We can ensure that we are delivering a project that works

for families on low incomes, reaching out to a diverse range of children—particularly children with disabilities or additional support needs and children from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, for instance. Although the focus is on targeting those who receive free school meals, we are conscious of the need not to consider everyone as one group; it is a matter of considering what can be done within the funding to support children and young people from different backgrounds, ensuring that the support is going as wide as it can under the entitlement.

Stephanie Callaghan: It would be interesting to see whether a bit of work could be undertaken on the local authorities that have gone a bit further, to determine whether demand has increased hugely in those areas.

I will move on to my second question. It is good to see what you wrote in your letter, in response to the convener's letter, about respecting

"the need for stronger national and local data"

across

"all the four capacities"

for curriculum for excellence. You also mention the

"short-life sub-group of the curriculum and assessment board ... to explore options for a sample-based survey".

I am really interested in the stuff about the quality of data, which has come up often across the different strands that we are considering. Can you expand on that further, or can you say something about the idea of considering that more widely than just the curriculum for excellence stuff?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: We are keen to gather the correct data. In many ways, this points back to some of the initial points that the convener made about gathering the correct data so that we know what the outcomes are from the educational spend that goes in.

The short-life working group is a response to the recommendations from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, which said that we needed to see what more could be done to consider the other three capacities within curriculum for excellence, on which we do not currently have the same level of data. We have a wide range of other surveys, such as the health and wellbeing survey, that paint a picture of young people's progress.

I am sure that the committee will come back to this area at some point in the future. I am happy to provide an update on the work around data that is being done in the short-life working group and on where it is going once we reach a point at which decisions and recommendations have been made.

Stephanie Callaghan: On the idea of having a wider focus, are you going to be looking at the need for qualitative data in education?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: We have a wide range of surveys that go out. As I said, the health and wellbeing survey is one of those. We are keen to look at the data that we gather in general to ensure that it provides the information that we think we require. That is why we have a short-life working group looking at those aspects.

We also have the growing up in Scotland survey, which looks at some of the types of data that the member is talking about. I hope that that reassures the committee that we are keen to gather the right data in the right way to enable us to determine the impact of policies not just in education but in other areas, along with the impact of what is happening in society in general, on children and young people.

Stephanie Callaghan: That is great. It is really helpful.

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): I think that it would be useful to follow up on some of the issues around data, cabinet secretary. The only data that we have so far regarding the impact of the pandemic on attainment and school achievement are the deeply concerning figures that came out regarding primary school attainment levels. They show that attainment is at its lowest-ever level and that the gap between the poorest kids and the rest is at its widest ever. You would share those concerns, would you not?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Those statistics are exceptionally concerning. As I said when those figures came out, we are seeing such impacts across the United Kingdom and, indeed, further afield, but that set of statistics is concerning.

Michael Marra: When did you first have sight of those results? They were published on 14 December, and it was trailed in little snippets in various speeches and announcements that you expected the data to be very concerning for us all.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: We had sight of them very close to publication, given that they are official statistics. However, I did not need to see the statistics to know that they were going to be poor. The results of the equity audit, which took place many months previously, pointed in a direction of travel that suggested that the statistics were going to be bad. Given that they are official statistics, they went through a process in which I did not see them until very close to the time of publication. However, as I said, I did not need to see the statistics to know what the direction of travel was.

Michael Marra: There is a broad logic to that. You mentioned the international experience and

the learning that has been lost, so I can understand that.

The budget was published on 9 December. Given the long-term concerns that you had had, what detailed representations did you make to the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy with regard to dealing with the impact on attainment of what had happened in our schools and the absence of learning? What resources did you ask for regarding the initiatives that you were putting in place? What argument were you making to colleagues to ensure that we could deal with the impacts?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: We had set out the direction of travel clearly in our Covid recovery plans before the budget came out, because we recognised that there was going to be a very big challenge in that area. That is exactly why we made a commitment to £1 billion in funding for the Scottish attainment challenge, and it is why a commitment was made pre-budget to make permanent, and therefore baseline, the funding for teacher recruitment.

We knew that it was going to be a difficult time for children and young people, and we dealt with that by putting in train, for Covid recovery, the money for the Scottish attainment challenge. That was funded through the budget process. Of course, it was on top of the £500 million for Covid response and recovery that we had already put in place as the pandemic began.

Michael Marra: Are you saying that the sight of the emerging evidence about the scale of the impact did not really make much difference to the approach that you took? It has been well recognised by colleagues and trade unions that the Covid recovery plan is a repackaging of previous announcements such as pupil equity funding and attainment challenge funding—although there has been a £20 million cut to that. The amounts of money are the same across a number of years. Does the scale of the challenge not require something of a different proportion to what you were doing three years ago?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: We increased the funding for the Scottish attainment challenge from £750 million in the previous parliamentary session to £1 billion.

Michael Marra: That is only because this is an extra year. The funding has been spread across another year, but there is no more money per year than there was in the previous parliamentary session.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: It is a substantial investment in children's education to increase expenditure on it.

Michael Marra: But there is no more money per year.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: This financial year's budget included a £20 million Covid premium. Given that no Covid consequentials have come to the Scottish Government this year, it has been exceptionally difficult to make further progress or to provide specific Covid premiums.

In my opening remarks, I pointed to the fact that we have seen the biggest investment in teacher recruitment for many years, in recognition of the challenges that education was facing and was about to face. That is why we have made the massive investment that we have made in teacher recruitment. We knew that this was going to be a challenging time.

Michael Marra: Cabinet secretary, you have already acknowledged to the committee that that investment will take us back to the number of teachers that we had in 2008, if we can reach that. That is not even as many teachers as your Government first took on in 2007. The challenge that we face now is the greatest that we have ever faced.

