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AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Meeting of the Parliament (Hybrid)

Wednesday 18 May 2022

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# Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 18 May 2022

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

## Portfolio Question Time

### Covid-19 Recovery and Parliamentary Business

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** Good afternoon. The first item of business is portfolio questions, and the first portfolio is Covid-19 recovery and parliamentary business. If a member wishes to ask a supplementary question, they should press their request-to-speak button during the relevant question or place an R in the chat function.

#### Human Rights (Incorporation of Treaties)

1. **Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government when it will provide an update to Parliament on when it plans to bring forward legislation to incorporate human rights treaties. (S6O-01086)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney):** In line with the ambitious recommendations from the national task force for human rights leadership, the Scottish Government has committed to introducing a world-leading human rights bill during the current session of Parliament, and we are on track to do that.

The programme for government set out that we would consult on the bill in the coming year. That consultation, and the bill itself, are being developed collaboratively with a wide range of partners and stakeholders from across Scotland. We will continue to provide updates to the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee on the bill's progress and timings.

**Pam Duncan-Glancy:** I thank the Deputy First Minister for that answer, and I look forward to hearing what I hope will be a comprehensive update on the progress of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill in his statement next Tuesday.

Can the Deputy First Minister set out when he expects to introduce specific legislation on the four human rights treaties that the Scottish Government is committed to incorporating into Scots law, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the United Nations Convention on

the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women? Can he confirm that the Scottish Government will seek appropriate legal advice and work with the United Kingdom Government to ensure that future legislation is within devolved competence?

**John Swinney:** With regard to the question on legislative competence, there is an obligation on ministers to ensure that that is the case and, accordingly, to introduce bills alongside the certificates that make that point.

With regard to incorporation of other treaties, as I indicated in my earlier answer, the Government's work on that is under way; there will be consultation in the coming year and we will keep Parliament updated on specific timings. As we set out legislative programmes year by year, further details will become clear to members during parliamentary announcements.

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** There is frustration about the lack of progress on incorporation of the UNCRC. I know that there will be a statement next week, but can the minister tell us that that will be the end of the process, rather than there being another consultation or review group process? We need to get the matter sorted quickly, so can the minister guarantee that?

**John Swinney:** I assure Mr Rennie that while we have been addressing issues in connection with the specific points that the Supreme Court raised—which will be the subject of my statement to Parliament on Tuesday—we have also been undertaking preparatory work to implement the elements of the bill that were uncontested in the Supreme Court judgment. That work is under way. My statement will update Parliament on where we have reached in our consideration of the Supreme Court judgment.

**Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP):** The Scottish Human Rights Commission has expressed concern about the UK Government's plans to introduce legislation to replace the Human Rights Act 1998 with a new bill of rights. Can the Deputy First Minister say whether proposed reforms could take place without unsettling the current devolution arrangements, and what actions the Scottish Government will take to oppose any regressive proposals?

**John Swinney:** At this stage, I am unable to give Stephanie Callaghan the reassurance that she—understandably and rightly—seeks. The Human Rights Act 1998 is embedded in the legislation that led to the establishment of this Parliament, and the powers of this Parliament and the way in which they are exercised are inextricably linked to the provisions of the 1998 act. The fact that the United Kingdom Government

is now, in essence, going to replace that legislation raises all sorts of issues about consideration and handling of human rights issues, but it also raises the danger that the devolution settlement on which this Parliament is founded might be destabilised, as a consequence.

We do not yet know the answer to the question. We know, however, that new human rights legislation is emerging. Once the bill is published, we will scrutinise its contents very carefully in order to assess its full impact, and we will update Parliament.

I assure Stephanie Callaghan that the Scottish Government will resist any attempt, in any shape or form, to diminish the human rights that are entrenched in the Human Rights Act 1998, and which are linked to the foundation of this Parliament.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I understand that Mr Whittle wishes to apologise to Parliament in advance. He has advised us that he will need to leave the chamber immediately after asking his question.

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

**2. Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what consideration it has given to improving data gathering and data management across Government as part of the development of policies relating to the recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. (S6O-01087)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney):** The Scottish Government is committed to improving data gathering and management to produce high-quality and impactful research supporting our recovery from the pandemic. That includes the data and intelligence network—a community of data experts promoting best practice on sharing and use of data, in response to the pandemic. The network has produced a range of resources including a data catalogue, and has worked to improve data set quality.

Research Data Scotland provides a way of systematically organising Scotland's data and offers researchers quicker and clearer access to data. It developed the Covid-19 database for quick data set linkage. It now holds 36 data sets and supports 68 Covid-19-related studies.

The business support partnership programme data and analytics workstream seeks to improve data set linkage abilities in order to gain a more holistic view of the business support that was offered during the pandemic.

**Brian Whittle:** I am sorry, Presiding Officer. I should have acknowledged the fact that I have to

leave straight after my question, as I have a constituency case to deal with.

I thank the cabinet secretary for his answer. The cabinet secretary will appreciate that, throughout the pandemic, having easy access to reliable data on everything from Covid cases to details of businesses that are eligible for support has proved to be vital in protecting the public, and has allowed our response to the virus to be as targeted as possible.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that as we look to recover from the pandemic and build greater resilience against future challenges, improving how the Scottish Government gathers, stores and uses data could bring significant benefits in every policy area, from future NHS workforce planning to health outcomes to hitting education attainment targets? If he does agree, what steps is the Scottish Government taking to address the shortfall?

**John Swinney:** Data management is central to every aspect of Government policy and action. It helps us to identify the most effective targeting of support to assist individuals who face difficulties during the cost of living crisis, for example. It also helps us to manage effectively the implications of Covid in the national health service and a wide variety of other environments.

The programmes that are being done through the data and intelligence network are designed to ensure that we constantly review the approach to data management and data handling, so that we achieve all our objectives in this respect and so that we can effectively deliver Government policy.

We have learned from the Covid pandemic that we need systems that can readily deal with distribution of resources to a wide range of recipients, whether they are individuals or businesses. Such systems had to be developed at pace during the pandemic, but we are looking to entrench those approaches in order to ensure that we are equipped for any eventuality in the future. That is material to the Coronavirus (Recovery and Reform) (Scotland) Bill, with which Mr Whittle is familiar.

### **Covid-19 Recovery (Hospital Restrictions)**

**3. Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what cross-Government discussions regarding the remaining Covid-19 hospital restrictions have taken place as part of its Covid recovery strategy. (S6O-01088)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney):** As Covid-19 infection prevention and control guidance is confined to healthcare settings, there are limited cross-Government discussions outside of health directorates regarding Covid-19

mitigations. Scotland's hospital Covid-19 guidance is developed in conjunction with NHS National Services Scotland's antimicrobial resistance and infection prevention and control staff, supported by the independent expert Covid-19 nosocomial review group.

The Scottish Government continues to work in partnership with NSS and with relevant policy teams on reviewing and updating Covid-19 hospital guidance in the light of emerging scientific and World Health Organization advice.

**Craig Hoy:** I thank Mr Swinney for that answer.

However, on-going Covid restrictions in Scotland's NHS are causing avoidable harm to patients and are restricting patient flow, which results in on-going pressure on waiting times. Does the Deputy First Minister agree that appropriate hospital visits play an important role in patients' treatment and recovery? Will he, as part of his Covid recovery strategy, commit to working closely with ministerial colleagues and officials to ensure that normal processes and procedures are resumed and maintained in hospitals wherever that is clinically safe and possible?

**John Swinney:** I agree on the final part of Mr Hoy's question, that hospital visiting, when it is clinically safe to do so, is absolutely essential.

However, I rather parted company with Mr Hoy at the start of his question because it suggested that that is not the approach that we should take. Everything that the Government is doing around hospital visiting is founded on clinical analysis. We are all familiar with nosocomial transmission of Covid, so we must be careful to ensure that we are taking the right clinically advised steps on hospital visiting so that we can protect the population that is in hospital and people who are visiting hospital for legitimate purposes. Yes—we will take an approach that is driven by clinical analysis and clinical advice because we must make sure that it is safe for individuals to visit in the current context.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 4 was not lodged.

### **Covid-19 Vaccination Programme**

5. **Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what role a Covid-19 booster vaccination programme this winter will play in its Covid recovery strategy. (S6O-01090)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney):** Vaccination remains a critical component in our response to Covid-19. Since its beginning, the Scottish Government's Covid-19 vaccination programme has been guided by the expert advice that has been provided by the Joint Committee on

Vaccination and Immunisation and senior clinicians.

In February this year, the JCVI advised that an autumn/winter booster programme for 2022 is likely to be recommended for people who are at higher risk of severe Covid-19, such as those of older age and those who are in clinical risk groups.

The JCVI will continue its review, and the Scottish Government understands that the committee is likely to make a further announcement with more precise details of timing and eligibility for the anticipated autumn/winter programme in the coming weeks. We stand ready to consider any further guidance from the JCVI as it is issued.

**Paul McLennan:** What consultations have taken place with local authorities and health boards about possible vaccination venues for this winter?

**John Swinney:** Dialogue is on-going with local authorities and health boards about the delivery of the vaccination programme, particularly in relation to convenience and locality for individual areas. It is obviously a very complex exercise, and the vaccination programme has led to the distribution of in excess of 10 million vaccines in a relatively short space of time. When the programme operates at population scale, it opens up different opportunities around locations than if it is a more limited vaccination programme for older people and for the clinically vulnerable. Of course, if the programme is targeted at those groups, access and locality will be ever more significant. I assure Mr McLennan that those questions will be considered very carefully with local authorities and health boards as we apply the advice from the JCVI.

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** A constituent caught Covid in February this year and now, three months later, she has it again. She is completely vaccinated. It was bad before, but this time it has floored her. Given that waves of omicron variants BA.4 and BA.5 are on their way, I am pleased that the cabinet secretary is indicating an extension of the booster programme. Could I encourage him to look at that particularly for people aged 50 and over, including those who have underlying health conditions such as diabetes or asthma? Will he urge the JCVI to move quickly, given that both of the new strains are thought to be very contagious and there is a level of vaccine escape?

**John Swinney:** All those are legitimate points, and I am sorry that Jackie Baillie's constituent has had that experience.

Jackie Baillie will be familiar with the fact that the Government follows, and has followed to date, as have other Administrations in the United

Kingdom, the advice of the JCVI. We have made clear to the JCVI at different stages our enthusiasm for elements of the vaccination programme to be undertaken, and for it to be undertaken more quickly than might ordinarily be the case.

I will certainly discuss with the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, who leads on dialogue with the JCVI in that respect, the issues that Jackie Baillie has raised but, fundamentally, as Jackie Baillie will understand, the JCVI operates independently of Government and provides high-quality clinical advice to Government.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 6 was not lodged.

### **Covid-19 Recovery (Testing and Contact Tracing)**

**7. Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on what modelling it has undertaken to estimate the impact on its Covid recovery strategy of removing population-wide testing and contact tracing at the end of April. (S6O-01092)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney):** The decision to make those changes to our testing policy was informed by the latest available evidence and advice from public health officials and clinicians, which included modelling of the epidemiological impact of the changes in testing policy. The Scottish Government continues to model the latest Covid-19 trends, and the results are published online in the "Coronavirus (COVID-19): modelling the epidemic" reports.

Alongside our evolving response to the pandemic, the Scottish Government's Covid recovery strategy will continue to focus effort and resources on bringing about a fairer future, particularly for people who have been most impacted during the pandemic.

**Sarah Boyack:** Given the challenge of new variants, the most recent of which are those that have been identified in Portugal and South Africa, what risk assessment has the Scottish Government done on the impact of ending routine testing, given the on-going health issues that Jackie Baillie raised, as well as the effects of long Covid? Does the Deputy First Minister agree that, without a commitment to free vaccines in low-income countries and around the globe, we will not be safe until everyone is safe?

**John Swinney:** I agree entirely with that latter point. Over the course of the vaccination programme, the Scottish Government has supported practically, and through the application

of pressure, the achievement of the objective that Sarah Boyack set out.

As I indicated in my initial answer, the change to testing policy was included in the modelling of the pandemic. We continue to monitor levels of Covid in our society through the various modelling exercises that are undertaken. The modelling that we do around waste water shows declining prevalence of the virus. We also monitor hospital admissions and case numbers.

We will continue to engage with the international clinical community on the research that is emerging on new strains and new variants, and we will reflect that in the choices and decisions that we make.

### **Parliamentary Questions (Timescale for Responses)**

**8. Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government for what reason a number of written parliamentary questions have not received an answer by ministers within the required timescale. (S6O-01093)

**The Minister for Parliamentary Business (George Adam):** The Scottish Government is committed to answering all parliamentary questions as quickly as possible and within the deadlines agreed with the Parliament. In the first quarter of 2022, the Government answered 90 per cent of written parliamentary questions on time, exceeding the Parliament's 80 per cent benchmark.

The Government produces quarterly statistics, which are available from the Scottish Parliament information centre, that show how many parliamentary questions were cleared after the substantive date and those that were still outstanding at the time of audit.

**Daniel Johnson:** I thank the minister for that answer, but I think that the number of wry smiles around the chamber probably points to the fact that things are somewhat awry from the picture that he paints.

The problem is a growing one, and it is not experienced only by Opposition members; I have had the same conversation with Scottish National Party back benchers. There is a problem with the timeliness and the quality of answers. I have asked three questions that it has taken the cabinet secretary more than four months to answer.

In relation to quality, I had an answer from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills that was simply a hyperlink to [myjobscotland.gov.uk](https://myjobscotland.gov.uk), as well as answers that have simply referred me to SPICe. As good as the work of SPICe is, I know where SPICe is and can ask its staff myself. I have

also had answers that have just given links to previous answers, regardless of their age—some of them have been up to six months old. I want the Government to tell me what the answer is today.

Ultimately, it is not just me or other members whom the Government is letting down, but my constituents, because I am asking questions on their behalf.

I ask the minister to reflect on that, because the answers that are given should be considered to be answers to the whole Parliament. If ministers would not be happy to answer questions in the chamber in the way that they answer written questions, they should not submit written answers in that way.

Will the Government undertake to improve matters from the point of view of time and, importantly, of the quality of the written parliamentary answers that are provided?

**George Adam:** I repeat that, in the first quarter of 2022, 90 per cent of questions were replied to in time.

The member should take into account that there are many factors that impact on the time that it takes to provide substantive answers to written PQs. Resourcing pressures for the Government mean that it has to prioritise activities such as, for example, our response to the pandemic. Delays can be caused through difficulty in interpreting the question, or by taking steps to ensure that answers are properly researched, accurate and, above all, open and helpful to members.

As always, I will try to be open and helpful to all members of this chamber at all times. If Daniel Johnson or any other member wishes to have a chat or discussion about any of the issues, my door will always be open.

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** The member says that with no hint of irony at all.

With any form of majority Government, it is, if anything, more important than ever that the strongest standards of transparency and scrutiny are upheld. Just this week, we heard of the SNP Government's abysmal adherence to freedom of information laws, with shady interventions from ministerial advisers going undocumented.

Written questions are treated with similar disdain by the Scottish Government, which often does not address the questions or simply states that they have already been answered, when they have not.

With the Scottish Government in the news for its secretive handling of the ferries fiasco, should Scottish ministers not be doing far more to earn the public's trust?

**George Adam:** Mr Kerr will understand that we had a public opinion poll only two weeks ago, and the public's trust was with the SNP.

Once again, we have Mr Kerr's hyperbole when it comes to interpretation of what is actually published and out there. We need to be very careful when we are discussing these matters. Mr Kerr seems to think that he can say what he likes, when he likes, shout about absolutely anything and be correct. His interpretation is not the same as everyone else's in this room, however, so he needs to have a wee think about how he conducts himself.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes portfolio questions on Covid-19 recovery and Government business.

We will move on to the next portfolio—*[Interruption.]* We will move on to the next item of business once everyone is in place and following proceedings.

## Net Zero, Energy and Transport

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The next portfolio is net zero, energy and transport. I remind all members who wish to ask a supplementary question to please press their request-to-speak buttons during the relevant question or enter the letter R in the chat function.

### Invasive Species

1. **Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what measures are available to stakeholders seeking to manage invasive species and mitigate their impact. (S6O-01094)

**The Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity (Lorna Slater):** Invasive non-native species are a key driver of biodiversity loss. It is estimated that they cost the Scottish economy around £300 million annually. The management of INNS is fundamental to our efforts in tackling biodiversity loss. The Scottish Government provides funding streams to stakeholders seeking to manage invasive non-native species. Funding has been available through, for example, the forestry grant scheme and the biodiversity challenge fund, and there has been direct funding through NatureScot for projects of strategic national importance, such as the Scottish invasive species initiative. The new nature restoration fund also includes management and eradication of INNS in its objectives.

**Gordon MacDonald:** A survey found that there are American mink present in the Pentland hills regional park in my constituency and that their presence can have an absolutely devastating impact on native mammals and ground-nesting

birds. Does the minister share my view that there is a pressing need to keep the impact of invasive species on Scotland's ecosystem to the absolute minimum, and that steps should be taken to ensure that they do not undermine work to restore and enhance biodiversity?

**Lorna Slater:** I do indeed share Mr MacDonald's view, which is why we are providing support to projects such as the Scottish invasive species initiative, which is tackling invasive plants and mink along rivers in an area of 29,500km<sup>2</sup>, which is over a third of the total area of Scotland. In the past four years, more than £1.5 million has been invested via the Scottish rural development programme to tackle rhododendron, which threatens our precious Atlantic rain forest. However, we recognise that there is always more that can be done.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** There are a number of supplementary questions.

**Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con):** Beaver activity can have and is having a negative impact on farmland, biodiversity and rural communities, especially in Tayside, where beavers were released either accidentally or illegally. The Scottish Government's new translocation scheme aims to help, but it lacks detail, so can the minister provide answers to the following questions? When will the new rules launch, how many trappers have been trained, how many translocation sites have been identified and for how long will the scheme be funded?

**Lorna Slater:** I am really excited about our beaver translocation initiative, because it is an excellent way of managing conflicts between beavers and other land users. I disagree with the member on biodiversity loss, because beavers are excellent at improving biodiversity by creating natural wetlands. *[Interruption.]* Beavers are a reintroduced species. When my father grew up here in Scotland, there were no beavers—they were extinct—so this is a success.

We will publish a new beaver strategy—in June, I believe—and I very much expect that it will answer the member's questions.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Alasdair Allan for a supplementary question.

**Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP):** I think that you are mistaken, Presiding Officer—apologies.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Foysoyl Choudhury for a supplementary question.

**Foysoyl Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab):** What measures are available to the Scottish Government to ensure that invasive species are not being brought into Scotland through international arrivals at airports?

**Lorna Slater:** That is a live issue for us given the issues around Brexit and the delay of 18 months to border checks, and it is a particular concern for my plant health colleagues. We are very concerned about biosecurity, and I am happy to write to the member about that in more detail.