We have very limited statistical evidence so far. I would like to see an awful lot more. Time and again, we have called for a focus on evidence. My question is how proportionate your response has been to the scale of the challenge. It does not seem to me as though, in your discussions with the finance secretary, you have been able to make or win the argument for more resource or for a more proportionate response to the challenge. Is that fair? The draft budget is a repetition of previous plans that do not really take into account the scale of the challenge that we face.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: It is not fair to say that the funding that we are putting into teacher recruitment—which is the biggest increase in funding for teacher recruitment since 2007—is a rehash of what we were doing already. It is a substantial change in investment compared to last year.

Michael Marra: You are only making good on the cuts that you have made since 2007, and, even if we get to that welcome position, there will be no overall increase in teacher numbers. I welcome the funding and the plan to get back to that position, but your Government made those cuts.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: The most recent teacher census showed that we have an additional 2,000 teachers. We have committed to, and will deliver, an additional 3,500 teachers and 500 support staff during this session of Parliament. A recent report from the Institute for Fiscal Studies highlighted the fact that Scotland has had the highest spend per pupil of the four UK nations for

the past 13 years and that our pupil-teacher ratio is now the best that it has been since 2009.

We are at a stage at which we have put in significant investment both to deal with the challenges of the pandemic—that relates to the £500 million expenditure on Covid recovery that I mentioned earlier—and to address attainment, and we are working on teacher recruitment and other areas. That shows our determination take the matter seriously.

10:30

Michael Marra: As you have acknowledged, the statistics are concerning for all of us—you called them “exceptionally concerning”. It is important that we get more evidence about the impact of the pandemic. What research have you commissioned to inform your policy and decisions about the recovery in education, particularly in relation to secondary schools? You will acknowledge that there is a gap—perhaps an understandable one, in your view—in the data at that level. What other structural research into the impact of the pandemic can the committee expect to be made available to us?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: We had the equity audit, which the Government published, and we have exceptionally regular discussions at the Covid-19 education recovery group—CERG—on the issue. The national improvement framework report that was published in December included evidence on the issue, too. Clearly, there were some gaps in what could be collated for that report because of the impact of Covid, but that is certainly one of the key areas where we will also be able to see the impact of the pandemic. We also keep in regular discussion with our international council of education advisers, and we learn what we can from that. I have regular contact with my teachers panel and the Scottish education council to ensure that, in the interim periods between the official statistics being delivered or NIFs being published, we discuss the impact of issues regularly with stakeholders.

Michael Marra: So, you have not commissioned anything new to address that gap in information relating to secondary schools.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: The reason why the material was not collated as part of the work around the NIF is that it was not possible to do that during the period of the pandemic.

Michael Marra: I understand that.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: We have looked carefully at what schools can publish, given the implications of Covid for that. I hope that the committee will appreciate that there were understandable reasons why some of the material

could not be delivered. Of course, again, we have the material from our stakeholders that is being looked at in this regard, as well as material from the Scottish Qualifications Authority that relates to secondary schools.

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): Good morning. Like most education stakeholders, I look forward to the announcement that you will make in May regarding the multiyear funding plans for further and higher education. How can you ensure that those packages, whatever they may be, will support the colleges and universities in addressing long-term sustainability challenges such as rising staff costs and pension costs?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: We have carefully considered calls from further and higher education institutions for multiyear funding packages. I am sympathetic to that idea on the basis that that will allow for better planning. Obviously, given that the Scottish Government does not itself have a multiyear budget, providing multiyear funding for those institutions is challenging. The issue of further multiyear funding will be taken forward as part of the work that the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy is doing. The Scottish Funding Council review also highlighted the importance of that, and we are keen to take early action on the SFC review overall to determine what else can be done to support the sector.

On what will happen from now on, there are aspects on which Governments should not intervene—industrial relations within the sectors, for example. As universities are autonomous bodies, industrial relations should certainly be left to them. It is also important that the role of colleges should be allowed to play out in relation to trade unions and to ensure that there is a positive working relationship with colleges and universities on industrial relations.

The spending review gives us the opportunity to consider how we can assist the higher and further education sectors in delivering not just for young people but for learners of all ages, as they do.

Bob Doris: What engagement work is planned for the college and university sectors between now and May to establish that the funding, whatever it may be, can be used most effectively?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: That is where the SFC has an exceptionally important role to play. It will engage with the sector to allocate the funding to the institutions and, importantly, continue to discuss with colleges and universities aspects of long-term financial sustainability—for example, long-term financial forecasts. It has an integral role to play as we move to the institutional settlements that will come from the funding. My officials and I will keep in close contact with the council as it continues to make its decisions on that and,

particularly, as we move to wider discussions on the spending review for future years.

Bob Doris: I do not doubt the financial challenges that the Scottish Government faces in setting the budget, but Colleges Scotland says that it has had a 2.6 per cent real-terms cut to its revenue budget, and 38 per cent of school leavers from the 20 per cent most deprived cohorts according to the Scottish index of multiple deprivation go to Scotland's colleges. Has the Scottish Government had discussions with Colleges Scotland about, or made any assessment of, the impact of what that body tells us is a 2.6 per cent real-terms cut?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I appreciate that the college sector has expressed disappointment about the settlement that it has been given. It has been an exceptionally challenging process, and I laid some of that out in the first part of my introductory statement.

The challenge, as we moved through the budget process, has been to deliver a fair settlement that allows the Government as a whole to deliver on our multiple priorities. We have supported the college sector, and its budget has been maintained for the coming financial year. I appreciate that that is a difficult settlement for colleges, but, as I said to Mr Dornan, the SFC will now work closely with the sector on the institutional settlements that will flow from that, to see how we can best deliver for the sector in what I readily admit is a difficult and challenging year.