### Scottish Water (Reserves)

2. **Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on using Scottish Water's reserves to fund a £100 rebate for customers. (S6O-01095)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport (Michael Matheson):** It is vital that Scottish Water continues to invest in infrastructure to provide a high-quality service to the people of Scotland. Revenue that is raised from customer charges is essential to deliver Scottish Water's investment programme.

Scottish Water's cash balance is not a surplus of funds; it is substantially allocated at any time to investment projects on a rolling basis. The average water charge in Scotland is already lower than the average charge in England and Wales.

From 1 April 2021, we increased the maximum discount available from the water charges reduction scheme—which is available to customers in receipt of full council tax reduction—to 35 per cent, up from 25 per cent. That enhanced scheme provides support to more than 470,000 customers.

**Jackie Baillie:** At a time when Scots are experiencing the worst cost of living crisis in a generation, Scottish Water is sitting on at least £500 million of reserves, and its senior executives are getting eye-watering bonuses—not salaries, but bonuses—of £92,000, which is three times the average wage. Does the cabinet secretary believe that that is right, and will he rule out further rises of the retail price index plus 2 per cent next year, given that inflation is expected to be at least 10 per cent?

**Michael Matheson:** As I mentioned, the cash reserves that Scottish Water holds are not a surplus of funds; they are for identified projects that have to be delivered, and Scottish Water has to hold a working cash balance that is allocated as those investments roll out. That is what those funds are held for, and the figure goes up and down during the course of the year and over different years. It is important that the member understands how the budgeting process operates, but given her question, it is clear that she does not.

On the support that we are providing, the member will recognise that extending the council tax support scheme that we provide for Scottish Water charges means that, because we have

extended the reduction to 35 per cent, households that are in receipt of the full council tax reduction discount will pay less under this year's water rates than they did back in 2021.

As the member will recognise, targeting support to households with the lowest incomes is a key priority during the cost of living crisis. [Interruption.] That is exactly what the scheme does: it assists households that have the lowest incomes with their water charges—and this year it reduces their water charges.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Before I call a member to ask a supplementary question, I say to members that if a question has been asked it is courteous to listen to the answer.

**Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** A very rough calculation suggests that the chief executive officer and managers of Scottish Water, which is a publicly funded company, cost around £1.5 million—as well as the bonuses that Jackie Baillie talked about. Has the cabinet secretary reviewed whether the spend provides value for the public purse and considered whether those funds could be used to reduce bills?

**Michael Matheson:** As the member will recognise, the board of Scottish Water is responsible for the remuneration package of staff, including the chief executive.

When it comes to value for money, we just have to look at the base salary packages in some of the water organisations in England, which in some cases go up to almost £1 million. The level at which Scottish Water's chief executive is paid is considerably lower than the level in comparable organisations in other parts of the United Kingdom.

It is important that we make sure that we use public money efficiently. I am sure that the member recognises that customers have voted Scottish Water as one of the most efficient and effective public utilities in the UK, given its progress on investment. We recognise the significant progress that has been made.

The important point is that the money that Scottish Water makes stays in Scottish Water, unlike the situation in the privatised systems that the Tories operate.

### Warm Home Discount Scheme

**3. Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government how it will respond to the United Kingdom Government's consultation, launched on 9 May, regarding the proposed expansion of its warm home discount scheme. (S6O-01096)

**The Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights (Patrick**

**Harvie):** The warm home discount is a Great Britain scheme, which provides an annual £140 rebate to around 210,000 vulnerable Scottish households.

Last year, we proposed an expanded replacement scheme, but—sadly—that was not agreed by the UK Government. The UK's new consultation proposes to continue the current scheme separately in Scotland, with just a £10 increase. We will urge the UK Government to listen to Scottish stakeholders and do much more to protect the most vulnerable households.

**Liz Smith:** I understand that the uplift will mean that rebates are provided to an additional 50,000 families in Scotland, on top of the 230,000 who already receive payments.

Will the minister confirm that the Scottish Government will not in any way disrupt the additional payments, which could be of considerable importance to families throughout Scotland, including in Mid Scotland and Fife?

**Patrick Harvie:** Liz Smith is correct about the figure of 50,000 more households, and it is worth putting that figure in context. The price cap rise last autumn created 50,000 more fuel-poor households, and the cap rose again in April, pushing a further 140,000 households in Scotland into fuel poverty. Further, big increases in energy prices are anticipated in October, and we fear that almost a million Scottish households will be in fuel poverty by the winter.

In the context of those figures, I hope that Liz Smith will acknowledge that extending support to 50,000 households is a pretty paltry response to the cost of living crisis that the Conservative Government is overseeing.

**Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP):** Although all measures, including energy efficiency measures, to support households in the context of rising energy prices are welcome, the crisis is happening now. As welcome as existing measures are, including the warm home discount consultation and the further £30 million, does the minister acknowledge that support is not being put in place fast enough or on the scale that is needed?

The Office of Gas and Electricity Markets estimates that 613,000 households in Scotland are in fuel poverty. What discussions has the minister had with the UK Government about more immediate assistance to deal with energy price increases? The wait-and-see approach that the UK Minister for Energy, Clean Growth and Climate Change, Greg Hands, set out to the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee last week is not acceptable and not good enough.

**Patrick Harvie:** I agree with Fiona Hyslop's characterisation of the scale and pace of the

response that is required, but which is clearly lacking from the UK Government.

I mentioned in my first answer that we have repeatedly proposed improvements to the warm home discount, with an expanded scheme that would be combined with other measures in Scotland. However, the UK Government chose not to take up our proposals and delayed any confirmation of even the continuation of the scheme.

I hope that the UK Government will do more. It is clear that there is huge pressure on it, even from some of its own back benchers, to do more and to act more swiftly to support people in relation to the cost of living crisis.

The figures that I mentioned speak for themselves on the scale of response that is required. This will be a life-or-death decision for some individuals and families this year. As we approach the autumn, I very much hope that the UK Government will reconsider its approach and do so urgently. Meanwhile, the Scottish Government will continue to do everything that we can with our powers and, in particular, with the energy efficiency measures that we are supporting as a way of cutting people's fuel bills.

**Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP):** Although it is great that many people are getting help with new boilers under the warmer homes Scotland scheme, the decision in May 2017 to exclude non-traditional construction properties from funding for external wall insulation means that a lot of expensive energy is still wasted. Many local authority houses are affected. Would the Scottish Government consider reviewing the position, given the current cost of living crisis?

**Patrick Harvie:** Such properties are included as part of our fuel poverty and energy efficiency schemes. For example, we have provided £64 million to local authorities to deliver external wall insulation through our area-based schemes this year.

Those local schemes target fuel poverty and benefit exactly the kind of hard-to-treat properties that the member describes. That approach has improved the homes of more than 100,000 fuel-poor households since 2013. Many of those properties are ex-local authority properties in mixed tenure blocks. They are often technically complex to insulate and they require other essential repairs, so the neighbourhood approach to improvements is often the best solution all round.

We are continuing to look at more ways to provide help with insulation and, over the coming months, we will consider all possible options to insulate and improve more homes.

## ScotRail (Services)

**4. Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what recent discussions it has had with ScotRail regarding returning rail services to pre-pandemic levels. (S6O-01097)

**The Minister for Transport (Jenny Gilruth):** Throughout the pandemic, Transport Scotland officials have worked closely with the rail industry, via the rail recovery task force, to ensure that scheduled train services have met overall passenger demand.

Although passenger demand remains well below that seen prior to the pandemic, I fully expect ScotRail to keep its timetable under review, with scope to adapt where feasible to provide the most reliable service for passengers.

**Russell Findlay:** The minister omitted to mention that ScotRail revealed today that, from next week, nearly one third of its services will be cut. That is 600 daily services across Scotland—at this rate, they will have more ferries than trains—and will cause absolute misery for passengers up and down the country.

Does the minister share ScotRail's view that the unions and drivers are to blame? If not, who is responsible for another calamitous chapter in the story of the Scottish National Party's nationalised rail?

**Jenny Gilruth:** I do not agree with Mr Findlay's characterisation of this Government's handling of bringing rail services into public ownership. However, to reflect on some of his substantive points, I think that we have seen 225 services affected today, with 138 full cancellations, so I would encourage any passengers who are watching to please check online for the availability of services.

Mr Findlay is correct that, due to some drivers not taking up the option of overtime Sunday and rest day working, ScotRail has today announced plans to run a temporary reduced timetable from 23 May, which is next week, to give passengers a more stable and reliable service.

We know that people want certainty when they travel and ScotRail has therefore looked at how best to give that certainty during what is—I absolutely recognise—a really challenging time for passengers.

Under the temporary timetable, services will be reduced by a certain level, but it is hugely important to note that ScotRail will keep that under review. It is worth saying that an extension to the rest day working arrangements and additional payments for staff was negotiated with the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and

Firemen and it will continue to be in place until October of this year.

Again, I would appeal to trade unions, which of course campaigned so strongly for public ownership, to come back to the table and negotiate an agreement so that we can deliver on the timetable expectations that should have been met last week in the new timetable.

**Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP):** The approach that the Tories have taken to rail relations elsewhere in the United Kingdom is a prime example of how not to engage with a workforce. The UK Government refused to increase pay during the pandemic and Network Rail's communications chief recently said that rail workers

"should have probably worked harder at school".

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Ms Dunbar, could you please get to a relevant question?

**Jackie Dunbar:** Does the minister share my disgust at those events, and will she join me in condemning the disdainful attitude of the Tories towards rail workers?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Minister, please extract the bits that are relevant to the initial question.

**Jenny Gilruth:** Forgive me, Presiding Officer?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Could you respond to what the member was trying to get at? A supplementary must be relevant to the initial question.

**Jenny Gilruth:** Understood, Presiding Officer.

It is disappointing that the UK Government appears not to be doing more to resolve the dispute south of the border. However, in Scotland, we have ensured that our general grade, non-driving railway staff have already received their previously negotiated and agreed 2.2 per cent increase for this year, while negotiations continue with both ASLEF and the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers.

**Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):** Can the minister tell us how long the devastating 30 per cent cut in services will go on for?

**Jenny Gilruth:** As I have already alluded to in my response to Mr Findlay, the situation will be kept under review. It is worth saying that, without Covid and its resultant impact on training, ScotRail would have trained an extra 130 drivers by this point. That would have eliminated ScotRail's need for drivers to work overtime on rest days.

However, I will speak to ScotRail later this week to ask for the update that Mr Simpson has requested. I would be more than happy to share further details on that with him.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Before I turn to the next question, could I please have less commentary from a sedentary position and a bit more courtesy and respect to one another on the part of all members?

### West Coast Main Line (Services)

5. **Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with TransPennine Express, Network Rail and ScotRail regarding the reported frequent cancellation of rail services on the west coast main line, particularly impacting travellers using rail services at Lockerbie station. (S6O-01098)

**The Minister for Transport (Jenny Gilruth):** Rail services that are run by Avanti West Coast and TransPennine Express stop at Lockerbie railway station. They are cross-border rail operators that are managed by the Department for Transport, although Transport Scotland participates in regular cross-border operator task force meetings.

For the first part of this year, TransPennine Express services in particular have been impacted by Covid-related issues and industrial action. However, recent performance data shows an improvement since February. I can advise that TransPennine Express has increased calls at Lockerbie from this week and is, broadly, offering customers an hourly service northwards and southwards on weekdays.

**Emma Harper:** Passengers need assurance that services will be available and on time. I know that the Scottish Government does not have control over TransPennine Express, but does the minister agree that the sooner rail is fully devolved, the quicker we can provide certainty to passengers who are travelling to and from Lockerbie station?

**Jenny Gilruth:** Emma Harper is right that we need certainty about travelling and which services are operating for passengers. We heard that when the previous question was discussed.

Ms Harper is also right that full devolution of rail powers is a long-stated aim of the Government, as it would bring track and train together and ensure that we have the levers that we need to create a sustainable rail service in the future. However, in the meantime, passengers must be reassured that alternative options are available during times of disruption.

The Lockerbie services are not ScotRail services. I will raise the issue directly with the United Kingdom rail minister when I meet her next week, and officials will follow up with operators what we can do to help to improve on people's recent experience of the services.

**Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab):** This is the worst train service in Britain, and there is a fair bit of competition for that title. The problems are not new; passengers from Lockerbie station have been treated as second class since the franchise began. When the minister meets her UK counterpart, will she join me in calling for an end to the failed franchise and for it to be brought under new management?

**Jenny Gilruth:** I will certainly raise some of the issues that Mr Smyth has alluded to regarding his constituents' experience of the service.

**Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con):** I have a suggestion that the minister might find will focus the Government's mind. Will she make a commitment that, for every day that there is rail strike disruption, the ministerial limos will remain parked, in solidarity with ScotRail passengers—yes or no?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Before the minister tries to respond to that, I say that I do not think that that supplementary is relevant at all. I appreciate that Sue Webber wishes to conflate the two issues. If the minister wishes to respond, please go ahead.

**Jenny Gilruth:** No, Presiding Officer—I do not see the relevance of that supplementary question at all.

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** No wonder.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Kerr, perhaps we could have comments through the chair. Thank you.

### Levenmouth Rail Link

**6. Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on progress with the Levenmouth rail link, including the planned reopening date. (S6O-01099)

**The Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights (Patrick Harvie):** We are committed to delivering the new railway, which will reintroduce passenger services on the line for the first time in more than 50 years and benefit communities, businesses and visitors in the Levenmouth area. Transport Scotland and Network Rail are working closely with their industry partners and currently expect to deliver this transformational project by spring 2024.

Construction activities are under way, with the first mile of track and drainage already completed. Work continues on the route structures, and site compounds are being established at key locations to provide strategic links to on-site activities.

**Claire Baker:** The minister will be aware of the strong desire from the community for the rail link to be the best that it can be. What discussions has he had with Network Rail about the delay in the public consultation and the need to get that under way? In recognition of the importance of the community's input into the station design, what flexibilities are there in the budget for a station that will meet the needs and ambitions of the community and be designed for a growing population?

**Patrick Harvie:** The consultation is being undertaken, and it is important for it to be undertaken comprehensively. I hope that Claire Baker will join me in congratulating the communities that campaigned long and hard to ensure that we have reached the point where we can see the project's completion in the near future.

I will happily write to Claire Baker regarding the budget issues that she raises. However, I hope that, for the time being, she agrees that consultation should be undertaken and that it is necessary to take time to ensure that the voices of people in the affected communities are heard.

**Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** It has been a dream come true for communities that campaigned for the Levenmouth rail route to now see the tracks being relaid. The route also opens up opportunities for a rail freight facility, which is being worked on with Diageo, the Malcolm Group and other local businesses. I note that it took seven years for the Highland Spring rail freight facility to be designed, developed and built. What role can Transport Scotland play in accelerating the development of a rail freight facility on the Levenmouth line, especially given the climate emergency?

**Patrick Harvie:** Mark Ruskell is right to acknowledge the hard work of campaigners and the positive opportunities to expand rail freight. That is an economic as well as an environmental opportunity, and the Scottish Government is leading the way with a first-of-its-kind target for the growth of rail freight, as well as significant investment.

We look forward to opportunities to include rail freight in all our investment, and our approach to the Levenmouth railway is no different. We are working with stakeholders, including local businesses and Fife Council, to maximise the economic, social and environmental benefits for the area. I am sure that we will all commit to continuing to proceed with that with the momentum that Mark Ruskell's question demands.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Before I call question 7, I say that I would like to take question 8 too, but I need brief questions and brief answers if I am to do so.

### “The Environment Strategy for Scotland”

**7. David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how the ambitions expressed in the first annual report to Parliament on progress in developing “The Environment Strategy for Scotland” coincide with the findings of the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report. (S6O-01100)

**The Minister for Environment and Land Reform (Màiri McAllan):** The Scottish Government’s environment strategy sets out our overarching response to the global climate and nature crises. As highlighted by Mr Torrance, recent reports from the IPCC highlight the increased urgency of those efforts. The environment strategy progress report, which we published in March, recognised that, although Scotland has made great progress in cutting emissions, we must go further and faster to reach our target of a 75 per cent reduction by 2030. We are considering all options on how to accelerate progress.

**David Torrance:** In the wake of the latest IPCC report, leading scientists stated that the UK Government is moving too slowly to tackle the climate emergency. Meanwhile, the UK Government’s Brexit minister has declared that he supports exploiting every last cubic inch of gas from the North Sea. Does the Minister for Environment and Land Reform share my concern that, if the Tories get their way, Brexit will become an act of environmental, as well as social and economic, vandalism?

**Màiri McAllan:** I absolutely do. The Scottish Government has made clear our commitment to remain aligned with the European Union on environmental standards. The EU is a beacon of progress in environmental policy, which is in stark contrast to the UK Government, whose cringeworthy entitled Brexit freedoms bill seems intent on abandoning legislation that has protected Scotland’s environmental interests for almost 50 years.

### Scope 3 Emissions (Local Authorities)

**8. Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what support it is giving to local authorities to enable them to reduce scope 3 emissions. (S6O-01101)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport (Michael Matheson):** The Scottish Government is committed to continuing to work closely with local authorities to tackle the global climate emergency. We published new climate reporting guidance to public bodies, including local authorities, in October 2021, which included specific guidance on reducing indirect scope 3 emissions.

The Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform and the Minister for Trade, Innovation and Public Finance wrote to chief officers in public bodies on 16 March 2021 with a call to action to decarbonise the public sector supply chain, which is worth £13.3 billion annually. A follow-up Scottish Government procurement policy note in 2021 highlighted the national sustainable procurement tools to support that work.

**Stephen Kerr:** The Scottish Government has not set a target for reductions in scope 3 emissions, which are a hugely important part of emissions from local authorities, covering procurement and supply chain issues, as the cabinet secretary said. Instead of working with councils and offering support in expertise and funding, the Scottish Government simply gives them an exemption when it is inconvenient to do the work. Why has the Scottish Government abandoned the issue? Is it because it is too hard?

**Michael Matheson:** It is becoming a pattern in here that Mr Kerr gets things badly wrong. The Scottish Government has already issued guidance, and regulations have been set out for local authorities, which Parliament approved previously. Those regulations clearly set out the required responsibility. Through the new guidance, local authorities need to publish details on what they are doing to tackle scope 3 emissions, which is part of the procurement duty process. Importantly, I am sure that Mr Kerr will welcome the recently published data that shows that emissions from public bodies’ operations have fallen by a third since 2015-16 and that emissions from their electricity use have halved since 2015-16.

**Stephen Kerr:** You are not answering my question.

**Michael Matheson:** Stephen Kerr clearly does not like the information that I am providing him with—[*Interruption.*]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Please resume your seat for a wee second, cabinet secretary—thank you very much. I have already said that I do not want a lot of sedentary commentary and I have already asked members if they would please listen to the answers that are given, to ensure that the question session is meaningful.

**Stephen Kerr:** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I do not want to try your patience, but I am asking for an answer to the question that I asked—not for the text from a civil service briefing that the cabinet secretary has in front of him.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That is not a point of order, Mr Kerr. The chair is not responsible for the substance of ministerial responses or indeed anybody’s responses. I ask

for some courtesy and respect across the chamber to ensure that we make these sessions as productive as possible for all.

Please resume, cabinet secretary.

**Michael Matheson:** I could give many other useful data points to Mr Kerr, which I am sure that he would not like to hear because they would not feed his narrative, which tries to talk down our local authorities.

My final point is that Mr Kerr will recognise—I think that he recognises it now—that the regulations have been put in place. It is for local authorities as corporate bodies to set their target dates, which means that it is our local elected members—on our councils, which were elected just over two weeks ago—who are responsible for setting out how they will meet targets. I know that those elections were not good for Mr Kerr and his party. I trust local authorities to get it right, and it is clear from their track record over recent years that they are doing exactly that, but this time, they will do it with even fewer Tories involved.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes portfolio question time. Before we move on to the next item of business, there will be a short pause to allow front-bench teams to move positions, should they wish to do so.

## Supporting Carers (Cost of Living)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-04441, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on supporting carers during the cost of living crisis.

14:55

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** I am grateful for the opportunity to hold this debate. There is no doubt that we face a cost of living crisis the likes of which we have not experienced in a generation. Inflation has risen to 9 per cent during the past six months and will be at least 10 per cent by the end of the year. Economists are forecasting a recession: things are tough, and they are going to get tougher.

During the pandemic, unpaid carers and social care workers stepped up to the plate. They shouldered an enormous burden as they kept loved ones safe, and they still carry that responsibility because services have not fully resumed. Pre-pandemic, too many carers experienced poverty and the problem is now much worse.

Carers Scotland found that more than half of unpaid carers are currently unable to afford their monthly expenses, and that their financial situations have worsened during the past six months. Carers have also seen increases in the costs of products and services that they need for the people for whom they care. Everything has gone up, from personal protective equipment to incontinence pads to medical equipment.

Among carers, 87 per cent think that they will not be able to heat their home to a safe level, 41 per cent are worried that they will have to use a food bank, and the overwhelming majority are worried about the impact on their mental and physical health from the additional stress and anxiety that the cost of living crisis is causing.

If we value carers, as we say we do, we must not allow that to continue. The time to act is now. It is no longer good enough for the Scottish Government to simply blame the United Kingdom Tory Government and wring its hands; the Scottish Government also has a responsibility to act.

This morning, I talked to carers from across Scotland, who said:

“Crumbs on the table are no longer enough. Unpaid carers save the Government £43 million a day and without us, the system would collapse. The Carer’s allowance supplement is wiped out by hidden costs like laundry, and there is no recognition of this. We are constantly having to fight, and this must stop.”

Scottish Labour has set out many times the actions that the Scottish National Party Government can take. First, ending non-residential care charges—which both Scottish Labour and the SNP committed to in their manifestos—should be done now. That will make an instant difference to the amount of money that people have in their pockets.

Secondly, the Government should increase access to the welfare fund for unpaid carers, and make caring responsibilities a qualifying criterion for grants.

Thirdly, the Government should keep the carers allowance supplement at the enhanced rate. It should also, in order to meet the increased costs of energy, develop additional financial support for households that include disabled people and carers because energy costs are higher for them than they are for the general population.

Finally, the Government should implement a strategy for unpaid carers. I know that one is coming, but please let it include action on poverty and the restoration and expansion of respite services, with entitlement to short breaks and wellbeing services.

We have suggested five simple things that the Scottish Government can do now, if it wants to. It has the power to act; the responsibility lies with it.

Let me turn to social care staff. I met Shona, Samantha, Shirley and Val this morning—they are care workers from around Scotland—and they said:

“We are so understaffed that we have to cover between 10 and 12 extra visits per week. We work in partnership with the NHS and care for the same clients, so we simply do not understand why we are treated differently. We are being asked to pay huge amounts on fuel, and there is no support in place for us.”

Some care workers in my constituency are subsidising their employers. They work in the private sector and they get 25 pence per mile. The cost of petrol has skyrocketed, so in visiting their clients they spend more than they are reimbursed. Although NHS staff have rightly received a 5p per mile increase in the mileage rate allowance from the Government—which I welcome—social care staff have been left behind once again. We must also remember that the starting position of most NHS staff is 45p per mile, whereas the amount for some people in the care sector is 25p per mile.

My question to the Government is this: why does it persist in treating social care workers as second-class citizens? They deserve parity of esteem; they deserve the same financial recompense for caring for people.

It was only six months ago that the SNP and Greens rejected Scottish Labour’s calls to deliver

an immediate pay rise to £12 per hour for social care staff, moving to £15 per hour the following year. Instead, they opted for a measly 48p pay increase. We must remember that we are talking about a predominantly female workforce that is low paid. The SNP has paid lip service to them. It cannot be right that retail and hospitality jobs pay so much more than social care jobs. Of course, the Greens used to believe that social care workers deserved £15 per hour, but their principles went out the window for a ministerial Mondeo and a £31,383 pay rise for each of the two Green ministers. That is more than a care worker earns in a year. That is shameful.

Social care staff are not immune to the cost of living crisis. We should be exploring every opportunity to help them and to retain their skills in the sector. Another suggestion, which was made by the trade unions, is that the Government pay workers’ Scottish Social Services Council registration fees. That would be a small but important gesture.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You need to wind up, Ms Baillie.

**Jackie Baillie:** I will come to a conclusion, Presiding Officer.

None of that should be a surprise to the SNP Government. It does not need to spend months and years deliberating over what to do and it does not need to blame someone else. It can act: it has the power to make a difference and carers need it to do so now.

I move,

That the Parliament is concerned by the escalating pressures that the cost of living crisis is putting on both the social care workforce and unpaid carers across Scotland, the majority of whom are women; recognises that poor pay and working practices in social care have been increasingly exposed during the COVID-19 pandemic and have created a recruitment crisis; notes that the rise in fuel prices is impacting on the ability of care workers to visit the people they support; calls on the Scottish Government to immediately end all non-residential care charges and implement a strategy for unpaid carers, which includes the restoration and expansion of respite services, with entitlements to short breaks and wellbeing services, and resolves that the mileage reimbursement rate for care workers is increased by five pence per mile, as agreed for NHS workers.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I advise members that we are tight for time, so I require that colleagues stick to their time allocations. I call Kevin Stewart to speak to and move amendment S6M-04441.2. You have around five minutes.

15:02

**The Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care (Kevin Stewart):** I thank carers—paid and unpaid—for their remarkable work in providing

critical and invaluable support to people across Scotland.

The Tory cost of living crisis has an impact on everyone in Scotland, including on the social care workforce and unpaid carers. The Scottish Government has already committed to increasing spend in social care by 25 per cent by the end of the current session of Parliament, in order to help to lay the groundwork for the establishment of a national care service.

We will take forward the ambitious reforms, but we do not want to wait for the NCS to come into being before we take action. This year, funding of £846.6 million will be transferred from the health portfolio to local authorities for a range of investments in health, social care and mental health services.

We want, through working in collaboration with our partners, to see improvements in recruitment and retention, fair work and ethical commissioning. We are fully committed to improving the experience of the social care workforce, including by increasing levels of pay, because we recognise and value the work that those staff do.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** Will the minister give way?

**Kevin Stewart:** I will carry on for the moment, because I have a lot to get through.

From April, we have provided funding of £200 million to local government to support investment in health and social care, embed improved pay and conditions and deliver a £10.50 per hour minimum wage for all adult social care staff in commissioned services from 1 April 2022. I remind members that that is more than social care staff are paid south of the border and in Labour-controlled Wales. That represents an increase of 12.9 per cent over the year.

**Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab):** What would the minister say to the 51 per cent of local authority staff who earn below £25,000 a year and for whom the figure for a pay increase that is on the table is only 2 per cent? Many of those staff are social carers.

**Kevin Stewart:** I say to everyone right across the country that at this moment we require an emergency budget from the Tory Chancellor of the Exchequer to address the cost of living crisis. That is what we need. I would like this Parliament to have all the levers of power to enable it to deal with such things, but we do not—which is something that Labour members do not acknowledge. The UK Government giving us powers over employment law is one thing that would be very helpful indeed.

We are also working with the fair work in social care group, which has developed a set of

recommendations for minimum standards for terms and conditions that reflect fair work principles. An ethical approach to commissioning and, as a consequence, to any procurement of care and support will have massive benefits for staff and supported people alike. There have been some gains already from early adopters in local government, but that approach must be extended and enhanced.

In relation to increasing fuel costs, the Scottish Government does not set the mileage rates that are paid to social care staff; those are agreed by their employers—1,200 individual employers, as I have told the chamber before.

The Scottish Government is committed to abolishing charges for non-residential social care and support, so that provision of those services is based on a person's need and not their ability to pay. We are working with stakeholders to develop options to achieve that as soon as is practicable.

**Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con):** Is not it right to say that the private companies are being squeezed, and that they cannot pass on money that they do not have? If that were to be sorted out, they would be able to pass on their money.

**Kevin Stewart:** No, I do not think that all private companies are being squeezed during the cost of living crisis. Some companies are making huge profits. Why should the Government subsidise those private companies? I find it absolutely hypocritical that Dr Gulhane has lodged an amendment that says that the Scottish Government should find the money to pay for people's additional fuel costs, when he is too afraid to say the same thing to the chancellor from his own party and to call for an emergency budget now.

**Jackie Baillie:** Will the minister give way?

**Kevin Stewart:** No—I need to crack on.

We have improved support for Scotland's unpaid carers as a priority, using our social security powers. Our carers allowance supplement was the first payment that was made by Social Security Scotland. It increases carers allowance by over 13 per cent, with eligible carers receiving a payment every six months.

We are doing more than that. In January, we announced an additional £4 million to help organisations that work with unpaid carers to put in place expanded services this winter. On top of that, we have invested an additional £20.4 million for local carer support in 2022-23, which brings total investment this year in Carers (Scotland) Act 2016 provisions to £88.4 million. We have also earmarked additional funding for short breaks and we will introduce a new carers strategy, which we are working on with carers.

The key thing in all this is that the UK Government needs to play its part to address the cost of living crisis for all of us. It needs to implement an emergency budget now to address the costs of living for care workers, for unpaid carers and for society as a whole.

I move amendment S6M-04441.2, to leave out from “recognises” to end and insert:

“recognises the severe and ongoing impact of Brexit on the recruitment and retention of social care workers; believes that responsibility for employment law should be devolved to the Scottish Parliament so that it can embed fair work principles, including enshrining the real Living Wage for all ages; notes that the minimum hourly rate for adult social care workers in commissioned services in Scotland increased by over 10% to £10.50 per hour in the last year; supports the Scottish Government’s commitment to scrapping non-residential care charges and introducing the National Care Service; further supports that the principles of fair work and ethical commissioning will be embedded within the National Care Service; welcomes the additional £5 million for short breaks for 2022-23 to enable more families and young carers to take a break from caring; encourages local authorities to engage with social care providers and contractors to address increased fuel costs for staff, particularly through mileage rates, and calls on the UK Government to take forward an emergency budget to address the cost of living crisis and increasing fuel costs, not least its impact on unpaid carers.”

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Sandesh Gulhane to speak to and move S6M-04441.1. You have five minutes, Dr Gulhane.

15:08

**Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con):** The minister seems to think that private companies that are providing care to our most vulnerable are making vast amounts of profit. I would welcome an example.

I believe that all of us in the chamber recognise that our social care workforce are overwhelmed and we acknowledge their immense work. The pandemic exacerbated—*[Interruption.]*—Sorry, is there something that you would like to say?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Michelle Thomson.

**Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP):** I forget the exact name of Robert Kilgour’s private care homes, but I think that he funds the Tory party to the tune of £220,000 a month. Perhaps you can ask him to make a contribution.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Members should speak through the chair. I call Dr Gulhane.

**Sandesh Gulhane:** Well, I believe that your facts and figures, like everything to do with SNP and facts and figures, are all wrong. Let us move on.

The pandemic exacerbated long-standing challenges facing the sector, which has long

experienced increasing workloads, burnout and rising sickness levels. More than 200,000 staff work in social care in Scotland and we know that they are ignored, overstretched, poorly paid, undervalued and, frankly, hamstrung by a lack of effective leadership from the SNP-Green Government. Recruitment and retention rates are poor, with a quarter of staff leaving within three months of joining an organisation. Let us not forget Scotland’s 700,000 vitally important unpaid carers, who have seen rest and respite services closed since the Covid pandemic struck.

**Kevin Stewart:** Will Dr Gulhane give way?

**Sandesh Gulhane:** I need to crack on.

The knock-on impact is increased anxiety, depression and mental health exhaustion.

We have a duty to act to get a grip, and we need to act today. Of course, there are different views in the chamber on how to tackle the crisis. We support the principles that are set out in Labour’s motion, albeit with some fine tuning of the words. The SNP-Green Government has savagely cut local authority budgets, so it must centrally fund all Labour’s calls.

**Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP):** Does Dr Gulhane think that the national insurance hike is helping or hindering with regard to the cost of living crisis?

**Sandesh Gulhane:** We need to be clear that the increase in national insurance is coming this way through the Barnett consequential to help us here in Scotland.

**Kevin Stewart:** Will Dr Gulhane give way on that point?

**Sandesh Gulhane:** I really need to continue, but I will come back to the minister if I have time.

We also need to ensure that allowances for carers are handled efficiently and effectively. The statistics for December show that just 3 per cent of claims were settled within 10 days, while complaints to Social Security Scotland soared by 200 per cent in two years. We are calling for unpaid carers in full-time education to receive the carers allowance immediately and for unpaid carers to continue receiving carers allowance for up to six months after bereavement.

As Gillian Martin said, there is the not so small matter of more than £1 billion coming to the Scottish Government from the UK health and social care levy. That must be passed on in full, and there should be a clear audit trail so that we can see how the money is spent and so that Audit Scotland can ensure that public money is spent properly.

**Kevin Stewart:** Dr Gulhane could do us all a favour if he would join with me and ask the

Chancellor of the Exchequer when we will actually catch sight of that money. How much is coming to Scotland and when we will get it? There is no clarity on that whatsoever, and if—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Dr Gulhane.

**Sandesh Gulhane:** It is clear that there is a lot of money coming our way—

**Kevin Stewart:** Where and when?

**Sandesh Gulhane:** What we are asking for is the Government to promise to ring fence it and not fund its pet vanity project—*[Interruption.]*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Dr Gulhane, hold on a second.

Minister, the member has taken an intervention. Shouting from a sedentary position is not going to help us get through a debate in which we are already tight for time.

Dr Gulhane, I can give you some additional time, but not an awful lot.

**Sandesh Gulhane:** Audit Scotland says:

“a lack of action now presents serious risks to the delivery of care services for individuals.”

Audit Scotland also points out that the SNP-Green Government’s

“inability or unwillingness to share information, along with a lack of relevant data, means that there are major gaps in the information needed to inform improvements in social care.

Given the SNP’s track record when it comes to public sector centralisation, we should all be worried about scrapping local accountability and imposing ministerial control. Let us have a quick look at the record. We had the botched merger of local police. What about the SNP Government’s management of big-money projects? There are inquiries into the business case and governance of the Edinburgh children’s hospital and Glasgow Queen Elizabeth hospital, where the SNP was responsible for £150 million of cost overrun.

The SNP has also made a hash of its adventures in boat craft, with the now infamous project to build two CalMac ferries, which is £150 million over budget and five years late. We are now told that they might not even enter service.

**Michelle Thomson:** Will the member give way?

**Sandesh Gulhane:** Well—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** No, you cannot, Dr Gulhane. You are just about to wind up.

**Sandesh Gulhane:** Indeed I am.

The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities is also concerned.

Finally, we need to address quality. The current focus on cost has suppressed staff salaries, contributed to high vacancy levels and prioritised the speedy completion of care home visits at the expense of emotional care and relationships. We believe in providing the Care Inspectorate with a wider scope of powers to promote sustained improvement of care services over time and to deal with issues that do not meet the high bar of serious risk to life, health or wellbeing.

Before I move the Scottish Conservatives’ amendment in my name, I point members to my entry in the register of members’ interests, which shows that I am a practising NHS doctor.

I move amendment S6M-04441.1, to leave out from “immediately” to the end and insert:

“provide funding to local authorities and integration authorities to end all non-residential charges; regrets that local government revenue has decreased by 20% in real terms since 2013-14 according to COSLA; calls on the Scottish Government to implement a strategy for unpaid carers, which includes the restoration and expansion of respite services, with entitlements to short breaks and wellbeing services; further calls for Carer’s Allowance to be made available immediately to unpaid carers in full-time education; calls for payments of Carer’s Allowance to be made to unpaid carers for up to six months after bereavement; further calls on the Scottish Government to guarantee that funding received through the Health and Social Care Levy will be passed on in full, and, while welcoming the UK Government’s cut to fuel duty, considers that the mileage reimbursement for care workers should be temporarily increased, based on the cost of fuel, and funded by the Scottish Government, by five pence per mile, as agreed for NHS workers.”

15:14

**Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** I thank my friend Jackie Baillie for bringing to the chamber this important debate on an issue that is far too often ignored in the Parliament. There are currently almost 700,000 unpaid carers in Scotland, and almost 210,000 people working professionally in the Scottish care sector. In total, carers account for 16 per cent of our overall adult population, which is astonishing. The services that they provide are indispensable. It is estimated that unpaid carers alone contribute a value of £36 billion every single year in Scotland. The positive impact that a carer will have on the person for whom they care, and on that person’s family and community, is unquantifiable.

The American professor Leo Buscaglia has said:

“Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear ... all of which have the potential to turn a life around.”

That is the true value that carers visit on their charges each and every single day, through their ability to soothe, reinvigorate and fortify. Families should be able to rest easy, knowing that,

regardless of who is caring for their loved ones, it is someone whom they can trust and who has the capacity, resources and fortitude to deliver the best possible standard of care.

Unfortunately, however, we know that that is all too often not the case, as our carers are stretched to breaking point. While all carers work unbelievably hard to provide care, they are simply not given the right support to enable them to keep up with the inordinate workload. At least 15 per cent of the caring workforce regularly work unpaid overtime, while unpaid carers have to go for long periods of time without breaks and have to sacrifice other aspects of their life. We know that during the pandemic, in lockdown, the closure of services such as adult respite care only compounded the situation in which unpaid carers found themselves. All of that puts significant strain on carers' health and wellbeing.