Bob Doris: That is helpful, cabinet secretary. It was a frank and realistic answer on a budget that is challenging for Scotland's colleges. In the forthcoming academic year, how will you monitor what that impact will be on colleges? During any financial year, Barnett consequentials become available and the Government can leverage in other spending, so Scotland's colleges will rightly be looking at how they can get some financial respite and whether some of that money will be leveraged in.

I will give some examples of that. I am not sure whether the core budget for colleges, which I said was challenging, includes the £10 million that colleges spent under the young person's guarantee in the most recent financial year or the £20 million from the flexible workforce development fund that I believe was spent in colleges in the most recent financial year. We are looking at a challenging budget, but will additional money be invested in colleges that we might not be seeing in the core budget? What can colleges expect in relation to that that will allow them to plan ahead? Mr Dornan has already spoken about how multiyear budgets would help with forward planning. Can the cabinet secretary assure us that

we are coming back to colleges in what will be a challenging financial period?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: There are areas where different portfolios in the budget have an impact on education and skills, so, yes, there are aspects of the finance and economy portfolio budgets that will have an impact on the investment in colleges.

The young person's guarantee is an example of something that does not sit within my budget portfolio although responsibility for policy does, and we are continuing to work through how the final allocation for the young person's guarantee will be determined and what it will be. The overall point that it is not just the education and skills portfolio that has an impact on colleges is fair.

Bob Doris: Finally, convener, can I just ask the cabinet secretary—

The Convener: Very briefly, Bob.

Bob Doris: For once, this will be brief. Would it be possible to get at some point the full quantum of spending on colleges reported in the one place, so that the committee does not have to do its own budget scrutiny and look at other committees' scrutiny to get a global figure for the money that is to be spent in colleges in the coming financial year?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I am certainly happy to take that away and see what can be done. It is one of the challenges that the education budget presents. A lot of the education budget sits within the local government budget, as well as in other Government portfolios, most obviously the finance and economy portfolio, which particularly impacts on skills. I would be happy to report back to the committee on that and to point it in the direction of that spend if that would be helpful, convener.

Bob Doris: Thank you, cabinet secretary.

The Convener: Thank you, Bob. It is fair to point out that Alastair Sim of Universities Scotland and Shona Struthers from Colleges Scotland wrote a letter to the committee on 21 December. It is important to get your response to that on the record, cabinet secretary, because those two people represent their sector and they are gravely concerned. I will give you some quotes from that letter:

"The settlement will translate into a real terms cut to funding for both sectors".

The next quote is quite damning, so it is important to get your response to it. The letter says:

"The real terms cut in the 2022/23 budget settlement for further and higher education is part of an established overall pattern of a lack of investment in universities and colleges which has put real pressure on our students, staff and infrastructure."

They writers are saying that it is an "established overall pattern" from the Scottish Government. They go on to say:

"However, the outcome of the 2022/23 budget sends the deeply unfortunate signal that the Scottish Government does not fully recognise the role that colleges and universities play in the critical delivery of education, skills, and research, which absolutely support economic recovery and transformation. In that context, we are very concerned of the prospects for colleges and universities in a multi-year settlement which the Cabinet Secretary for Finance is expected to deliver in May 2022."

As I say, cabinet secretary, it is important for the committee to get your reaction to those very pointed comments on the record.

10:45

Shirley-Anne Somerville: As I said earlier, I appreciate that universities and colleges have expressed their disappointment at the settlement for those sectors. I point out the fact that this has been a difficult budget, for the reasons that I set out in my introductory remarks. The Government has spent the money that we have been allocated this year. We have had to make difficult choices in that.

I absolutely and fully appreciate the role that colleges and universities have played and will continue to play, particularly in our recovery from Covid. The fact that no consequentials arising from Covid are coming to the Scottish Government has presented us with challenges in those areas. We appreciate that. However, we have—

The Convener: Cabinet secretary, they say that there is

"an established overall pattern of a lack of investment".

That is not about one year's money, is it?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Within the budget, we are allocating nearly £2 billion to Scotland's universities and colleges. That is a fair settlement in a challenging area. We have also provided fair settlements in the past. I appreciate that there have been challenges but, for example, between 2007 and 2021, the college sector resource budget has increased by more than 30 per cent in cash terms. I give that as an example of how we can invest, have invested and will continue to invest in the college and university sector, and we will continue to look at that very closely in the spending review.

The Convener: I am sure that Universities Scotland and Colleges Scotland will be anxious to continue their discussion with you on the basis of their concerns and your response, which—to be frank—I am not sure will have given them much comfort.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I am quite surprised by the cabinet secretary's evidence. I do not think that she has given any acknowledgement to the fact that core school budgets will be cut by £100 million in this year's settlement. Why is she not spitting mad about that? Surely, it is her responsibility to stand up for school budgets.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I point to the fact that we have delivered a very strong budget for education and skills. We have seen investment—

Willie Rennie: There has been a £100 million cut. Do you have no issues with that at all?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: We have seen a very important development in our investment in teachers, for example, but if Mr Rennie will point to that £100 million cut and—

Willie Rennie: It is quite simple. The real-terms cut to councils is £268 million. Education is about half of what councils do, so I am being quite cautious in saying that the cut is around £100 million. There is no reference to or acknowledgement of that. Why are you not spitting mad about that? Surely, you should not be defending that cut to the core school budget; you should be arguing for an increase to it.

We heard from Michael Marra, who made some pretty clear points about the challenges—which you acknowledged—that pupils and teachers are facing in schools, yet you have imposed a cut of £100 million to their budget.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: With the greatest respect to Willie Rennie, I do not recognise or accept the figures that he has used. The 2022-23 local government settlement is £12.5 billion. That is fair, given the most challenging of circumstances. The figures that have been pointed to about cuts have been selective and misleading, as they do not take account of the complete funding that goes into local government.