Worryingly, despite an act of this Parliament enshrining the rights of those same carers to access support and advice, according to a survey that was conducted in 2019, only 16 per cent of carers knew about that legislation and the rights that it provides, and more than half of them had not heard of the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016 at all. That is why the Scottish Liberal Democrats have campaigned for an update to the act in the light of the pandemic, and have campaigned to actively include carers and service users in the process to better bind lived experience with the legislation that we passed in the chamber.

As we have heard, and as the motion mentions, the cost of living crisis has had a devastating impact on social care. Half of unpaid carers across the UK report that they are unable to afford their monthly household expenses. Meanwhile, professional carers feel that their salaries can no longer provide the income and stability that they sorely need and deserve.

The situation is dire, and it needs urgent attention. Kevin Stewart would argue that the answer lies in the creation of a so-called national care service, but it does not. A national care service would strip individuals and local communities of the little agency that they have left. It would put powers with ministers: the very same ministers who were responsible for sending untested and Covid-positive patients into our care homes when we were in the foothills of the pandemic.

The Scottish Liberal Democrats believe that the answer lies not with centralisation and bureaucracy, but with localism, giving the ability to make decisions to the people who are most affected by them. That includes working with local government to introduce a package of new carer benefits; establishing a new fund to support training and education for carers who are returning

to work; and moving away from narrow work-based contracts towards more holistic, flexible roles.

Those are all Liberal Democrat policies, and they could be implemented right now without building complicated and unnecessary structures, so what is the Government waiting for? We are legislating on the precipice of the worst crisis in a century; it is our duty to protect the vulnerable and those who are caring for them, and we must do so urgently. That is why the Scottish Liberal Democrats will support Labour's motion.

15:19

**Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab):** The cost of living crisis has impacted, and continues to impact, on communities up and down the country. At this moment, in this debate, we all need to focus on that fact. Just this week, it was reported that,

"one in five people in Scotland"

—many of whom, we understand, will be unpaid carers and care workers—

"are struggling to pay for their weekly food shop".

That figure should shame us all.

Behind the numbers are stories of family members and key workers struggling to get by, and of people who provide care to the most vulnerable in our society being unable to make ends meet. That should be a reminder to members of all parties that inaction is not acceptable; sitting on their hands will not put money in people's pockets.

I need to send a message to the minister that, by definition, a crisis ought to be responded to with purpose and with maximum strength, using all available resources. It is not a surprise that the Tories have shown such a lack of political will to assist those most in need, but it is truly shameful that the SNP and the Greens here in this Parliament have not stepped up and supported measures that would offer immediate assistance to people in dire need. Today, however, they have another chance. Today, Scottish Labour heard from carers: the very best of society, caring for loved ones. Now we need to ensure that the Parliament hears them and responds by supporting the motion.

It is fair to say that the SNP Government has failed to recognise that the crisis can be tackled properly only through the implementation of radical policy here in Scotland. In failing to hear that, it has failed our carers, paid and unpaid.

In the short time that I have, I want to emphasise that Scottish Labour's motion has, importantly, highlighted the increased fuel prices

that are making it more difficult for care workers to visit the people they support. I have heard that many times, so I want the Scottish Government to listen. If the Government wants to join us in reducing the burden that is placed on care workers, it will support our proposal to increase mileage reimbursement for care workers by five pence per mile, as was agreed for NHS workers.

We ought not to be surprised by the lack of action thus far. Many of the issues facing social care workers that have been exacerbated by the pandemic, such as low pay and poor working conditions, among others, long pre-date both the pandemic and the current cost of living crisis, as we have heard. Our social care workforce is demoralised and people understandably feel as though they have been undervalued, underpaid and overworked for far too long. Scottish Labour's call to immediately end non-residential care charges is an achievable one—we know that—yet, yesterday in committee, the minister seemed unable to detail any progress on those issues. He told us that his department is very busy, but he seemed able only to outline the poor pay offer from the Government: an insulting 48 pence increase.

Ultimately, the minister and the Government are bereft of ideas on how to support our unpaid carers and social care staff. It is clear that action is needed and needed urgently. Far too often, carers and care workers appear to be forgotten about by the Government. Families who use social care are often burdened by high costs, and those in care suffer the consequences of poor decision making.

For far too long, the social care workforce has been overworked. I call on other parties—I look to the SNP back benches and the Green benches—to support the motion, which values our unpaid carers and the social care workforce.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Gillian Martin, to be followed by Sue Webber. We will have to stick strictly to the speaking time allocations. You have up to four minutes, Ms Martin.

15:23

**Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP):** Some people are feeling the effects of the cost of living crisis more than others. The walls of the chamber have echoed for weeks and months to speeches from members on most benches about our deep worries for people who are already in poverty and those who are in work who are being plunged into poverty. It is right that Labour is using its debate time to address the impact of the crisis on carers, because it is not right that people are bearing the cost of doing their job, particularly in relation to mileage remuneration for those who

use their own cars for their clients in the face of stratospheric petrol and diesel costs.

I will take the example of one of my constituents. She is a home carer, working in the Aberdeenshire area and getting £10.93 an hour. She earns roughly £20,000 a year before tax. She comes from a two-earner household: her husband is a teacher at an Aberdeenshire secondary school. She enjoys being a carer, and it fits in with her life: she has three kids to look after. She loves her job. She gets a mileage reimbursement of 35p a mile and averages about 150 miles a week, visiting rural clients in her diesel car. She fills up the tank about three times a month, and she has noticed that that costs about £15 more than it did in January. Her mileage reimbursement has, of course, stayed the same.

The couple calculates that they spend about £90 per month more on using the car to both their jobs. Their combined domestic electricity and gas bill has also gone up by about £90, and they reckon that their food costs have easily risen by £80 per month. However, it is the national insurance rise that has affected their family income the most. Her teacher husband is seeing an extra £120 coming off his pay packet at source. All in all, the family estimates that it is about £400 worse off every month. She said, "I am lucky. I have my husband and he is earning more than me. What if I was on my own?"

I am therefore in agreement with Labour that my constituent and other carers need help. However, where I do not agree with Labour is about the asks that it has made. The 12.9 per cent pay increase that the Scottish Government facilitated for care workers is well above inflation, and it is the highest in these islands. Every move that the Scottish Government makes to ease the pressure on low and middle-income earners is all but cancelled out by the fiscal irresponsibility to the vast majority of workers and the poorest in our society through decisions that are made at UK Government level. Jackie Baillie said that the carers allowance supplement has been wiped out, but wiped out by whom and by what? It is wiped out because of what happens at Westminster.

Yes, the causes of the increased fuel and food costs are global and partly the outcome of current geopolitics.

**Pam Duncan-Glancy:** Will the member give way?

**Gillian Martin:** I have not got time. We are facing the same effects of the same issues as every other country, but UK fuel duty is around 40 per cent. Last month's 5 per cent reduction is not enough and it is not keeping up with fuel price rises. We need to put a windfall tax in operation on

all companies that are profiting from our situation, and we need to cut VAT on fuel bills.

I do not have much faith that the Conservatives will do the right thing, but I was genuinely shocked when the chancellor, Rishi Sunak, went ahead with the national insurance rise in the face of ordinary people's electricity and gas bills doubling, and in the face of huge rises in the cost of the weekly shop.

**Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Gillian Martin:** I do not have time.

This is the most regressive tax that I have seen since the poll tax, yet Labour's only answer is for the Scottish Government to mitigate bad decisions by Tories in Westminster at a cost of £600 million a year. What could we spend that £600 million on? Increasing public sector wages, perhaps?

I say to Labour that, for once, they should turn their fire on those who can act to reduce the tax, fuel and food cost rises at source. Let us ensure that that 12.9 per cent increase is not swallowed up. Let us ensure that we do not rely on Tories, whose response to the cost of living crisis is to say that people should simply change to supermarket value brands, work more hours, decide to earn more money or sit on buses instead of putting their heating on.

15:28

**Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con):** There is a crisis in our social care service. Staff are overwhelmed, having gone above and beyond during the pandemic, but they have not been given the leadership or supportive environment that they need from this SNP Government. Quite frankly, there has been no leadership at all.

It is not just the SNP that is at fault. Instead of working to address the crisis in social care, Scottish Labour is working with and focused on the centralisation of care services alongside the SNP. That will hollow out local councils even further.

**Jackie Baillie:** Perhaps the member is not aware of what is in the Labour Party manifesto, and I could forgive her for that. However, if she did read it, she would understand that it is about local delivery and accountability. Will she change what she has just said in the light of that factual information?

**Sue Webber:** There is still an impression that Labour supports a national care service. With that, I will carry on with my speech.

The message from service users and people with lived experience is clear: it is local services that they want; it is local services that can adapt to

the diverse nature of their needs; and it is local services and third party organisations that we should focus on and invest in. They are delivering the services that people want.

Labour supports the plans for a national care service, despite organisations such as the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Fraser of Allander Institute voicing serious concerns.

The SNP's plans amount to a blatant power grab. Costly new legislation and centralised structures are not the solution. That is why the Scottish Conservatives would offer a local care service, which would protect individual choice and individual control.

**Gillian Martin:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Sue Webber:** Not at the moment.

Our local care service would include a local care guarantee, which would ensure that support was delivered as close as possible to the people who need it, especially in rural and island communities.

We want positive action to be taken. We would give further powers to the Care Inspectorate to drive up standards of local care. A wider scope of powers should be considered to promote sustained improvement of poor care services over time.

We would build minimum pay and terms and conditions into commissioning and procurement, as the Feeley review recommended. We would make care a rewarding career path and would ensure that commissioned services rewarded length of service and positive job performance with pay progression and development of the skills base and responsibilities.

We would institute rigorous workforce planning for the future. A robust, transparent data set to underpin that work can be developed without a national care service. Ours would be not merely a workforce plan that was affordable, but one that was based on forward capacity planning carried out by people who deliver the services and those who access them.

We would improve the carers allowance and extend payments. We would do that by introducing a taper rate so that carers do not lose 100 per cent of their allowance if they earn £1 more than the £128 per week limit. We would also extend payments of carers allowance to up to six months after bereavement and would allow carers in full-time education to continue to receive the carers allowance.

We would amend the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016 to give unpaid carers automatic rights to support for breaks from caring. Right now, only

around 3 per cent of unpaid carers receive statutory support for breaks from caring.

The UK Government's health and social care levy delivers a clear union dividend. In 2024-25, Scotland will benefit from an additional £1.1 billion because of the health and social care levy. We are calling on the Scottish Government to guarantee that that fund will be passed on and ring fenced in full.

Although we welcome the UK Government's cut in fuel duty, we consider that the mileage reimbursement for care workers should be temporarily increased by 5p per mile, based on the cost of fuel, as has been agreed for NHS workers. Most importantly, it should be funded by the Scottish Government.

**Kevin Stewart:** Will the member give way?

**Sue Webber:** Yes, I will.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** As briefly as possible, minister.

**Kevin Stewart:** Does Ms Webber still agree with what she said last year, when she said that public sector workers should have a pay freeze? She also said that she thought that it might be wise to consider a 20 per cent pay cut. Does she still agree with those comments?

**Sue Webber:** I think that the minister is manufacturing a false grievance. The public want us to work together.

The UK Government has stepped up during the cost of living crisis, by providing a £22 billion package of support, which includes a cut in fuel duty and an increase in the national insurance thresholds. Instead of pressing ahead with a bureaucratic overhaul of services, the SNP should bring forward reforms now.

15:33

**Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP):** The cost of living crisis is really starting to impact on the most vulnerable people in our society. Inflation is forecast to reach 10.25 per cent, fuel poverty is expected to double and food bank usage is up by 50 per cent.

Who can forget the silence among Tory members when the Parliament debated the cut in universal credit that impacted the poorest in our society?

**Craig Hoy:** Will the member give way?

**Paul McLennan:** No—I do not have time.

That Tory silence was replicated in council chambers across Scotland.

What makes the situation even more galling is that, across Scotland, Labour and Tory councillors

are sitting together over cups of tea putting council administrations in place. *[Interruption.]* In Stirling, East Renfrewshire and South Lanarkshire councils, and probably more, a Labour-Tory cosy-up is in motion. In East Lothian, we even had a Tory candidate telling voters that he was being promised the job of provost by the local Labour Party, if they supported a Labour administration.

Local authorities play a vitally important role in delivering social care.

Labour going into partnership with the Tories in Scotland is a slap in the face for anti-poverty action campaigners. Last night, Scottish Labour tweeted—

**Daniel Johnson:** On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr McLennan, please resume your seat.

**Daniel Johnson:** Presiding Officer, could you remind the chamber of what the standing orders say about speaking to the motion at hand in a given debate?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I have been listening to the speech. It has roamed a little further from the text than usual, but the member has referenced the relationship to local authorities delivering these services. Mr McLennan, please resume.

**Paul McLennan:** Thank you. I also reference social care and the cost of living crisis.

Last night, Scottish Labour tweeted:

“Tonight at Westminster, the Tories voted down a Labour amendment calling for a windfall tax on oil and gas giants.”

This is the best part:

“Make no mistake, the nasty party is back.”

**Craig Hoy:** What has that got to do with social care?

**Paul McLennan:** Across council chambers in Scotland, we see Scottish Labour keeping the bed warm for the Tories. The Scottish Labour Party prefers to work with what it calls “the nasty party”.

**Jackie Baillie:** You are factually wrong.

**Paul McLennan:** I am not factually wrong.

**Craig Hoy:** On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

**Paul McLennan:** I will give way to Jackie Baillie if she wants to stand up and tell us—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr McLennan, please resume your seat. Craig Hoy has a point of order.

**Craig Hoy:** Might I suggest that Mr McLennan has come to the wrong debate? I suggest that he

retakes his seat and comes back when we hold the debate that his speech has clearly been written for.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That is not a point of order. Mr McLennan, please resume.

**Paul McLennan:** Thank you, Presiding Officer. Members do not like what they are hearing.

I will give way to Jackie Baillie if she can stand up and say that Labour will not go into administration with Tory colleagues.

**Jackie Baillie:** If you would like to sit down, I would be happy to intervene on you.

Perhaps you might reflect on East Dunbartonshire. Could you perhaps tell me what is going on there?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Through the chair, please.

**Jackie Baillie:** Of course.

Is there a collaboration going on in East Dunbartonshire between—let me guess—the SNP and Labour? Would the member care to reflect on that? Would he care to name the other councils that are having similar discussions?

**Paul McLennan:** Jackie Baillie did not answer my question.

In the past year, the Scottish Government has raised pay twice for social care staff. Kevin Stewart laid out other measures in his speech. In April this year, the minimum hourly rate for providing adult social care increased to £10.50, which was an increase of 4.8 per cent from the £10.02 that was introduced in December 2021 and an increase of 12.9 per cent in the course of a year. For a full-time adult social care worker, based on a working week of 37.5 hours, the increase represented an uplift of £1,600 over the financial year. The £10.50 hourly rate in Scotland is significantly higher than the national living wage rate, which will apply to many social care workers in England and Northern Ireland, with workers receiving less money per hour than those in Scotland.

The national care service is the most ambitious reform of public services since the creation of the NHS and it will be established, as the minister said, by the end of the current parliamentary session. With the creation of a national care service, we can take forward national pay bargaining for the social care sector for the first time.

The carers allowance supplement was the first payment made by Social Security Scotland. It increased the carers allowance by 13 per cent, with eligible carers receiving a payment of £231 every six months. In December last year, eligible

carers received a double carers allowance supplement of £462 in recognition of additional pressures that they have faced as a result of the pandemic.

How can anyone take Labour members seriously on the cost of living crisis? They are holding hands with the architects of the crisis. The message is loud and clear: vote Labour, get the Tories—get the nasty party.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We now have absolutely no time left over the course of not just this debate but the subsequent debate, so I am going to have to require members to stick absolutely to their time, whether or not they take interventions.

15:38

**Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green):** As many others have done, I thank all social care workers and unpaid care workers for everything that they do.

As the co-convenor of the cross-party group on carers, I will focus on the impact of the cost of living crisis on unpaid carers. At CPG meetings, I have heard at first hand how unpaid carers and those whom they care for have been affected. Many have been experiencing rising costs against the backdrop of a global pandemic, during which they have been worried about the effect on Covid-19 on their loved ones, while also coping with the impact on their own mental and physical health of taking on more care.

As we know, Covid resulted in some people's care packages being reduced or withdrawn, and it often fell to unpaid carers to fill the gaps. Research published in 2020 showed that an estimated 392,000 additional people in Scotland have become unpaid carers as a result of the pandemic, bringing the total number of carers in Scotland to around 1.1 million.

The cost of living crisis has a disproportionate impact on unpaid carers, many of whom face significant financial hardship because of their caring role. Research recently published by Carers Scotland revealed that 92 per cent of carers surveyed had seen their energy bills increase, and two thirds were already cutting back on heating.

There may be additional costs associated with caring. Carers often find themselves paying for items to keep the people they care for well and safe, such as personal protective equipment and cleaning supplies. According to the Carers Scotland report, those costs have risen in the past six months.

There may also be additional energy costs associated with running electrical equipment if the person who is being cared for has mobility issues,

because they may spend more time at home and therefore have higher energy consumption. That also applies to people who are receiving palliative care at home. Recent Marie Curie and Loughborough University research highlighted that the double burden of income loss and increased costs of living that are brought on by a terminal illness, such as higher energy bills and home adaptation costs, can leave people struggling to make ends meet.

All those factors must be taken into account when we consider the impacts of the cost of living crisis on carers and the level of support that is required.

Contrary to the advice that was recently offered by a certain UK minister, people, especially carers, cannot simply work more hours or move to a better-paid job to offset rising costs. Caring, which is often a full-time job in itself, impacts on unpaid carers' ability to take up paid employment. According to Carers Scotland, six in 10 of those who care for 35 hours or more a week are not in paid employment.

I fully support the call in the Government amendment for the UK Government to take forward an emergency budget to address the cost of living crisis and increasing fuel costs, including the impact on unpaid carers. We need to see action on that now, because people are struggling and have been for some time.

**Pam Duncan-Glancy:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Gillian Mackay:** I do not have time; I am sorry.

Carers Scotland warned that, as well as the financial impact, the cost of living crisis is having an increasing impact on carers' mental and physical health, with 80 per cent reporting that they feel stressed, anxious and worried about the steps that they would need to take to manage their current finances.

The greatest impact is often felt by full-time carers. We must deliver the right for unpaid carers to take breaks from caring as part of the national care service as a matter of urgency, and we must make sure that those breaks address the multitude of caring responsibilities that some people have.

I look forward to the publication of the Scottish Government's carers strategy, and sincerely hope that it will set out clear actions that can be taken to improve support for unpaid carers across Scotland. Unpaid carers should be recognised as equal partners in care; our social care system would collapse without them, and the support that they provide is worth more than £10.9 billion to the Scottish economy each year. It is vital that we recognise that. We thank them for their efforts, but they need more than warm words and applause;

they need action on the cost of living crisis and improved support that helps them to care for their own mental and physical health as well as that of the people for whom they care.

15:42

**Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** When I read the SNP amendment this morning, I felt despair, because either the minister and his party are unwilling to recognise the key issues in social care, or they just do not know how to fix them. That gives me real concern; more important, it must concern the tens of thousands of older people up and down Scotland who are trapped in hospital because they cannot get a care package, are sitting in their houses and cannot get a care package after having been assessed or are on waiting lists for assessment.

As usual, the minister and the SNP Government say that the answer is to set up a national care service, but I remind Kevin Stewart and the Government that when the Auditor General, Stephen Boyle, appeared at the Public Audit Committee some weeks ago, he was very clear that some things cannot wait for the establishment of a national care service.

**Kevin Stewart:** Will the member give way?

**Alex Rowley:** I will give way in a minute.

I am clear that we cannot wait years to address the appalling terms and conditions of the workers in the private sector who are delivering a public service. We are talking about years: if the Government introduced a bill before summer recess, whatever we came up with would take years to pass and implement. This cannot wait.

**Kevin Stewart:** We are not going to wait until the establishment of the national care service to make progress on pay and terms and conditions. That is why I will continue to talk to COSLA, the unions and other partners, to see what progress we can make on that front.

**Alex Rowley:** The whole point is that there are two sets of workers who are delivering a valuable public service to vulnerable people, but the pay and terms and conditions of one set are completely different from those of the other set. Social carers, who are mostly women, are putting in eight-hour shifts but finding that they are paid for five hours, because they are not paid for the travel time between clients. That is because councils contract out those services. In effect, what we have in Scotland is social care on the cheap.

I acknowledge the issue to do with employment law powers, and I would support our looking at that, but you do not need those powers to address the problem. That is a fallacy that you continually

put across. You have the powers, in Scotland, right now, to say to every local authority in the country—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Through the chair, please, Mr Rowley.

**Alex Rowley:** Sorry.

Mr Stewart and the Government have the powers right now. They could fix the issue tomorrow by putting resources into health and social care. They cannot wait year after year. This is fixable, and it is fixable now.

Paul McLennan talked about a national care service in terms that are similar to those used when people talk about the creation of the national health service, but the SNP amendment talks about “ethical commissioning”. Let us get rid of commissioning. What about not-for-profit public services, delivered free at the point of need? When the public in Scotland get their heads round what the SNP is proposing—a privatised care service that will not work—the SNP will be in for a shock.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Christine Grahame, who will be the final speaker in the open debate.

15:47

**Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** At this late stage in the debate, it is obvious that I will reprise some of the arguments that other members have made.

As other members have done, I whole-heartedly pay tribute to and thank all carers, professional, paid and unpaid. Their commitment to the people for whom they care, and the kindness—an essential—with which they deliver care must never be overlooked or underestimated.

On the Labour motion, Covid has indeed exposed failings and deficiencies right across the care sector and particularly in the care home sector. Reform is now a necessity. Hence the Scottish Government’s commitment to a national care service—but I agree with members that that is for the future; we must face the here and now.

First, on recruitment, at least two factors are in operation: Brexit, which the Labour motion sidestepped; and pay levels. In the public sector, the Scottish Government can take action and has done so. In the past year, adult social care workers in commissioned services in Scotland had their minimum hourly rate increased by more than 10 per cent, to £10.50 an hour. That is the public sector.

On the private sector, I am sympathetic to Alex Rowley’s points—and I heard what he said about

employment legislation, which I hope means that he thinks that powers in that regard should come to the Scottish Parliament—but we have no control over the private sector and its contracts, terms and conditions. All that we can do is try to persuade.

**Jackie Baillie:** The Scottish Government tops up the wages of care workers in the private sector. The truth is that there is nothing to stop it doing that now in relation to mileage rates.

**Christine Grahame:** I am a socialist, like Jackie Baillie, and I want her to take on board this fact: I do not like putting money into the private sector to beef up profits and returns for shareholders. That is the issue: the private sector is still profiting from looking after people; that is not what I want.

We cannot interfere with companies’ contracts. I welcome a movement towards employment law powers coming here.

I must move on, given the short time that I have—I knew that this would happen. Pay is not the only issue for people in the care sector. I want there to be career progression, so that individuals who wish to transition from care to the nursing profession can do so. According to Queen Margaret University, there can be direct entry into nursing, with accelerated entry into a master of nursing degree in year 2, if the individual meets certain requirements. I am not saying for one moment that one profession is superior to the other; they are different but complementary. However, that allows people to see, if they wish, career progression, which is important to all of us.

On the crisis that we are in, I do not know what planet Sandesh Gulhane is on: the governor of the Bank of England has referred to “apocalyptic” food prices, and the governor of the Bank of England is not known for hyperbole. An “apocalyptic” rise in the cost of living touches more on people who are stuck at home, whether as paid carers or unpaid carers, who may have ventilators and who will have heating, laundry and everything else to deal with, including enormous difficulties with prices, so—

**Craig Hoy:** Will the member give way?

**Christine Grahame:** I am in my last minute.

We need an emergency budget here and now to deal with those factors. Tinkering around the edges is not good enough.

I say finally to members on the Labour benches that we are mitigating all the time for a Tory Government with only six MPs elected to Westminster.

I have had enough of mitigating—we have seen £770 million go towards mitigating so far this year. I do not like to choose between the worthy and the less worthy. We should not have to do that. We

should be independent, deal with these issues here and now, deal with our economy, have a proper benefits system and never, ever have to suffer Tory austerity again.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We now move to the closing speeches. I am disappointed to note that Alex Cole-Hamilton, who participated in the debate earlier, is not in his seat. We will expect an explanation for that.

15:51

**Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con):** I am pleased to have the opportunity to close the debate on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives. We have heard some very good and frank contributions in the debate, and we have heard the contribution from Mr McLennan.

As many members have done, I also want to express my tremendous gratitude to everyone in the social care system and to thank them for everything that they have done throughout the pandemic and everything that they will go on to do.

I also thank those unpaid carers of all ages who, as Alex Cole-Hamilton said—and I see that he has now resumed his seat—provide an unquantifiable level of support in Scotland. Some of those carers are very young and many are over 65. They are unsung heroes and they need our support.

A recent report from Audit Scotland paints a picture of a social care service in crisis in Scotland. Staff are

“not adequately valued, engaged, or rewarded”

and, as Jackie Baillie said, it is simply unacceptable that some are now subsidising their employers. It is now an industry that is undermined by long hours, low pay and poor recognition. The situation has been made worse as a result of the global cost of living crisis. That, in turn, is contributing to

“recruitment difficulties, rising sickness absence and high vacancy levels.”

Ultimately, that puts the people who require care services at risk.

As Alex Rowley said, urgent action is required to address the needs of carers and to address social care problems that are pushing the industry towards disintegration and collapse, but what is the SNP Government’s proposed solution? It is to create a national care service, which, according to COSLA, amounts to an attack on localism and, to judge by Mr Stewart’s remarks today, will also amount to an attack on private sector providers. Make no mistake—the SNP is providing sticking plasters today and it will be rearranging the deckchairs on the Titanic tomorrow, because past

experience shows us that centralisation can be costly and chaotic and will put additional pressures on hard-pressed carers.

Instead of pressing ahead with that bureaucratic overhaul of services, the SNP should introduce reforms now and let the record funding that it has received from the UK Government flow towards Scotland’s councils. However, according to COSLA, local government revenue funding has decreased by 20 per cent in real terms between 2013 and 2022. Labour calls for the removal of non-residential care charges. That is a laudable goal, but it is something that the SNP would need to fund in order to replace those lost revenues for councils.

The policy framework on charging for social care support at home is not currently accessible. It is far from transparent, it is far from fair and it is far from equitable.

Today’s debate has been instructive in helping us to understand the scale of the problems in our care service, but the SNP’s amendment is anything but helpful. Once again, Mr Stewart seeks to pass the buck. The SNP does what it always does: dodge responsibility for the problems of recruitment and retention and the care crisis in Scotland.

**Gillian Martin:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Craig Hoy:** No, I will not give way.

In this issue and so many others, the Government adopts a cynical strategy—an ABC approach: A for “abdicate responsibility”, B for “blame Brexit” and C for “say Covid is the cause”. However, up and down the country, carers and care workers can see through that. They know that the problems of recruitment, retention, staff burnout and the postcode lottery in social care pre-date the pandemic. Ministers repeatedly ignored the concerns of those who are working in the care sector and of the army of unpaid carers. This is a crisis for which the SNP—and the SNP alone—is to blame. The Government had a decade to fix the roof when the sun was shining, and it systematically failed to do so. That is why I encourage colleagues to support the Conservative motion this evening.

15:55

**Kevin Stewart:** Those who work in the care profession and unpaid carers can see through the Tory spin, because at the heart of the difficulties that we have throughout our islands is the fact that we have an impotent Prime Minister and chancellor who are unable to fix the cost of living crisis, when other countries have stepped up to the plate to do so.

**Craig Hoy:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Kevin Stewart:** I will listen to what Mr Hoy has to say.

**Craig Hoy:** The minister suggested that the UK Government is impotent. Might I hear him say how many Scots will pay a lower amount of national insurance after the chancellor's cut comes into effect in a few months' time?

**Kevin Stewart:** A huge amount of Scots are paying much more in national insurance and will be paying much more for petrol, electricity, gas and food shopping because the country has an impotent Tory Prime Minister and chancellor who are unable to do what other countries are doing and help the poorest in society through the tough times. The other interesting point in Mr Hoy's closing speech was that he called care an "industry". It is not an industry: it is about supporting and caring for our most vulnerable—not an industry at all.

I will take umbrage with members on the Tory benches about pay. Tory members have said that we should be paying more. The Government will make the effort to ensure that we do better in pay and conditions as we move forward. However, we pay more in Scotland than they do south of the border and more than they do in Labour-controlled Wales. When will the Tories recognise that we could do even more if the Tory chancellor loosened the purse strings and paid folks south of the border a decent rate, and we gained the consequential from that? I will take no hypocrisy from the members on the Tory benches about that issue.

I will share some of the actions that we have taken with the chamber. We have waived the cost of protecting vulnerable groups checks and Scottish Social Services Council registration. We have funded myjobscotland recruitment to try to bring more folk into the social care profession—not industry. We will continue to do all that we can to try to fill those vacancies.

Let us look at what we have been up against: Brexit. One service that I spoke to has lost 40 per cent of its workforce because of Brexit—yet another Tory failure. We believe that Scotland's social care services benefit greatly from staff from across the world joining our workforce through international recruitment. Shame on the Tories for blocking those folk from our islands. In a number of other areas, we are ahead of other parts of the country, and we would always want to be in a position to do more.

Let us look at some of the things that we are doing differently. We uplifted the carers allowance supplement by 6 per cent, along with other benefits. That represents an investment of £4.6

million in 2022-23 that is aimed at supporting those on low incomes, particularly families and unpaid carers, who are suffering at this moment.

**Pam Duncan-Glancy:** Will the member take an intervention?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The minister is just about to conclude, because he is already over his time.

**Kevin Stewart:** In that case, I will conclude with these points. We will continue to do our utmost for our social care workforce—for the social care profession—and for unpaid carers in our country.

Lastly, the Labour Party and the SNP agree on a number of things. One of the key elements that Labour members seem to forget is that we are bound by a restriction on our powers. They would have been better attacking the Tories today rather than the Scottish Government.

16:00

**Paul O'Kane (West Scotland) (Lab):** We have heard today the reality of how carers are coping in these immensely difficult times. Of course, Labour members put on record our thanks to carers, both paid and unpaid, up and down our country, who are supporting people day in and day out, especially during this cost of living crisis.

However, it is clear that carers are being let down. In the absence of a social care system that properly supports the needs of everybody, unpaid carers in particular have had to step up where this Government has simply failed.

From the estimates of third sector organisations, we know that, during lockdown, up to an additional 400,000 Scots took on unpaid caring roles, bringing the number of unpaid carers in Scotland to more than 1 million. The impacts of that have been devastating. Two thirds of carers have reported acute worsening of their mental health and wellbeing due to the lack of support. We heard that articulated by many colleagues in the debate, including Alex Cole-Hamilton.

Although the pandemic has brought the problems to the fore, they are by no means new. We know that unpaid carers, care workers and people with diverse and complex care needs have been let down over the 15 years of this SNP Government, and the problem has now reached breaking point with the twin challenges of the pandemic and the worst cost of living crisis in memory, which was highlighted by many colleagues this afternoon, and by my colleague Carol Mochan in particular.

The SNP has had 15 years to show our social care workforce how valued it is. However, now, as the NHS struggles to remobilise, the SNP

Government has failed to show that it recognises the crucial importance of the work of our social care services and the unparalleled work that paid and unpaid carers do.

We have heard a shopping list of strategies and reviews from the minister today. The national care service proposals have once again been trumpeted as the silver bullet. However, the creation of that service is four years down the road, so it cannot be an excuse for delaying reforms and improvements to care now. Many of the recommendations that were identified in the Feeley report are yet to be delivered. The minister and his colleagues are using their vision of a national care service—a vision that we have concerns about—as an excuse for doing nothing now, and that is unacceptable.

The minister is, of course, quick to pin the failure to fix the staffing crisis in social care on Brexit. However, let us be clear: Brexit did not cause the staffing crisis in social care; it exposed and exacerbated a crisis that was driven by the SNP's failure to acknowledge low wages and poor terms and conditions.

The SNP amendment talks about the UK Government delivering an emergency budget. Let us be crystal clear: no party has done more to challenge this out-of-touch Tory Government than the Labour Party. Again, however, the SNP wants to pass the buck. It took the SNP months, and two attempts, to join Labour in the division lobbies and vote for a windfall tax that would put money in the pockets of care workers.

The First Minister has the power to support carers and care workers, but she refuses to do more. If the Greens decide today to commit themselves to supporting the SNP's amendment, that will be a complete betrayal of the manifesto that they stood on. They promised to give social care workers a £15-an-hour wage and then rolled that back once the First Minister came calling. At decision time, the Labour Party will be clear about supporting using the powers of this Parliament to make a real difference for carers.

The Conservatives have today said that they have concern for carers, but their amendment fails to propose solutions that would help carers, such as calling for an immediate rise to £12 an hour for care workers. Further, once again, last night they showed their true colours in the House of Commons when they would not support our moves for a windfall tax.

As the pressure on our social care services continues to intensify, the burnout of carers and care workers is increasing. We are seeing hostile work practices and one in five workers currently on insecure or temporary contracts, and an additional 15 per cent of staff regularly work unpaid overtime.

Without a fresh approach to the training, retention and proper pay of staff, we risk losing our skilled social care workforce altogether.

Scottish Labour has pledged to fight for a fair wage for all paid care staff as well as for quality training opportunities. We must see the waiver of the Scottish social services council registration fee become permanent.

It is clear that we must do more to support workers in travelling to work and between workplaces, and that we must do something on mileage.

I ask Gillian Martin what the point of Parliament is if we do not use the powers of this place to protect people such as the carers she speaks about. Before the debate today, along with my colleague Jackie Baillie, I met unpaid carers who are struggling day after day with the cost of living crisis. The families I met told me that their household bills have risen by £4,000, which is quite frankly unthinkable and frightening. Unpaid carers are not receiving the support that they need to ensure that they can keep their homes warm and their families safe and secure.

It is clear that, across the chamber, we must show that we value unpaid carers and care staff. Scottish Labour will always be on their side. I call on the chamber to back our motion tonight.

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** That concludes the debate on supporting carers during the cost of living crisis. I will allow a moment or two before moving to the next item of business.

## Scottish Attainment Challenge

### The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-04445, in the name of Michael Marra, on protecting attainment funding. I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to please press their request-to-speak buttons now.

I call Michael Marra to speak for up to six minutes and to move the motion.

16:07

### Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):

Thank you, Presiding Officer. I appreciated the couple of moments to prepare.

In lodging the motion, I had been hopeful that it might, even at this late stage, allow the Scottish Government to see its way clear to reversing its position on the cuts that have been made to funding for our most vulnerable young people in our poorest communities.

Nothing in the very short Scottish Labour motion is very critical of the Scottish Government or of either of the parties in the Government. There is no excuse to vote against the motion, other than not agreeing with its premise that it is wrong to ask the poorest children to shoulder the cost of new services for others.

The motion asks for reflection and a change of course. The motion was lodged before this morning, when we heard from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills that the commitment that the First Minister had made to substantially close the attainment gap by 2026 was to be abandoned, and that the green light was being given to backfill cuts with pupil equity funding money. I have to say to the cabinet secretary that nobody in the Scottish Labour Party will in any way tolerate using Covid as an excuse not to honour that timetable for our young people.

Scottish Labour recognises and welcomes the resources that all local authorities will use to challenge and tackle poverty and low school attainment in their communities, wherever they are found. Poverty exists everywhere and can be hidden. In the face of yearly savage cuts to council budgets, Scottish Labour councillors and councillors of any party are right to grasp any resource that the Government puts on the table.

Just this morning, the cabinet secretary told the Education, Children and Young People Committee that, timetable aside, closing the education gap between the richest and the poorest remains

“the defining mission of this Government.”

However, the Government must be judged on its actions rather than on its words.

Nine local authorities will suffer a 60 per cent cut to their attainment challenge funding. Dundee will suffer a 79 per cent cut, Inverclyde will suffer an 82 per cent cut, North Ayrshire will suffer a 75 per cent cut and Renfrewshire will suffer a 71 per cent cut. I could go on. Those are not just percentages; they are real cuts.

A report from the Dundee City Council earlier this year identified 106 posts that can be cut to make the saving. They are vital posts. They are teachers and they are speech and language therapists who work with incredibly vulnerable young people, helping them to meaningfully engage with learning. They are school and family development workers who themselves are backfilling the decimation of social work provision.

I recently visited a primary school in Dundee where an outstanding headteacher told me that she could not countenance losing those workers. If they go, there will no longer be statutory provision on which to fall back. A former headteacher of 20 years' standing from Dundee told the Parliament's Education, Children and Young People Committee that he had no idea how the city would cope.

The local authorities were originally selected because of their very high levels of deprivation, and we know that that deprivation has not gone away. In Scotland child poverty continues, shamefully, to grow under the Scottish National Party and the Tories.

We also know that the pandemic has been worse for the poorest communities. Infection and mortality rates and school absences were higher, and we know that the impact on education has been severe.