When it comes to education, I point to the facts that the Institute for Fiscal Studies has calculated that school spending per pupil is higher in Scotland than it is in England, that we have provided extra resources to local councils, and that 2019-20 was the fifth year in a row in which there was a real-terms increase in local authority education expenditure.

With the greatest respect to Mr Rennie, I do not accept the premise of his question, and I propose—

Willie Rennie: With respect, your answer was rubbish, because the Scottish Parliament information centre has made it clear that there is a £268 million cut to local authority budgets, and half of local authorities' spending is on education. You have made various promises to fund extra

teachers and other things, and you should, of course, fund those, because those were your election promises, but that does not entitle you to cut £100 million from core school budgets.

This is not about England; it is about Scotland. I do not want to hear comparisons with elsewhere, because I care about pupils in Scotland. Cabinet secretary, why on earth are you not angry about the cut? I am angry. I cannot believe that the Government is cutting budgets at this time, so why are you not angry about it? That is what I do not understand. What you have said is very managerial.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Again, with the greatest respect to Mr Rennie, I do not accept the figures that he is using. The local government—

Willie Rennie: The figures are from the Scottish Parliament information centre. If you dig into your briefing, I am sure that you will discover that there is a £268 million cut. Councillors across the board, including Scottish National Party councillors, are spitting mad about the local authority settlement, so I cannot understand why you are not, given that education is a massive part of what local authorities do. Why are you not angry?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: The overall settlement that has been provided will deliver real-terms growth. It protects core budgets in cash terms, it will allow additional funding to be provided for teachers and support staff, and it contains funding for the 100 days commitments, some of which I mentioned in my introductory remarks. It also contains funding for the free school meals settlements.

If Mr Rennie wishes more money to go into local government or elsewhere, I am sure that he will tell me—or perhaps Ms Forbes later in the budget process—where money should be cut from to allow that to happen.

Willie Rennie: I might have to, because it is clear that the cabinet secretary will not make any efforts to argue for more funding for core school budgets. It is your job to stand up for education, but you are not making that case. Why on earth are you sitting here today complacently accepting the fact that the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy is, in effect, cutting £100 million from your core budget? That is undermining the work that you are doing. Why are you not making that case?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: The Government has provided a fair overall settlement for education and local government. I encourage Mr Rennie to put forward, perhaps for the first year, costed budget alternatives and to say whether he would like to take the money from health, justice, transport or our work on net zero. We have set out in the budget where the money is going. If Mr

Rennie wishes more money to be provided, he has to say where it will come from, given that the entire budget has been spent. He can demand that more action be taken, but he has to suggest where the money will come from if he is not satisfied with the Government's budget proposals.

Willie Rennie: The cabinet secretary has followed the script this morning. Teachers, councillors, pupils and parents will listen to the cabinet secretary's answers and will draw one conclusion, which is that she is not standing up for Scottish education and making the case for it. There would not be a £100 million cut to core school budgets if she was making the case.

I have finished my questions.

James Dornan: The cabinet secretary has kind of answered the question that I was going to ask. The reality is that Mr Kerr, Mr Marra and Mr Rennie have all asked for extra money. Surely the cabinet secretary's role in the budget process is to argue in Cabinet for as much as she can. At that stage, the Scottish Government has to say, "This is the money we've got, and this is how we're going to spend it. If you want to spend it in any other way, please tell us where you're going to get that money from in the budget." There has been no sign of that from any of the three previous speakers.

The Convener: Thank you. The cabinet secretary—

James Dornan: I am asking for a response from the cabinet secretary.

The Convener: I know. I was just about to hand over to the cabinet secretary.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I will be brief. This is an unfortunate part of the usual budget process. Opposition parties demand additional expenditure not just in my portfolio but in other Government portfolios. All Opposition members come to committee meetings such as this one and demand additional spending in portfolios, but none of the demands are included in a budget alternative so that there can be serious discussions with the finance secretary about alternatives to the budget that has been proposed. It is very easy to demand that more money be spent; it is much more difficult to have a budget settlement—

The Convener: I think that we will move on.

Fergus Ewing: I very much welcome the additional investment that will allow Scottish local authorities and schools to provide additional teachers. I will ask the cabinet secretary questions in two areas. The first relates to the additional costs of education provision in rural parts of Scotland, and especially the Highland Council area. As the cabinet secretary knows, that area includes 29 high schools and 204 schools in total,

which is the largest number in Scotland. A great number of those schools, and particularly the primary schools, have very small rolls, which means that the number of teachers that Highland Council must employ per pupil will be greater than the average in urban council areas. In addition, the extra transport costs and the higher costs of building work, be it new build or repair, are recognised factors.

The other point that I bring to the cabinet secretary's attention is that my information from close discussions with senior officials at Highland Council is that those extra costs have been exacerbated as a result of restrictions in the construction sector. For example, there has been restricted capacity and less competition.

I know that the local government funding formula tries to reflect rurality, but the cabinet secretary will be aware that the committee has already raised the issue with her in the current session of Parliament. Will she outline for me and other members who represent rural or largely rural constituencies how we can be sure that rural authorities have sufficient resource under the formula? Is there scope and a need to revisit the details of the formula to ensure that the important factor of rurality, given the costs of providing education, is properly accounted for?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I recognise that Mr Ewing has a long-standing interest in that area, given his constituency interest. I will make two points. The first relates to what we can do through Scottish Government funding, outwith the local government settlement, to take better account of rurality. I point to the changes that we have made to the Scottish attainment challenge fund, which will now allocate funding to all 32 local authorities because we recognise that there is poverty in all areas.

As well as looking at how we distribute money, we recognise that SIMD is not a particularly useful measurement for rural areas, as Audit Scotland has pointed out in the past. We are therefore keen to look at, for example, the data on the take-up of free school meals and children in low-income families, which can provide us with a much better analysis of rurality in different areas. We are challenging ourselves to see how we can change Government funding streams to better take account of that.

11:00

As Mr Ewing pointed out, local authority funding is agreed under a settlement, which is based on a formula that is agreed with COSLA. The Government is always open to evidence-based suggestions for improving the funding formula, but I stress to the committee that any fundamental

change to it would properly have to come through COSLA in the first instance.

If Mr Ewing has concerns about that aspect, I will be happy to hear about them in further detail. I think that an evidence-based approach is the right way to go about that, as we have—quite rightly—to work with our partners in local government on the wider aspects that are outwith the Scottish Government's control. I hope that that gives Mr Ewing some reassurance that we have looked at what is within our powers to ensure that we take account of rurality.

Fergus Ewing: I am grateful to the cabinet secretary for that comprehensive answer, particularly regarding the inclusion of the Highland Council area and others in the attainment funding. As she rightly says, poverty is no stranger to several parts of the Highlands and, indeed, my constituency, and I am pleased that the Scottish Government recognises that. It is a step forward. I will relay the cabinet secretary's comments to senior officials in Highland Council, with whom, as it happens, I will be in touch later today.

I want to ask the cabinet secretary about another area. How is provision made in our secondary schools to assist those pupils who have mental health issues? I recognise that the prime responsibility for that rests with the national health service, but I am mindful of the fact that very often, according to information that I have from my constituency work, early intervention by specific allocated staff in schools that is designed to assist teenagers who are undergoing various forms of mental ill health can play a really important part. After all, many teenagers are slow to trust people and take advice, so it is good for them to build a relationship with someone in whom they have confidence in order to help them through difficulties. Those may include Asperger's syndrome, autism, anorexia, self-harm and other very serious matters that adolescents may experience.

I have recently dealt with a harrowing constituency case. I will not go into the details here, but I feel that the provision that is available in some of the schools in my constituency, although I stress that the standard of assistance for those who need it is very high and it is very much appreciated, is simply too limited in its scope. One headteacher told me that he could do with three times as many teachers as he currently has to deal with that particular area, which is so important in helping young people who are troubled for one reason or another.

In asking that question—I am sorry that it was somewhat longer than I intended—I appreciate that it is not primarily your responsibility, cabinet secretary. Nevertheless, tackling mental ill health requires collaboration across schools, health

services, social services and other areas of public life, as well as with the third sector. How can we ensure that every school is able to provide a sufficient level of support in that area? What reporting mechanisms exist, for example, to enable headteachers to report to local authorities, education directors and so on? I am not familiar with that world. Do we need to do more to ensure that there is reporting of outcomes to local authorities, for example, so that accountability exists in every one of the 32?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: It is obviously a serious issue, and the Government takes it seriously. Much of the responsibility will lie with child and adolescent mental health services, but I can point to two examples of how education can assist. The first is through the funding that we have given local government to allow for a counsellor in every secondary school. That is a new initiative and we are closely monitoring the demand for the service to see how needs are being met across the country. It is a reasonably new initiative, but it is available and it is an important addition to what is going on.

The other example is the whole family wellbeing fund. For that development, we are putting additional funding of £50 million from across Government into next year's budget, although that will increase over the current session of Parliament. It is important that we look in a holistic manner at the challenges that young people and families face, which may include child poverty, challenges with educational attainment and issues around mental health or substance abuse.

Our development of the whole family wellbeing fund is another important step to ensure that we support families and use education establishments as a way to reassure people that support is available. There is no wrong door; if a family needs support, the intention behind the fund is to ensure that they get it, and mental health plays an important part in that.

Fergus Ewing: I am very pleased to hear of the recent development of a counsellor in every secondary school. That is extremely welcome. I am grateful to the cabinet secretary for her answer. I hope and expect that she will keep the matter under close review as part of her work with her Cabinet colleagues.

Stephanie Callaghan: My question follows on from Fergus Ewing mentioning children and young people with additional support needs, including those with neurodiversity. The Morgan review and other evidence that we have heard suggested that the focus often ends up being on children and young people who present with challenging behaviour, and that that is sometimes at the expense of other children in the class, who might also have additional support needs but do not

present such behaviours. Can you provide any reassurance that that will be addressed?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: All teachers provide significant support to pupils with additional support needs, as do specialist support learning staff. The budget that we are discussing continues to provide additional support to local authorities, investing £15 million every year to enhance their capacity to respond effectively to individual needs. That money can be used for additional pupil support assistance.

The overall responsibility to provide sufficient support for every young person lies with schools, but we and COSLA are jointly implementing the ASL review outcomes. Some of that work has been impacted by Covid, but we are keen to move forward with a revised action plan, and I hope that that will deal with some of the issues that Stephanie Callaghan has raised.

The Convener: Oliver Mundell has a supplementary question on that subject. We will then stay with him for his other questions for the cabinet secretary.

Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con): Cabinet secretary, in response to Fergus Ewing's question on rural funding, you mentioned the change to using the data on low-income families as a measure for the attainment funding. Will consideration be given to extending that approach to pupil equity funding? I have raised the issue before, but I am concerned that a small number of schools—predominantly smaller rural schools—do not get any pupil equity funding.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: From memory, I think that 97 per cent of schools receive pupil equity funding. We have not yet published the allocations for each school, but we will seek to do that in due course and Mr Mundell will be able to see them at that point. Free school meals have been used as a proxy as well. I hope that that is as relevant to small rural schools as it is to larger schools and other areas, as it is based on the number of children who present for free school meals.

Oliver Mundell: To be frank, I find that answer very disappointing, because it is well established that there is often stigma attached to being poor in rural communities, where that poverty is often much more visible. Various poverty campaigners recognise that. I am sad to hear you say that free school meal uptake is the same in rural areas, because many people do not think that that is the case.