The little statistical evidence that the Government has gathered shows that the attainment gap is now wider than it has been since the policy began. To choose to make cuts in these communities “beggars belief”, according to the Educational Institute of Scotland. It has said:

“we have been absolutely appalled at the levels of funding cuts ... It beggars belief. We do not understand why those cuts would be made at a time when we know that poverty levels are rising, when the pandemic has absolutely bludgeoned some communities and we know that individual families and the young people within those families are struggling as a result of Covid.”—[*Official Report, Education, Children and Young People Committee, 20 April 2022; c 31.*]

**Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP):** Andrea Bradley of the EIS also said to the committee on 20 April that

“There is an opportunity now in the fact that the framework has been adjusted to include all 32 local authorities”,

and that

“With the new framing, there is an opportunity for us to do more and to do things differently. It is important that we

seize that opportunity to the best of our ability.”—[*Official Report, Education, Children and Young People Committee*, 20 April 2022; c 3.]

Does Michael Marra acknowledge that she also said that on behalf of the EIS?

**Michael Marra:** I certainly do, but I do not think that it has any relevance to the point that I am making. It is entirely appropriate that we take the opportunity to do the best that we can for young people, but I say to Kaukab Stewart, and to other SNP members and the Greens, that making cuts to their communities does not serve the poorest kids in this country well. It means asking them to pay the costs of provision of services to other parts of the community. It is a disservice to the EIS to pretend it supports that.

Kaukab Stewart will recall that the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers said:

“It is clearly not right to be making those swingeing cuts.”—[*Official Report, Education, Children and Young People Committee*, 20 April 2022; c 32.]

Jim Thewliss, of School Leaders Scotland, said:

“it is surely immoral to take away that funding.”—[*Official Report, Education, Children and Young People Committee*, 20 April 2022; c 34.]

He said that it is “immoral”.

In the words of a headteacher who submitted evidence to the education committee, teachers are “raging.” The single most important thing that could be done to improve the attainment challenge is, as she said, to put the money back.

In the end, this is a very simple matter, but it tells us an awful lot about priorities, because the SNP and the Greens are asking us to believe the—frankly—ludicrous proposition that the best way to support poor kids is to cut support for areas that have the highest numbers of poor kids living in them.

No member can, in good conscience, say in the morning that education for our poorest children is their “defining mission” then vote in the afternoon to cut funds.

I move,

That the Parliament calls on the Scottish Government to revise plans for the Scottish Attainment Challenge to reinstate full funding to the nine original Attainment Challenge Authorities.

**The Presiding Officer:** I call Shirley-Anne Somerville to speak to and move amendment S6M-04445.2.

16:13

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Shirley-Anne Somerville):** The Government wants Scotland to be the best place

for children to grow up in, and it wants all children—regardless of their background—to flourish and achieve their potential. However, we know that poverty is a major barrier to that, which is why our commitment to the Scottish attainment challenge remains unwavering. That could not be more evident than it is through our increased investment of £1 billion in the attainment Scotland fund to tackle the poverty-related attainment gap and to support education recovery.

Before the pandemic, we were making progress in tackling that gap. The year-on-year trend for curriculum for excellence levels data was positive. The gap for primary school pupils was narrower for both literacy and numeracy, and on our Scottish credit and qualifications framework—SCQF—level 5 or better and SCQF level 6 or better, the attainment gaps are now at their lowest level since consistent records began in 2009-10.

Indeed, only yesterday we published statistics that show that the number of Scottish students from deprived areas who are progressing to Scottish universities is at an all-time high. That demonstrates progress towards our goal that, by 2030, 20 per cent of students who enter higher education will come from our most disadvantaged communities.

However, we know that there is more to do, and that tackling the poverty-related attainment gap will take more work and endeavour. I say that very much in the knowledge that the challenge is now more pronounced, with evidence highlighting the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on children and young people who are impacted by poverty. That sits alongside the challenges of the cost of living crisis that the same children and their families will face.

In recognising the progress that has been made to date and the scope to make progress on the impact of the pandemic, we have worked tirelessly with stakeholders to refresh the attainment challenge. We have a new mission, which is

“to use education to improve outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty, with a focus on tackling the poverty-related attainment gap.”

The mission acknowledges that in order to tackle child poverty we need to break the cycle of poverty.

The Scottish attainment challenge will continue to empower headteachers, who know their pupils and communities best, to invest more than £520 million in pupil equity funding during the current session of Parliament to support children and young people who need it most, and to do so with the certainty that comes from confirmation of allocations for the next four years.

Alongside that, we know that poverty impacts children and young people across Scotland. That

is why, for the first time, we are distributing strategic equity funding to all 32 local authorities, which will enable them to take strategic approaches through working in synergy with headteachers and others to support children and young people. As is the case for PEF, local authorities can develop long-term plans with their allocations, which are now confirmed for the next few years.

**Members** rose.

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** I think that Oliver Mundell just beat Mr Marra to it, so I will take his intervention.

**Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con):** Does the cabinet secretary now accept that it was wrong not to address rural poverty in all the previous years in which the money was being handed out?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** I point Mr Mundell to the fact that pupil equity funding is allocated through the free school meals provision, which can, of course, take account of children living in rural and in the most urban areas. I note that we have moved away from using the Scottish index of multiple deprivation in allocating other parts of the fund, because we want to deal with rural poverty.

At committee this morning and again in his speech in the chamber, Mr Marra mentioned that he recognises that there is poverty in every community. I say to him that we do not have £43 million in the education budget that is not already committed. If he wishes the change to happen, and for us to go back, we must either take the money from the other 23 local authorities, from the funds for early learning or colleges or from the school clothing grant—the opportunities are nearly endless. Alternatively, we could take it from health, justice or some other Scottish Government portfolio. I hope that Mr Marra is about to tell us where the money will come from.

**Michael Marra:** Education is the Scottish Government's number 1 priority and "defining mission". Out of a budget of £40 billion, putting back the money would represent 0.01 per cent of that. How on earth can that amount not be found?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** With the greatest of respect to Mr Marra, I point out that the budget for education is already committed, as the budget is committed across the Scottish Government's portfolio. We do not have £43 million waiting unallocated to put back. I ask again: where would the money come from? Mr Marra seemed this morning to suggest that I take it from PEF that rolls over to Scottish schools. If that is what Mr Marra wants us to do, let him be clear that that is the case.

**The Presiding Officer:** You must conclude, cabinet secretary.

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** The Government has taken, and will continue to take, important steps on the issue. However, we need to take account of the context in which we are living. We are living in a country in which we are tackling child poverty as well as the attainment gap. That is exactly what this Government is determined to do.

I move amendment S6M-04445.2, to leave out from "calls on" to end and insert:

"notes the Scottish Government's commitment to invest a record £1 billion through the Scottish Attainment Challenge to recover from COVID-19 and accelerate progress in closing the poverty-related attainment gap through the refreshed Scottish Attainment Challenge, an increase from the £750 million invested over the course of the last parliamentary session; recognises that poverty exists in every community in Scotland; welcomes the clear, funded role in tackling the poverty-related attainment gap; notes that the refreshed Scottish Attainment Challenge model was developed in partnership with, and agreed and welcomed by, COSLA; welcomes that headteachers will continue to be empowered to reduce the poverty-related attainment gap in their school communities; notes the refreshed mission of the Challenge, which focuses on improving outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty, contributing to the Scottish Government's ambitions to tackle child poverty, and supports complementary action being taken forward by the Scottish Government to tackle child poverty, including the delivery of five family benefits, including the Scottish Child Payment, increasing the school clothing grant, and through services to support income maximisation."

16:18

**Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con):** By introducing criticism of the Government in my amendment, I have perhaps been less generous than colleagues. However, I suspect that the motion would be hard for it to support.

The debate perfectly sums up the challenges in Scottish education under the SNP. It is yet another example of where the rhetoric does not match the reality. After its action on SAC funding, the idea that the Government can continue to claim that education is its number 1 priority is a joke.

Since I was elected to this chamber, I have consistently made the case for more funding for rural schools and for recognition of the challenges that rural poverty brings to education. In one sense, I am pleased that we have now had an admission from the Government that that has been overlooked for years. However, at no point did I imagine that such support would be paid for by taking money and resources from others who are experiencing poverty.

It is not just the seemingly casual redistribution of the funds that troubles me; it is the timing off the back of the Covid pandemic and the speed with which the authorities that are losing out will have to make eye-watering cutbacks. Perhaps all that would have been more excusable if our schools

had not become so reliant on attainment funding to plug the gap and pay for key staff and specialists.

Under the SNP, our education system has been stretched to breaking point and left woefully understaffed and under-resourced, as the pandemic exposed. In the pandemic's aftermath, we are left with an SNP Government and cabinet secretary who seem detached from the realities that our schools and young people are facing. The Government's priorities are all wrong and the level of investment is insufficient to deliver on past promises.

Looking at the issue more widely, there is little point in claiming to put additional financial support into the system to increase attainment when you do not get the teaching and learning bit right. That is where teachers can make a difference and help close the gap. No one is saying that welfare and wellbeing are not important, but we must stop asking teachers to do everything, and we must start resourcing them to do the job that they are there to do. We must support teachers and let them get on with helping young people.

That means making sure that we can recruit and retain the right teachers, specialists and support staff across the country. It means getting class sizes down to a level at which behaviour can be managed and individual pupils can get the support that they need. It means offering pay and conditions that reflect the work that teachers do. It means trusting teachers to decide more about what a school needs.

The PEF and attainment challenge funding serve as nothing more than a mirage when we do not properly resource our schools in the first place. There are many questions over additionality when it comes to this money, and I could go on about them all afternoon, but they are for another day.

That is because, for the areas of the country that are seeing their funding cut back, we are not talking about additionality. We are talking about fewer resources going to our most vulnerable young people. We are talking about fewer teachers and fewer professionals being there to support young people off the back of the pandemic. Yes, we are seeing more resources going to other parts of the country, and that is to be welcomed, but those resources do nothing for the young people and teachers who are left to pick up the pieces.

How a cabinet secretary who claims to be here to champion education can say that that is enough, and not be able to find more resources within her segment of the budget, instead of pushing her colleagues in Government to find more money for what is one of the most important areas of public life and our most sacred duty in

this Parliament, beggars belief. I do not know how the cabinet secretary can justify robbing Peter to pay Paul. That is a matter for her conscience, at the end of the day.

I move amendment S6M-04445.1, to insert at end:

“, and believes that, if the Scottish Government and the First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, had kept their promise to make education their number one priority, resourced the education system properly, and had not cut thousands of teaching and support roles prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, many of the challenges that are being seen could have been significantly reduced.”

16:23

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** Oliver Mundell was bang on with that latter point. At the very least, you would expect the education secretary, if no other minister, to champion education. I know that the First Minister has sort of gone off education and does not regard it as the top priority anymore, because the numbers do not suit her argument. It is now a long-term ambition, instead of a “judge me on my record” matter. We cannot judge her on her record if she will not be in office any longer. It will take that long to get the progress that we are looking for.

For the education secretary not even to argue for an additional £43 million to plug the hole made by the Government's cuts from nine challenge authorities across the country, is depressing. SNP ministers make the predictable argument that if we want to make the case against something, we have to find the money in the budget, even though we do not have access to the books and we do not know what secret pots of money they have for their favourite future schemes. SNP ministers should be standing up for these things, but they seem incapable of doing so.

The SNP has been slow-footed in closing the poverty-related attainment gap. Back in 2010, while we were in government in the UK, we were arguing for a pupil premium, which involved targeted funding for those in disadvantaged communities. That was five years before the SNP Government woke up to the problem. Who would have thought that the Tory-Liberal Democrat coalition would be way ahead of the SNP on closing the poverty-related attainment gap?

**Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green):** Will the member give way on that point?

**Willie Rennie:** No, not just now.

The UK Government was way ahead. The evidence was there, and I was going on about it. I pleaded with the SNP Government to follow suit, but it was incapable of doing so. Meanwhile, the poverty-related attainment gap grew wider, and it is still growing, despite what the cabinet secretary

said. The cabinet secretary's complacency at this morning's meeting of the Education, Children and Young People Committee was staggering. She was grasping at little statistics to try to prove that, somehow, the gap had closed before the dreaded pandemic came along and blew away all the progress. That is not the case—none of that happened. If we look at the numbers, we see that the gap was growing wider rather than narrowing.

Initially, we had concerns about the approach of having nine challenge authorities, and we wanted the money to go across the country. We were in favour of the money being targeted, as with the pupil premium in England, at pupils who needed it, wherever they were in the country. However, as the system has been set up, the structures developed, the staff employed and the best practice developed in those nine local authorities, it seems absolutely nuts to pull away the rug just when they are managing to make a little bit of progress. For the want of another phrase, we should be levelling up, not levelling down with the challenge funding for those authorities.

The approach is typical of the Government. We have short-term decisions after micromanagement after depressing narrative. That is what the Government is about. Rather than make closing the attainment gap its top priority and defining mission in the shorter term, it now talks about the longer term. It is a depressing story from the SNP and, I have to say, a depressing response from the education secretary. We need bold action and the funds to go with it if closing the attainment gap is to be our defining mission. However, I am afraid that we will not get that from the education secretary or the SNP Government.

**The Presiding Officer:** We move to the open debate.

16:27

**Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** The First Minister is fond of telling us that education is her priority. She never tires of telling us how passionate she is about ensuring that every young Scot has a decent start in life, irrespective of their background or circumstances. However, for most of her 15 years in government, the evidence and the reality is that Scottish children born into the poorest families in the poorest communities have been badly let down. Pupils who live in more affluent families are still more likely to succeed in school and higher education.

When the Scottish Government belatedly launched the Scottish attainment challenge, Scottish Labour welcomed the recognition that investment and action were needed to close the poverty-related attainment gap. The funds

allocated, although they are insufficient to fix the problems, were still a step in the right direction.

Four of the nine authorities that have been allocated attainment challenge funding are in my West Scotland region. That is a stark indication of the scale and concentration of poverty in the west of Scotland. Councils in the west have worked creatively to use those funds to make a real difference to the lives and educational progress of children and young people. Nevertheless, Audit Scotland has warned us of the challenges that remain. In a March 2021 report, it said:

"The poverty-related attainment gap remains wide and inequalities have been exacerbated by Covid-19. Progress on closing the gap has been limited and falls short of the Scottish Government's aims."

As has been said, that was in 2021, and we can now add the problems that are being caused by inflation and the cost of living crisis. As well as being a damning indictment of the Scottish Government's failure to resolve the problems that we all know exist, that highlights the utter stupidity of cutting money from the authorities where the need is greatest.

As Michael Marra said, by 2025, funding for the nine challenge authorities will have been slashed by £25.3 million per year—that is 60 per cent overall. In total, there will be a cut of £63 million over the next four years, with cuts of 82 per cent in Inverclyde; 75 per cent in North Ayrshire; 71 per cent in Renfrewshire; and 58 per cent in West Dunbartonshire.

I say to the minister that I do not have a problem with providing extra money for education in every council across Scotland—it is badly needed—nor with reviewing how existing funding is being used and considering improvements. However, I have a problem with funding extra money for all councils by stealing it from those councils that the Scottish Government itself has identified as facing the biggest challenge with the poverty-related attainment gap. That is robbing Peter to pay Paul. Taking money from our poorest areas to help better-off areas is something that Boris Johnson would be proud of—it is the tartan version of the Tories' so-called levelling-up agenda.

**Kaukab Stewart:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Neil Bibby:** I do not have time, I am sorry.

I could understand that decision if the attainment gap had already been closed, but that is clearly not the case—just ask Audit Scotland.

Inverclyde's attainment challenge funding will be gone by 2025-26. Ruth Binks, the director of education in Inverclyde, said:

"we are one of the biggest losers as a result of the revision",

and she went on to say that

“We are now considering revisiting and revising all the initiatives that we have taken forward, such as ... on mental health and employability for parents.”—[*Official Report, Education, Children and Young People Committee*, 4 May 2022; c 7.]

**Kaukab Stewart:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Neil Bibby:** I am sorry—I do not have time.

In the cabinet secretary’s closing remarks, I would like to hear how that can possibly be justified, because I have not heard a single justification from a single SNP member so far in this debate. How does the Government suggest that Inverclyde tackle the problems that are being caused by this Government’s cuts?

**The Presiding Officer:** Please conclude, Mr Bibby.

**Neil Bibby:** What should Inverclyde, North Ayrshire, Renfrewshire and West Dunbartonshire do to replace the money that is being lost? Yet again, it is the poorest families in the poorest communities that are being hit hard—

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Bibby.

**Neil Bibby:** —and the poverty-related attainment gap will worsen.

16:31

**Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP):** As a member of the Education, Children and Young People Committee, I take my role and responsibilities very seriously. Only a matter of hours ago, the committee completed the last evidence session in our inquiry into the Scottish attainment challenge, and we have not yet begun work on our cross-party report. For that reason, I feel compelled to note that I find the Labour motion today disappointing and perhaps even a bit disrespectful of that work, part of which involved outreach to hear directly from parents and teachers about their experience of the Scottish attainment challenge.

Those parents and teachers shared with us things that worked, and we heard first-hand testimony of caring, diligent professionalism and practice that reflected knowledge of their pupils, families and children and meant that support was delivered in a dignified way. I am mindful in particular of the words of one headteacher, who told us that the discourse around education was rarely about what happened in the classroom and more often about political point scoring and headline grabbing elsewhere. In my remarks today, I will endeavour not to add to that unhelpful noise.

The area that I represent has a lot going for it, but it faces severe economic challenges, and no one in my position would welcome a reduction in the funding to address the impact of those challenges. However, it is important to look at the facts of the matter. The Scottish Government decision to change the approach of the Scottish attainment challenge fund was backed by local authorities and Convention of Scottish Local Authorities leaders, and it ensures that the redistributed funding allocations recognise that poverty exists in all parts of Scotland. It is an inescapable fact that there is poverty all over Scotland, and I understand the rationale behind wanting to ensure that the 59 per cent of children in relative poverty who reside outwith the nine challenge authorities receive a fair share of resource.

**Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab):** Is Ruth Maguire aware of any Scottish Government analysis of how the impact of those cuts on the nine authorities will affect them relative to the effect across Scotland?

**Ruth Maguire:** Martin Whitfield raises an interesting point. My local authority, North Ayrshire, was one of the nine challenge authorities and, until the pandemic, was progressing very well on both raising attainment and reducing the poverty-related attainment gap overall. That was evidenced in an Education Scotland inspection report in July 2018, which stated:

“North Ayrshire Council is making very good progress with improving learning, raising attainment and narrowing the poverty-related attainment gap.”

In addition, the 2021 Scottish attainment challenge 2015 to 2020 impact report for North Ayrshire stated that North Ayrshire’s attainment in literacy and numeracy between 2016 and 2019 had improved for learners at all stages. The work that the local authority, teaching and support staff have done around professional learning, nurture, mental health and wellbeing and family learning has been valuable, and it has made a difference.