How much additional money has been allocated in the budget to guarantee that this year's examinations will take place?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: There do not require to be any changes to the budget to ensure that exams will take place. The SQA's central planning assumption is that they will take place and it is moving that planning forward. The budget for the SQA is set out on that basis.

Oliver Mundell: People will find that answer strange—particularly people in education, who will expect you to be pulling out all the stops this year after the disruption in the past two years. Measures that have been suggested to me include acquiring additional community spaces to allow greater social distancing should they be required at the time, taking on more invigilators, and putting in place one-to-one catch-up support and tutoring for young people who have missed out on a considerable amount of learning. Surely that seems sensible, and just telling them what the questions will be is not a substitute for what they have missed out on.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I answered Mr Mundell's question on the basis of what it takes to deliver exams. The exams will take place unless, during the exam diet, there is—

Oliver Mundell: So, the answer is that zero additional resource is going in to support schools in ensuring that exams take place.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: If you let me answer the question, Mr Mundell, you will hear what I am about to say. The only reason why exams would not take place would be that there was public health guidance on the prevention of gatherings. Clearly, if there was such guidance, it would be irresponsible for the Government to say that exams should take place. The SQA is continuing to work to ensure that exams can take place safely.

Within the wider educational settlement, a great deal of work is continuing around what support can be given while learning is disrupted, so that there is a wider pool of material in relation to the e-learning offer, increasing study support sessions and so on. A great deal of work is continuing, albeit not within the budget that we are discussing. Clearly, we need to be delivering that work now, and increased support has gone into the e-learning in the current calendar year.

We are also working closely with local government colleagues on what they are putting in place for Easter revision and on whether further support can be given in relation to that. The reason why I have not made an announcement on that to date is that we need to know what local authorities will be doing in order to ensure that what we do is in addition to what is already happening. However, a great deal of work is being done to ensure that young people are being

supported while their learning is disrupted at this time.

11:15

Oliver Mundell: All of that sounds like it is too little too late. There has been a tweet about some parts of the exam process while you hold back other information that parents, teachers and young people are looking for. I think that people will judge that for themselves—

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I am not holding back any information on this, Mr Mundell. I strongly refute that.

Oliver Mundell: You have literally just told us that you are looking at additional support for pupils to help them to catch up on lost learning but that you will not tell us the detail of that right now. Education is a joint endeavour between local councils and the Scottish Government, and those discussions should not be taking place behind closed doors. You should be providing that information to parents, pupils and teachers now so that they can set aside time, possibly in their Easter break, to make the most of that provision.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: We will provide information about what is happening at a national level as soon as we can. I am sure that, at a local level, work is already on-going with schools and local authorities.

I do not think that anyone wants to be in a position whereby young people are concerned about the build-up to their exams or learning. That is why it is very important to reassure them that, throughout the entire academic year, continuous work has been done to ensure that work in relation to e-Sgoil and other e-learning opportunities has continued to be built on, and that will continue during the year. The feedback that we have had is that it is going down exceptionally well and is being well received by teachers and pupils. There has been an exceptional amount of work during the entire academic year to build on what is available to support children and young people, and we will continue to do that work.

Oliver Mundell: I do not want to be rude, but I think that you need to get real. Young people, parents and teachers are anxious now. They are expressing concern because they feel that they have missed out on education and that clear messaging is not coming from the Government about what will happen with exams. You said that there are plans in the background for additional catch-up, but we do not know anything about them or what they would involve in detail.

From your answer, it seems that zero additional pounds are going in to facilitate exams taking place and the putting in place of sensible

precautions. It just seems like a repeat of what we have seen over the past two years, whereby exams and education have not really been a priority.

I have a final question. What additional resource and support are going in to help teachers to take part in the education reform process? They have been pulling out all the stops to keep our young people in classrooms and they are doing the very best that they can do in difficult circumstances. What additional resource are you putting in place to free them up to meaningfully participate in that process?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Professor Ken Muir has now completed his consultation on the work, which is, again, in the current financial year and not the next one. The consultation was exceptionally well received by front-line staff and stakeholders and was very heavily used within that. On top of that, we have had discussions in the Scottish education council and the teachers panel to ensure that there is maximum consultation and discussion.

Ken Muir will now report back to me by the end of this month. I think that his recommendations will cover a lot of ground, but I will report back as quickly as I can with the Government's response. After that process has happened, we will absolutely make sure that the on-going work has a key role for both the agencies that are involved in the reform process and the staff. It is difficult to determine at this point what that will be, because Professor Muir has not reported yet. However, I have reassured stakeholders that I am absolutely determined to have a very empowered reform process where front-line staff and, importantly, pupils have a key role in the process, and that is adequately accounted for in the budget.

The Convener: I will go back to Bob Doris. We have heard a couple of times from Bob, but I want to see whether he has any further contribution to make.

Bob Doris: I do not think so, convener. There is a lot for us to digest in private.

The Convener: A couple of colleagues have supplementary questions.

Michael Marra: I apologise to colleagues for raising this issue again—they know about my obsession with ventilation issues. The cabinet secretary and I have exchanged letters and many comments in the chamber on the issue. I welcomed the announcement yesterday of some limited resource for active ventilation in schools, but prior to Christmas the cabinet secretary was strident in her rejection of any idea of active ventilation. At what point over the Christmas period did the Government change its mind, and

how many air purifying devices does she think the £5 million can provide for Scotland's schools?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: The guidance remains as it was before Christmas. The guidance is based on the expert advice that the Government receives.

Michael Marra: I am sorry, cabinet secretary, but we cannot hear you.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Can the convener tell me if anybody else can hear me?

The Convener: I can hear you.

Michael Marra: Perhaps it is just me. Apologies.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Perhaps Mr Marra can come back to me in correspondence if he cannot hear me. I will carry on and see where we get to.

I said that the guidance had not changed from before Christmas. We listen very carefully to the expert advice on the issue. The £5 million is in addition to the £10 million that was given previously for CO₂ monitoring and the previous allocation of £90 million for Covid logistics, which many local authorities have used part of for improved ventilation.

The ventilation support fund that was announced by the First Minister yesterday is to ensure that we are supporting the Scottish guidance on ventilation in schools, which is, as I said, the same as it was before Christmas. It will help to support any remedial action that is required. As I have said to Mr Marra and others, from the feedback that we get from local authorities, there is a very small amount of remedial action required for a small minority of spaces, but I wanted to ensure that funding was not a blockage, and that is the reason for the fund. It could be used for high-efficiency particulate absorbing filters if they were identified as the only appropriate solution for particular spaces.

However, once again, I point out that the expert advice that we are getting on this issue is that air-cleaning devices should not be used as an alternative to improving natural ventilation, and the updated guidance makes very clear the circumstances in which the use of air-cleaning and filtration devices might be appropriate. That is aligned with the advice that we are getting from the Health and Safety Executive. Therefore, the money is not simply for HEPA filters but is for whatever remedial action local authorities feel is required, and they can discuss that with Scottish Government colleagues.

Michael Marra: Therefore, contrary to what the First Minister announced yesterday, that is not funding for active ventilation in school but just an

additional £5 million on top of the previous moneys that have been allocated, which the cabinet secretary said have resulted in very limited action. That is very disappointing and, frankly, completely contrary—

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Mr Marra—

Michael Marra: If I may speak, cabinet secretary.

It is very contrary to what the First Minister said yesterday. In December, Labour moved a motion, which SNP and Green colleagues voted against, to set out £30 million in total, which could have procured two HEPA filters for each classroom in Scotland. Is that not the kind of action that should be taken now? We are talking about the budget today. The cabinet secretary should recognise that—she should listen to the First Minister when she says in the chamber that it should happen—and argue for £30 million to be put in place in the budget in order to procure those filters.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: With the greatest respect, Mr Marra, local authorities have taken the action that they deemed necessary to deal with the challenges. There has been limited action because local authorities have been reassured that what is in place is adequate for what needs to happen. I am not aware of any local authority that has been held back in any action because of a limitation in funds.

I assure Mr Marra that I listen very carefully to what the First Minister says at all times. She and I are absolutely on the same page on this, because there is a recognition that the money can be used for air filters, but, of course, it is a matter for the use of guidance. As with all our reactions to Covid, policy must be based on expert advice. Again, with the greatest respect to Mr Marra, the expert advice—including what comes from SAGE and the Health and Safety Executive—would not suggest or lead to the policy that he wishes to put in place, because it does not equate to what the expert advice says needs to happen.

As a Government, we have ensured an opportunity for local authorities to move forward with remedial action, including, if required, the use of HEPA air-cleaning filters. It is very important that that opportunity is there. It is already within the guidance that that can happen, if local authorities wish, so nothing is stopping it happening at that point.

I am very keen to ensure that we take on concerns. Before Christmas, Mr Marra raised a concern, which I encouraged him to ensure was taken up through official channels. In conjunction with my COSLA colleague, Councillor Stephen McCabe, I have written to all the unions to say that we have a workforce issues group where we continuously ask for specifics, so that the Scottish

Government or local authorities can act on specific concerns that teachers have. We have not had any specific concerns that we need to look at but, once again, we have written to all unions to ask them not for general concerns but for specific concerns from specific teachers, which we can deal with in confidence, if required. We take that very seriously, and we have reached out to ensure that that can happen.

Michael Marra: Convener, I think that we have reached a bit of an impasse. The distance between the reality that teachers and pupils are facing on the ground and the cabinet secretary's response is quite astonishing. The cabinet secretary referred to a case that I raised with her in the chamber, in response to which she told me to ask the teacher who had contacted me to raise the matter with their union representative. The teacher involved is the union rep in their school. People are finding that there is no recourse to get the kind of action on active ventilation that they need. It is clear from what we are hearing now that the funding that has been put in place cannot even be ring fenced for spending on ventilation. To be frank, I am at my wits' end with the cabinet secretary on this matter. Thank you, convener, for indulging me on the subject.

11:30

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Mr Marra, the fund can be spent in any way that a local authority thinks is required. I think that it is important that we give local authorities the ultimate flexibility to allow that to happen, and I certainly hope that they will take up that flexibility and use it in any way they require to enable them to meet the guidance, which is based on expert advice. We will take any individual concerns exceptionally seriously.

The Convener: How much does a ventilation unit typically cost?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: The typical cost for a HEPA filter is not in the pack that I have with me. We looked at it when we were analysing the £5 million fund, so I can certainly get it to the committee very easily, but I do not have it with me today.

The Convener: I am talking about the rationale for how you arrived at the figures of £10 million and £5 million. I come back to the theme of outcomes, with which I started the meeting. It would be interesting to know what the rationale is. Does a unit cost £500, £1,000 or £5,000? It would be interesting to see the working. When we were all at school, we were told to show our working. I would like to see the Government's working in coming up with those numbers. Would you agree to send the committee that information?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Absolutely—we can certainly look to do that. The £10 million was there for CO₂ monitoring, so it was based on the costs of delivering that. For the £5 million, the level of funding is not based on thinking that we have an ask from local authorities for £5 million at this point. We are attempting to ensure that we are able to meet the needs of local authorities as they come forward.

The Convener: There was a rationale behind the £5 million, I take it—the number was not simply plucked out of thin air.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: No—money is far too tight for us to be able simply to pluck figures out of the air. We can certainly provide the rationale, and the cost of a HEPA filter, to the committee.