**Michael Marra:** Will the member give way on that point?

**Ruth Maguire:** I will, but Labour does insist on these short debates, so—

**Michael Marra:** Yes—I will be quick.

In recognising that good work in North Ayrshire, how can Ruth Maguire defend the 75 per cent cut that I assume the SNP will vote for tonight?

**Ruth Maguire:** I will vote for the Government’s amendment, which lays out the work that needs to be done to tackle the poverty-related attainment gap.

The local authority is working on how the programmes will work. The fact that the multiyear allocations are being confirmed over a four-year period will be welcome, and that will assist all local authorities to plan for the long term.

Addressing the poverty-related attainment gap is about more than what goes on in the classroom. The actions that the Scottish Government has set out are putting money in the pockets of families now, helping to tackle the cost of living crisis, setting a course for sustainable reductions in child poverty by 2030, and expanding access to free school meals, so that children can feel the benefits of nutritious cooked food during the week. School uniforms place a significant pressure on families, which is why the Scottish Government has increased the national school clothing grant. The newly doubled Scottish child payment, together with the three best start grant payments and best start foods, will be worth more than £10,000 by the time a family's first child turns six, and £9,700 for second and subsequent children.

I know that Opposition colleagues do not like comparisons with our friends and neighbours over the border, but that difference is more than £8,200 for every eligible child born in Scotland in comparison with England and Wales. That does not make things better for people experiencing poverty here, but it provides context to politicians.

16:36

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

Children cannot attain while they are hungry. To talk about an attainment gap at all is to acknowledge that many children and young people living in our poorest communities do significantly worse at all levels of education than those from the wealthiest ones. That gap has got worse over the course of the pandemic. Data shows a drop in the number of pupils attaining an expected level in literacy and numeracy, with fewer school leavers achieving one or more national or higher qualifications. Sadly, that is no surprise, when we consider that the number of children living in poverty has increased over the same period. I will quickly touch on child poverty before I go on to talk directly about the cuts that the Government has passed down to the poorest pupils in the poorest communities.

Almost 240,000 children—one in four—are living in families who simply cannot make ends meet. As we plunge deeper into this devastating cost of living crisis, the gap between the money coming into those families and the money that needs to go out to cover the basics is growing wider. The insufficient amount of money that families were already struggling to live on is being stretched even thinner, and children not only recognise that

but are left at a disadvantage to their more affluent peers as a result.

In some parts of Glasgow, more than one in two children are in families who are being forced to choose between heating and eating—a figure that rises exponentially in the First Minister's own Glasgow Southside constituency. How can we expect pupils to learn and experience the full potential of their education? That is before we even touch on the poverty rates among the priority groups of black and minority ethnic children, disabled children and children in single-parent families, to name a few.

Although I acknowledge the action that has been taken so far, the Government must go far further. My colleagues and I have taken suggestions to the Government on how to reduce the figures, and we have told it how to pay for that, but it has almost always refused to do so.

Beyond that, and as my colleague Michael Marra has set out, by implementing a cut of 60 per cent to the attainment challenge funds for the nine authorities that got them previously, with no additional support to plug the gap, the Government has not just failed to take enough action to pull children out of poverty; it has now actively made decisions that will increase the impact of poverty on the ability of children in those areas to excel despite their economic circumstances. That risks jobs and threatens innovative and important projects. Crucially, it will have a direct impact on attainment.

In Glasgow, the dedicated funding has been cut by 12 per cent. A quarter of children living in the lowest two SIMD quartiles attend a Glasgow school. Those children are already pushing against deep poverty and inequality.

**Kaukab Stewart:** Glasgow's funding will be reduced by 3 per cent. Would the member accept that Glasgow will continue to receive £30 million of SAC funding between now and 2026?

**Pam Duncan-Glancy:** I believe that the cut is 12 per cent, not 3 per cent.

As I was saying, a quarter of children living in the lowest two SIMD quartiles attend a Glasgow school, and those children, who are already pushing against deep poverty and inequality, are now seeing their life chances weakened ever further by direct attacks on funding that was put in place to recognise that they come from a starting position of disadvantage.

Rather than reversing a long-term trend of local authority and education cuts, and recognising the dire need for investment in the system, the Government has spread funding that is already thin on the ground even thinner by taking the money from nine areas that have specific needs

and spreading that same amount over 32 local authorities. It is vital that funding is provided to guarantee that young people from low-income families everywhere have the best possible chance of achieving qualifications, but it is immoral to do it by removing support from poor children in parts of the country to give it to children in other parts of the country, rather than ensuring proper investment for the wider education sector.

I mentioned earlier that people in minority groups face disproportionate levels of poverty. Their educational inequality is also being exacerbated by the reduction in funding. Take children with additional support needs—

**The Presiding Officer:** Please conclude, Ms Duncan-Glancy.

**Pam Duncan-Glancy:** Children with additional support needs are five times more likely to leave school with no qualifications, and 43 per cent of them are less likely to leave with one or more qualifications at higher level.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Ms Duncan-Glancy.

16:40

**Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con):** Earlier this month, I completed my five-year term as a councillor at North Lanarkshire Council. It was an honour and a privilege to represent Motherwell West and I wish all the returning and newly elected ward councillors the best of luck in their roles.

I mentioned North Lanarkshire because it was one of the nine original attainment challenge authorities that were identified alongside eight other local authority areas as having the highest concentration of deprivation. That means that young people in those areas do not experience the same opportunities as their peers who live in more affluent areas. I am sure that all MSPs who are present in the chamber today will agree that no child should be disadvantaged because of their background or postcode.

It made sense that the Scottish Government wished to take direct action by allocating £43 million throughout those local authorities to support children and young people who were living there but, as we know, the SNP backtracked on that promise and, instead of investing in areas that needed it most, decided to extend that sum of money to all Scotland's local authorities, spreading that vital funding thin.

The decision that has been taken by the Scottish Government to remove targeted support from the nine challenge authorities will not help disadvantaged young children in Forgewood, the area that I represented as a councillor and

represent as an MSP. It will not allow local schools to implement measures to close the attainment gap, which is essential if we are ever to give all young people the best start in life.

It appears to me that the SNP is content with underperforming when it comes to education. The Government has no ambition, no drive and no innovative strategies to make the necessary improvements to tackle the attainment gap.

**Ross Greer:** How much more productive does the member think the Scottish Government could be in tackling child poverty if the Government did not have to mitigate her party's bedroom tax and benefit cap?

**Meghan Gallacher:** I remember when the Scottish Greens used to challenge the Scottish Government on education. It is a sorry state when that no longer happens.

When Nicola Sturgeon said that she would make education her number 1 priority, people took her at her word. However, after 15 years, our education system has fewer resources, fewer teachers in our schools and slipping school standards. It is no wonder that the SNP cannot tackle the attainment gap when it does not understand the basics of what makes an education system work well. It is not good enough, and our young people deserve better than this failing SNP Government.

One area that I want to mention today is PEF. Michael Marra rightly spoke out against the effect that the loss of the challenge funding will have in Dundee. The Scottish Government has also been clear that PEF money cannot be used to backfill those cuts. That puts schools in areas of high deprivation in a difficult position. What if a school that has not been able to spend its PEF allocation would benefit from using that money to help tackle the attainment gap through other methods? Will we see situations in which staff posts could be lost because of the Scottish attainment challenge funding reduction?

When I looked at the PEF allocation across North Lanarkshire schools, it was a mixed picture. Some schools had managed to allocate all or most of their PEF, but I also noticed that a significant number of schools located in areas of high deprivation had not. I understand that there might be many reasons for funding being unspent and carried forward, but the stance that is currently adopted by the Scottish Government does not give schools the ability to spend money where it is needed. It is restrictive, and it is typical of SNP to throw money around and hope that it provides a solution.

The decisions that have been taken by the SNP Government do not empower our headteachers. After all, teachers know our schools and our

communities, so they should be given more autonomy to make the best possible decisions for our young people. As part of that, they should be given the flexibility to use school funds to make a targeted plan to help pupils in the areas of greatest need. That goes back to my point that the Scottish Government has no strategy when it comes to tackling the attainment gap.

We need a credible plan that will restore school standards, increase teacher numbers and ensure that our young people receive the high-quality education that they all deserve. My only ask today is that the Scottish Government listens to the concerns that have been raised by Opposition members across the chamber and finally makes education its number 1 priority by supporting the motion and the Conservative amendment.

16:45

**Siobhian Brown (Ayr) (SNP):** When I saw the *Business Bulletin* this week, I was pleased to see that Scottish Labour was using its parliamentary time wisely to debate two very important issues that are close to all our hearts—health and education. However, when the motion for this debate came in, it was very disappointing, to say the least.

**Michael Marra:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Siobhian Brown:** No—not at the moment.

The Scottish Government is ensuring that every child and young person has the same opportunity to succeed in education, regardless of their background. As we have heard, the Scottish Government is putting in place improvements to the Scottish attainment challenge to aid our recovery from the pandemic and to accelerate the closing of the attainment gap, which I would have thought would have been welcomed by everyone here today.

However, once again, the Labour Party, with its endless grievance politics, is using its time to stand in the way of progress to help the most disadvantaged children and young people across Scotland.

What I find interesting—and slightly confusing—about Labour’s motion is that the refreshed Scottish attainment challenge model has been warmly welcomed by COSLA. Even Labour’s Councillor Stephen McCabe, the COSLA spokesperson for children and young people, said

“We welcome the recognition that councils across Scotland will be pivotal in work to tackle the attainment gap, not only providing additional support within schools but enabling stronger links with the wide range of important services for children, young people and their families that sit beyond the school gates.”

It would be helpful if all members of Labour were on the same page.

In its refresh of the Scottish attainment challenge, the Scottish Government has taken the decision—which is backed by local authorities and COSLA leaders—to ensure that the redistributed funding allocations recognise that poverty exists in all parts and every corner of Scotland, and that no area that is deserving of help should be left behind. I welcome the fact that South Ayrshire will now be included.

**Michael Marra:** Will the member give way?

**Siobhian Brown:** I am sorry, but I do not have time—I have a bit to get through.

In my constituency of Ayr, there are deprived areas such as Wallacetown, which is one of the most disadvantaged areas in Scotland. The children and young people of Wallacetown have just as much right to thrive in their education as those anywhere else in Scotland.

Through the PEF, the Scottish Government has stepped in to provide South Ayrshire Council with more than £2 million, which is to be spent at the discretion of teachers and school leaders to help to close the attainment gap. In doing so, it is putting power into the hands of the people who are most experienced and well placed to make such decisions about the needs of their young people.

I am proud to say that, as a result of Scottish Government initiatives—and, most importantly, the hard work of the teachers and the young people—98.3 per cent of young people in South Ayrshire currently go on to positive destinations in employment, training or further study after leaving school.

I am not saying that there is not more work to be done. No one is denying that there is more work to be done. We must not rest on our laurels. However, I believe that the SNP Scottish Government’s policies to tackle child poverty and the attainment gap are progressive and world leading. The SNP has delivered the highest spending per pupil across the four nations of the UK. Scotland has more teachers than at any time since 2008 and the Government is committed to recruiting more. For example, the number of primary teachers is at its highest level since 1980. Investment in education is at a record high. In addition, the Scottish Government introduced the minimum school clothing grant at a level that relieved the pressure for around 145,000 families. That is to name just a few of its policies.

I welcome the fact that, under the changes, all 32 local authorities in Scotland will have access to available funds and be empowered to get on top of the attainment gap as quickly as possible and ensure that every young person is encouraged to

be the best that they can be. We should all want that, and we should all get behind the Scottish attainment challenge.

16:49

**Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green):** Like colleagues, I am glad that Labour decided to have a debate on attainment funding, even if I disagree with its conclusions. The objective is one that we all share—we all want to close the poverty-related attainment gap everywhere in Scotland. The question is how we do that with the resources that are available to us.

Over the past six years, I have taken part in a number of debates on the attainment gap, and in every one of them, I and a number of other members have made the same point: that the best way to tackle the gap is to tackle poverty itself. We cannot expect teachers and school support staff to play a role somewhere between that of a social worker and that of a miracle worker, working to undo the damage that wider societal inequality has done before children have even arrived in the classroom each morning.

That is why the Scottish Government is ramping up its efforts to tackle child poverty: free bus travel for young people; doubling the Scottish child payment to £20, with a further increase to £25; capping the cost of school uniforms; increasing the wages of low-paid workers, by mandating that anyone bidding for a public sector contract or a grant must pay at least the real living wage; mitigating the UK Government's cruel benefit cap—and far more. Those measures are how we are tackling child poverty at source in Scotland.

**Michael Marra:** Does the member agree that the change in policy that we are debating is a sign of the abandonment of what I think is a generational agreement on the issue of multiple and deep deprivation? Communities that have those particular challenges face particular barriers and require the resource to combat them.

**Ross Greer:** I am going to come on to a point about the differences between communities that are experiencing poverty as a whole and individual families who experience what we describe as hidden poverty in wealthier postcodes.

Schools and the attainment funding that they have been provided with still play an essential role. Poverty exists in every council area; indeed, most children living in poverty do not live in what we regard as poor postcodes, if we are to use SIMD data. However, those who live in a deprived community have differences in experiences and outcomes from those who live in an area where most families are financially secure. There is an important debate to have about how we support those in areas with high concentrations of poverty

and those whose poverty we refer to as hidden—although it is more often a case of people not wanting to look than a case of poverty being hidden.

A funding model that is based on postcodes misses most of the children whom we are trying to help: 59 per cent of those children are missed by such a model. As even those who are opposed to the change in funding have noted, there is hidden poverty everywhere. Therefore, the funding that is intended to close the poverty-related attainment gap needs to get everywhere too, and be proportionate to the level of child poverty in each area. Young people in 23 council areas will now benefit from support that was not previously there.

I am not trying to gloss over the impact over the next four years in the nine challenge areas, but this is where I really struggle with Labour's position. Just a few months ago, we debated this year's budget. During those debates, Labour representatives proposed additional spending on a raft of policies—all of which, from memory, I agreed with. They totalled more than £2 billion, but not a single tax rise or cut elsewhere in the budget was proposed alongside them. It is entirely legitimate for Opposition parties to oppose Government policy, but if they are serious about changing it, there is an onus on them to present a viable alternative. That applies in this case too, given that the budget is fully allocated and £43 million a year is being asked for.

More support is being provided to young people and their families in those nine areas. Everything that I mentioned earlier, from free bus travel to increasing the Scottish child payment, will disproportionately benefit those on the lowest incomes. The overall quantum of money being spent to support young people who are experiencing poverty is increasing, not decreasing.

That is in the context of a Scottish budget that has been cut by the UK Government to the tune of 5.5 per cent this year alone. In the previous session £750 million was spent, and in this session, a further £1 billion will be spent, solely on the Scottish attainment challenge. That does not include the funding for free school meals, the increased school clothing grant or myriad other interventions.

Again, I am not dismissing the difficulties that, in ensuring that children everywhere who need extra support are able to receive it, the change in funding will cause in some areas. However, as the head of education at Inverclyde Council told us two weeks ago, this is the "fair thing to do".

16:53

**Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con):** Our children's education is more important than

any one politician, party or political ideology. I believe that we all recognise that to be true, so I do not doubt the sincerity of anyone here today in wanting to see every young person in Scotland succeed in life. They must succeed, because how can we hope for a better, more prosperous and fairer Scotland when only some children have the opportunity to achieve their potential?

What I have doubts about is the effectiveness of Scottish Government policy. I would encourage the SNP, after 15 years in power, with full control over education, to look honestly at the results of its policy, which I will set out. We have heard statistics today already, but they are worth repeating again and again to drive home the message that, when it comes to education, failing our children is never an option.

Let us first consider the basics. The attainment gap was bigger for primary literacy and numeracy in 2020-21 than at any time since comparable data was first made available. Last year, numeracy levels fell to 74.7 per cent from 79.1 per cent in 2018-19, and literacy levels dropped from 72.3 per cent to just 66.9 per cent.

It is a grim picture at secondary level, too. The 2021 attainment gap is wider than at any point since 2017. For those attaining A grades, the difference between the most and least deprived pupils is stark, at more than 22 percentage points. For A to C grade attainment, the difference is 7.9 per cent, which is worse than the year before.

We have already heard about funding today, but funding alone is not enough to close the attainment gap. That is why the Scottish Conservatives want to see more focus on teaching and learning. Getting the basics right early on would ensure that pupils are equipped with the skills that they need for the future as they advance through school—for example, preparing them to work in the circular economy, which requires specialised engineers, innovators and leaders.

Although funding is obviously important, it is not the whole answer, so it makes no sense for the Scottish Government to cut support for those who need it most. Ultimately, that is what its new challenge funding scheme amounts to.

Let us consider Dundee. We know that children from the most deprived backgrounds fare worse in school, and Dundee has some of the highest concentrations of deprivation. That should mean that Dundee gets more support, but under the SNP's new scheme, Dundee will actually lose almost £5 million by 2025-26. How is that fair for struggling kids in Dundee?

I appreciate that other areas will see their funding increase. For example, Angus will see an increase of almost £877,000 by 2025-26, but it should not be the case that support is reduced for

one set of children to help another. In effect, that is what the SNP is doing.

The goal must be to help every child who needs it. We all want the attainment gap to be closed, education outcomes to be improved and every child to be able to succeed regardless of their background.

16:57

**Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP):** I am pleased to support the Government's amendment, and I welcome the range of anti-poverty measures that it highlights.

As the head of education services at Glasgow City Council, Gerry Lyons, told the Education, Children and Young People Committee on 4 May, the Scottish Government's focus on poverty did not start with the attainment challenge, but it allows even greater focus to be put on that policy priority.

Over this parliamentary session, the challenge will be supported by £1 billion of investment, which is an increase of £250 million from the previous parliamentary session. The refresh that was announced by the cabinet secretary included that increase in investment. It also included a change in the challenge's mission to acknowledge that poverty cannot and should not be tackled only during school hours. Increases in the school uniform grant, the expansion of free school meals and the Scottish child payment are all policies that link into the work of the attainment challenge.

The challenge refresh also includes a change to the distribution of funding. As Emma Congreve of the Fraser of Allander Institute told the committee,

"It is incredibly difficult for a diverse country with different needs in different parts of the country to agree on what the best approach is."—[*Official Report, Education, Children and Young People Committee*, 9 February 2022; c 10.]

The decision to use a funding model based on the data on children in low-income families will deliver challenge funding to every local authority in Scotland, including the nine original challenge authorities. That move was welcomed by COSLA and council leaders across the country. The cabinet secretary has also delivered a tapered reduction in the year-on-year funding to the nine authorities that already receive it, to enable them to manage their resources.

As Ruth Binks, director of education in Inverclyde Council told the committee, the local authorities that are in receipt of challenge funding knew that the funding was not guaranteed year on year and were regularly challenged on their exit strategy. She said,

"There is poverty throughout Scotland ... so revision to the original funding model was merited",

and she went on to say,

“I think that it was a fair thing to do.”—[*Official Report, Education, Children and Young People Committee, 4 May 2022; c 7, 8.*]

**Pam Duncan-Glancy:** Does the member acknowledge that any cut to Glasgow City Council’s funding that supports children who live in poverty is unacceptable?

**Kaukab Stewart:** The committee heard from headteachers from the West Partnership that any cut requires to be looked at, of course, but they accepted the situation in order for funding to be fairly distributed across all local authorities.

I welcome the opportunity that Labour has given the Parliament to reflect on the many ways in which the Scottish Government is delivering funding to reduce the attainment gap the length and breadth of Scotland. I thank colleagues in my party for mentioning some of them; I will not go over them again.

The Government is clearly serious about reducing the attainment gap. I am shocked that Labour endlessly chooses to align itself with the Tories in attacking the Government when it is taking sustained, meaningful action on a hugely important issue. [*Interruption.*] I am about to finish.

The Education, Children and Young People Committee has taken extensive evidence from teachers and school leaders, and I pay tribute to all those people, who have worked incredibly hard. Indeed, quite a few of them put on the record the support that the Scottish Government has provided to enable them to do their jobs.

When Opposition members try to do down education, they do our children and educators a disservice—

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

**Kaukab Stewart:** Opposition members need to bring that approach to an end and support measures.

**The Presiding Officer:** We move to the closing speeches.

17:02

**Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con):** I am delighted to close the debate on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives. I will speak in support of the Labour motion and the amendment in the name of my colleague Oliver Mundell.

We have heard many speeches and, given the tight timing, I will not be able to mention them all. It is clear from the mood among members in the chamber, with the exception of SNP and Green

members, that removing the targeted approach will not help the children who most need help.

It is not surprising that we have been reminded about Nicola Sturgeon’s top priority, which I think that everyone here bar SNP and Green members remembers.

We have heard the same old, same old from SNP members. They have spent years sticking their heads in the sand over their failure to close the attainment gap, so it does not surprise me that nothing has changed. The First Minister declared that closing the attainment gap is a moral challenge. She was quite right, but that makes it all the more regrettable that, after seven years—

**The Minister for Children and Young People (Clare Haughey):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Pam Gosal:** I do not have time to take an intervention and, to be honest, talk is cheap: you need to take some actions now.

It is all the more regrettable that, after seven years, this Parliament finds itself yet again debating the SNP’s failure to close the gap.

**Clare Haughey:** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I felt that that remark by Pam Gosal was quite rude and condescending.

**The Presiding Officer:** I remind members always to speak through the chair and avoid the use of “you”.

**Pam Gosal:** I will, Presiding Officer.

The decision to target additional attainment gap funding at nine challenge authorities was at least a step in the right direction. The decision to remove targeted attainment gap funding from challenge authorities is nothing more than the action of a Government that is out of ideas and has resorted to placing sticking plasters over problems in the desperate hope that things will look better when it has finished.

In my region, West Dunbartonshire, the cuts mean a reduction of 58 per cent between 2021 and 2025, which equates to more than £1.2 million. Here is a newsflash for the SNP: it cannot improve a targeted funding system by making the system less targeted, and it will not improve the prospects of deprived children by removing £25 million from their schools. That is especially problematic when we consider that, if we exclude attainment funding, spending on education fell between 2013 and 2019 in nearly all key challenge areas.

Where does that leave our key challenge areas and the pupils who need that funding most? We know that, already, the NSPCC in Scotland has written to the Education, Children and Young People Committee with concerns that large cuts to

the most deprived local authorities will result in mass departures of headteachers.

The Scottish Government has failed to support disadvantaged children: first, by failing to close the attainment gap at both primary and secondary level, as pointed out by my colleague Maurice Golden; secondly, due to the wider underinvestment in schools leading to cuts in teaching posts, as my colleague Oliver Mundell rightly acknowledged in his amendment; thirdly, by retaining a restrictive stance on pupil equity funding, meaning that it cannot be used to backfill cuts and does not give the schools autonomy to spend more money where it is needed, as rightly asserted by my colleague Meghan Gallacher; and, last but not least, by replacing the attainment challenge fund with the less targeted strategic equity fund.

We need to see less talking and more action from the SNP Government—innovation, not stagnation. If the SNP needs some pointers, it should consider our proposals for a curriculum for all, which would see funding allocated effectively to encourage responsibility and innovation in our education workforce and would prompt a restoration of high education standards in our classrooms.

17:06

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** As we looked to refresh the Scottish attainment challenge, it was important that the Government and stakeholders took cognisance of the fact that 59 per cent of children in relative poverty lived outside the challenge authorities. There was general agreement that that model needed to be looked at and that we needed to find a fair model.

I think that that is exactly why, as Siobhian Brown and others have mentioned, Councillor Stephen McCabe, COSLA's then spokesperson for children and young people and Labour leader of Inverclyde Council, welcomed the changes and announced that COSLA welcomed

“the recognition that councils across Scotland will be pivotal in work to tackle the attainment gap”.

Ruth Binks, who recently gave evidence to the Education, Children and Young People Committee and has already been quoted in this debate, said that, given that there is poverty in every local authority area in Scotland, the original funding merited revision and that it was the “fair thing to do”.

Also, as has been mentioned, these changes will be brought in over four years.

**Martin Whitfield:** Does the Scottish Government have impact assessments on the nine authorities that lost their funding?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** Impact assessments were published when we published the refreshed Scottish attainment challenge programme on 30 March.

We have seen both from individual councils and COSLA a recognition that this was an important area for the Scottish Government to look at. That is one of the reasons why we did so. However, understandably, although there has been consideration of this matter today, we have not heard as much about the £520 million pupil equity funding that is going directly to headteachers—

**The Presiding Officer:** Cabinet secretary, if I might stop you for a moment. I am aware that there are a lot of conversations taking place across the chamber. I would be grateful if we could hear the cabinet secretary.

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** Thank you, Presiding Officer.

We have seen £520 million of pupil equity funding going directly to schools. As the guidance makes clear, it is up to headteachers to spend that funding, because this Government is putting into action the empowering system that we want to see.

However, I have found it difficult to stomach the directions that we have had from various Opposition parties to simply find the money—a point that Ross Greer and others made. I would point out that the budget is published every year. Back in the day, Opposition parties put together costed and credible alternative budgets. Now, we are told to “find the money”, and that is testament to the fact that they are so far from government that they make demands that they genuinely have no idea how to achieve in a fully allocated budget.

We even had Willie Rennie casting back to the good old days of the Tory-Liberal Democrat coalition. I suggest to Mr Rennie that that is not a pleasant place for the Liberal Democrats to go, given how well it went for them recently.

We were also challenged to take bold action. I point to the £1 billion of attainment challenge funding that the Government is putting in, and the 3,500 thousand additional teachers that we have committed to, with our Green Party colleagues.

I find it particularly rich that, today of all days, the Labour Party has moved the motion as it makes what would appear to be backroom deals with the Scottish Conservatives right across Scotland to make administrations that, quite frankly, make a mockery of any pretence that it is about progressive educational politics. Better together indeed—it is not better for our young people right across Scotland.

Ross Greer said that the best way to tackle the attainment gap is to tackle poverty, and we will

continue to do just that. However, we will continue to tackle the attainment gap with one hand tied behind our backs, because of the continued progress that the UK Government is making to make our job more difficult. There is no thanks to the Tories and its coalition partners, the Labour Party—and, it would appear, the Liberal Democrats.

17:10

**Martin Whitfield:** It is a great pleasure to close the debate in this cauldron of argument and dispute about what is happening in our local councils following the elections. Education either is or is not the SNP's defining mission—I am not sure that the debate has provided a great defence of it being the defining mission of the SNP-Green Government. Of course, it is right that all authorities are now being supported with a budget, and sadly, as Ross Greer and so many others pointed out, the reality is that children across Scotland are living in poverty—as my colleague Pam Duncan-Glancy said, the figure is one in four. However, that support should surely not come at the expense of the nine authorities that were identified in 2015 as the areas with the deepest level of poverty across Scotland.

The funding allocated to all local authorities going forward should of course remain, but it cannot be paid for on the backs of poor children who are hungry—0.01 per cent of the budget! With respect, the cabinet secretary should be able to turn to those who discuss finance within the Government and say, "Our defining mission is education, and 0.01 per cent will protect the poorest children in Scotland."

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** The figure £43 million is being spoken about. We have made clear time and time again that, if the member wants to take that away from health, justice or social care, which we have just had a debate about, he has to say so—where exactly would it come from? As Ross Greer pointed out, there is no costed analysis, which is the case with every other policy that the Labour Party has put forward.

**Martin Whitfield:** All this is on the back of a £0.5 billion underspend this year.

Before I turn to the contributions that have been made today, I will turn the clock back.

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** Will the member take an intervention on that point?

**Martin Whitfield:** I will not take an intervention.

Let us turn the clock back to 2015, when the First—*[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer:** Order! We will hear Mr Whitfield.

**Martin Whitfield:** I am very grateful, Presiding Officer.

I will turn the clock back to 2015. The First Minister's aspiration then was that a child born in that year would have the same chance as everyone else by the time they left school. A child born in that year would now be eight years old. So, how are we doing? As Maurice Golden rightly pointed out, literacy levels have plummeted from 72.3 per cent to 66.9 per cent and numeracy levels have dropped from 79.1 per cent to 74.7 per cent. The literacy attainment gap has risen from 20.7 to 24.7 per cent. We heard about the Audit Scotland report in the debate.

Let us look again at what the then cabinet secretary, Angela Constance, said in the chamber in 2015 on the launching of the attainment challenge, when it was pointed out that the 20 per cent most disadvantaged areas do only half as well as the most affluent areas. Liam McArthur MSP made an intervention to ask about the postcode lottery of the nine attainment challenge areas. Her answer was:

"Nonetheless, as we move forward ... we need to invest in a more targeted resource for the children who are most in need." —*[Official Report, 17 February 2015; c 12.]*

What we have heard about today is the effect of that targeted resource. Members on the SNP back benches have spoken about improvements in North Ayrshire, but what of going forward? Suddenly, the cliff edge is reached. That is the end of the funding—it goes, for 0.01 per cent of the budget.

We have heard from a number of people, including Oliver Mundell. I confirm to the Conservatives that we will support their amendment, but we cannot support the SNP amendment, which talks not about how people in those nine areas will be helped but about what will happen down the line. When will that ever be delivered?

We heard from Willie Rennie, who succinctly said that the cabinet secretary is unable to argue in her own Government for funding for these people.

Neil Bibby reminded us that the children who are born in our poorest families are being let down today—it is the tartan version of the Tories' levelling up.

I welcome Ruth Maguire's confirmation of the attainment challenges in North Ayrshire, where the staff had worked hard to bring about improvements. Will those improvements continue with the 75 per cent cut? I fear not.

There was agreement today across the chamber about the importance of poverty and young people, except in the final contribution from

Kaukab Stewart, who said that she was disappointed that members had talked down education. I do not believe that anyone in this chamber today talked down education. What we talked about was the pathway to improve our young people.

**The Presiding Officer:** You must close, Mr Whitfield.

**Martin Whitfield:** As Michael Marra succinctly put it, we are faced with the ludicrous proposition that the best way to give support to poor kids is to cut the support from the areas with the most poor children.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes the debate.

## Points of Order

17:16

**Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. First, I apologise for not being able to give your office advance notice of this point of order, which I would have liked to do.

Earlier today, in the debate on supporting carers, I commented that Robert Kilgour, a well-known Tory donor, made contributions to the Tory party. Having now consulted the Electoral Commission website, I wish to apologise for underreporting the scale of the donations, so I would like to correct the record.

As an individual, Mr Kilgour has made 15 donations either to the Tory party or to Scottish Business Supports the Union, totalling £76,127.76. In addition, via his company, Dow Investments, he has made 37 regular donations to the Tory party, totalling £222,651. His most recent think tank, the British Civic Institute, has not yet registered with the Electoral Commission but, when it does, I will ensure that I make accurate figures available.

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** Thank you, Ms Thomson. That point is now on the record.

**Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I think that Michelle Thomson should look at what she said on the record, which was “£220,000 per month”.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Gulhane. That is not a point of order.

## Business Motions

### The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-04461, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

#### Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 24 May 2022

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: European Charter of Local Self-Government (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill – Next Steps

*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: Keeping Care Close to Home and Improving Outcomes

*followed by* Committee Announcements

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Wednesday 25 May 2022

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Health and Social Care; Social Justice, Housing and Local Government

*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: Community Wealth Building – Delivering Transformation in Scotland's Local and Regional Economies

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 26 May 2022

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

*followed by* Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions: Constitution, External Affairs and Culture

*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: Update on Delivery of Social Security Benefits

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 31 May 2022

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)

*followed by* Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee, Health, Social Care and Sport Committee and Social Justice and Social Security Committee Debate: Reducing Scotland's Drugs Deaths and Drugs Harm

*followed by* Committee Announcements

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Wednesday 1 June 2022

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm General Questions

2.20 pm First Minister's Questions

3.05 pm Portfolio Questions: Justice and Veterans; Finance and Economy; Education and Skills

*followed by* The Queen's Platinum Jubilee 2022

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 23 May 2022, in rule 13.7.3, after the word "except" the words "to the extent to which the Presiding Officer considers that the questions are on the same or similar subject matter or" are inserted.—[George Adam]

17:18

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** Last Wednesday, during Conservative Party business, Jenny Gilruth, the Minister for Transport, proudly proclaimed that the missing document in the ferries fiasco had been found. Audit Scotland's reckoning is that key information is still hidden, but the email in question implicated the Deputy First Minister, John Swinney, in the affair—*[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer:** Excuse me a moment, Mr Kerr. Colleagues, can we please have some peace to hear Mr Kerr?

**Stephen Kerr:** As outlined by Douglas Ross at First Minister's question time the next day, the email clearly shows that Mr Swinney had the final approval before the contract was awarded to Ferguson Marine. That was new information, and it contradicted the supposed truth that the First Minister had been telling the chamber up to that point, which was that Derek Mackay had the final approval. Indeed, the First Minister continued to purport that line, despite Mr Swinney eventually admitting that he had given approval.

Therefore, I was rather surprised when the Scottish Government rejected my request for an immediate statement from the Deputy First Minister. I was surprised further when it was revealed that neither this week nor next week had any time been set aside for Mr Swinney to outline his actions and answer questions from elected parliamentarians. The Deputy First Minister appeared to have plenty of time to give multiple, somewhat contradictory quotes to the media, but had no time to speak to the Parliament. Once again, we see just how little this arrogant Scottish National Party Government respects the Parliament.

What is this place for, if not to be the first line of scrutiny of the Scottish Government? Throughout Covid, the Parliament was often sidelined and the media were prioritised as the Government's policy announcement hub. That situation has, sadly, continued and we are now in the ludicrous position of the media being not only the first, but the only line of scrutiny on Mr Swinney on that matter. If that remains true, then the Parliament has failed.

My amendment therefore inserts into the business motion a statement from the Deputy First Minister, next Tuesday after topical questions, in which he can explain himself to the Parliament and answer questions. We should not have to fight tooth and nail for such things.

To pre-empt the Minister for Parliamentary Business's reply, in which he is likely to say that the Deputy First Minister believes that there is not enough to say in a statement, I say that I have seen enough of the Deputy First Minister's statements to know that he is adept at using a lot of words to make very few points, so I would not worry—[*Interruption.*]

**The Presiding Officer:** Colleagues.

**Stephen Kerr:** I am grateful that the SNP acknowledges the truth of what I am saying, so I would not worry about that—[*Interruption.*]

**The Presiding Officer:** Colleagues, we will hear Mr Kerr.

**Stephen Kerr:** If that is not enough for Mr Adam, I think that all parties will agree when I say that Mr Swinney's statement need not take up the

usual 10 minutes but need be only as long as it takes Mr Swinney to explain his role in the matter. The rest of the time should, of course, be given to MSPs to provide adequate scrutiny. Therefore, I encourage all members of the Scottish Parliament to support my amendment, so that we can restore some faith in the effectiveness of the Parliament.

I move amendment S6M-04461.1, after

"Tuesday 24 May 2022

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)"

insert—

*"followed by* Deputy First Minister's Statement: Ferries Contract Approval".

17:23

**The Minister for Parliamentary Business (George Adam):** Thank you, Presiding Officer. Dearie me. It is my intention to stick to the facts of the matter at hand and not to the flawed interpretation from some people in the room.

Last week, the Scottish Government published the exchange of 9 October 2015 and set out that the Deputy First Minister spoke with officials following the approval by the Minister for Transport and Islands earlier that day. The short note of that meeting, which is in the email trail, confirms that the decision was taken by Mr Mackay.

It reads, "He"

—the Deputy First Minister—

"now understands the background and that Mr Mackay has cleared the proposal."

The submission noted that the Deputy First Minister had approved the financial implications and the budget availability in his role as Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy at that time. That documentation has been published since 2019.

The matter was a major part of last week's First Minister's question time, as the chief whip of the Conservative Party has alluded to, and of a topical question this week. The issue has been discussed numerous times over the past week, and if other members wish to discuss it further, I encourage them to use the usual routes, as we have done in the past.

**The Presiding Officer:** The question is, that amendment S6M-04461.1, in the name of Stephen Kerr, which seeks to amend motion S6M-04461, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on setting out a business programme, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division. There will be a short suspension to allow members to access the digital voting system.

17:25

*Meeting suspended.*

17:31

*On resuming—*

**The Presiding Officer:** We come to the division on amendment S6M-04461.1, in the name of Stephen Kerr.

The vote is now closed.

**Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app did not work. I would have voted no.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Ms Burgess, we will ensure that that is recorded.

**For**

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 O’Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

**Against**

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)

Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on amendment S6M-04461.1, in the name of Stephen Kerr is: For 52, Against 67, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S6M-04461, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on setting out a business programme, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

The vote is now closed.

**Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app did not connect. I would have voted no.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Burnett. We will ensure that that is recorded.

**David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I would have voted yes.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Torrance.

**Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My vote was not recorded. I would have voted no.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Ms Lennon. We will ensure that that is recorded.

**Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My vote was not recorded. I would have voted no.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Ms Clark.

#### For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)

Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

#### Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)

Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 O’Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on motion S6M-04461, in the name of George Adam, is: For 68, Against 51, Abstentions 0.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 24 May 2022

2.00 pm Time for Reflection  
*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)  
*followed by* Ministerial Statement: European Charter of Local Self-Government (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill – Next Steps  
*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: Keeping Care Close to Home and Improving Outcomes  
*followed by* Committee Announcements  
*followed by* Business Motions  
*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members’ Business  
 Wednesday 25 May 2022  
 2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