The Convener: It would seem a bit ironic to pluck a number out of thin air for an air filter, but there you go—that is my joke for the morning.

Ross Greer has indicated that he wishes to come back in—he said earlier that he did, so I will bring him in now.

Ross Greer: It is on the point about filtration. In the first instance, I make the point that, at least on the basis of the Educational Institute of Scotland members survey, which was completed and published recently, there is no need to put two HEPA filters in every single classroom in Scotland. There are thousands of classrooms for which the data shows us, and teachers are telling us, the air flow is sufficient and ventilation is fine.

That said, that is far from the situation in every classroom, which is why the money is being provided. I have a couple of questions about how the money is being deployed. Given that this is a budget scrutiny session, can the cabinet secretary clarify one point? Is the aim to deploy all the money in the current financial year, within the next six weeks, or does the Government reckon that it will spill into the next financial year, from 1 April?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: We are working very quickly with local authorities to determine how to get the money out of the door as quickly as possible. If there is a wish to have funding provided, we want to be able to provide it in the current financial year.

Ross Greer: With regard to the distribution model, is the aim to come up with a formula for dividing the money between the 32 local authorities, or will it be distributed on the basis of authorities making a bid for what they believe is necessary in their area, including how much it would cost and the difference that it would make? Is it a pot from which they can draw down, rather than £5 million being distributed between 32 different bodies all at once?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: That ties in with the point that you raised about need being different among local authorities. It may vary, depending on, for example, the age of the schools and what is already in place in a school setting. It would seem more sensible for the money to be drawn down as required by local authorities, so that we can be sure that we are getting the money to where it is needed. Mr Greer rightly points to the information that we got back from the EIS survey, and I would highlight the feedback that we are getting from local authorities on their CO₂ monitoring, which notes that very little remedial action is required at this point. We want to be able to direct the £5 million funding to where it is needed.

Ross Greer: You mentioned a letter that was sent to unions in your name and that of Councillor Stephen McCabe. It was forwarded to me this morning by a union that I have been working with on this issue. The union welcomed the opportunity to give those examples because, as I understand it, there is a disconnect between the anecdotal evidence that we are all hearing and the specific issues being dealt with in a way that can resolve them.

As well as being sent to unions, will the offer in that letter be made openly to individual teachers and to teachers who are organising through groups other than their unions? I am aware that a lot of the issues around ventilation have been spearheaded by a grass-roots group of teachers who were featured on BBC and STV news in the past couple of days. I am sure that that group would be keen to contribute, although most of its members are union reps and, I am sure, will contribute through that avenue. Are we maximising the number of ways in which teachers and other school staff are able to flag up specific issues that, for whatever reason, are not being resolved at a school or local authority level?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I cannot speak on behalf of Councillor McCabe, but I think that, on the overall issue, local government and national Government are in agreement that we want to do anything that is required to be able to assist in this matter. We will, of course, take information from other sources if that is at all possible.

However, I point to the fact that we have the workforce issues group, which is chaired by COSLA. It considers many issues, including, in particular, ventilation. Unions sit on the group, along with Scottish Government officials, and are asked for specific examples that are not being dealt with locally and can be escalated if they need to be dealt with in another way. That approach has not proved to be fruitful, as we have not had material coming through in that way. That is why I have taken the decision to write directly to

appeal to unions. Of course, I am happy to hear from other sources about particular concerns in any area. That avenue is open, and the workforce issues group is the place where those issues can be considered in great detail.

Ross Greer: Around a dozen specific issues have been raised with me, and I am happy to ask those teachers whether they are happy to have them passed on to the working issues group. If they are, I should have those issues with you by the end of the week.

The Convener: Stephanie Callaghan has a supplementary question.

Stephanie Callaghan: There have certainly been some challenging questions for you about the education budget, cabinet secretary—sadly, not always expressed in the most polite way. Can you comment on the importance of the wider policies such as the Scottish child payment, which are outwith education but which are critical to our attempts to address the poverty-related attainment gap in the longer term, particularly with the UK Government reducing universal credit at the moment? It would be good to hear some assurance that you will be arguing passionately that those wider policies that impact educational achievement will be prioritised at Cabinet level and beyond.

The Convener: That is not a supplementary question, but the cabinet secretary can answer it, briefly.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: The point is a valid one. There are many impacts on education from other parts of Scottish Government expenditure. Closing the poverty-related attainment gap is a key concern for Government. One of the aspects of the issue is the need to tackle child poverty at its source, and the Scottish child payment, which Stephanie Callaghan mentioned, is an example of what we are doing in that regard. There is extremely close working going on between education officials and child poverty officials in Shona Robison's portfolio to ensure that we are working together collegiately on child poverty and education. That is one example of the important impacts of other parts of Government on education.

The Convener: I have one final question. Earlier, you mentioned some timelines, but can you say whether the committee will receive a copy of the report before the Scottish Government responds to it?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I am not yet aware of exactly when Ken Muir will report back. He is finalising that work just now, and the date is within his gift. We certainly expect to receive the report by the end of the year and will seek to publish it in

due course after that. Obviously, at that point, the committee would be made aware of that.

The Convener: Thank you. We would like to have a look at the report as soon as we possibly can—I am sure that you feel the same way.

I thank you and your officials for your time today. It has been a useful and revealing session—typically robust, but all well within order. We look forward to the next occasion that you and your officials join us.

The public part of today's meeting is now at an end.

11:41

Meeting continued in private until 12:22.

This is the final edition of the *Official Report* of this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

Published in Edinburgh by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

All documents are available on
the Scottish Parliament website at:

www.parliament.scot

Information on non-endorsed print suppliers
is available here:

www.parliament.scot/documents

For information on the Scottish Parliament contact
Public Information on:

Telephone: 0131 348 5000

Textphone: 0800 092 7100

Email: sp.info@parliament.scot



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba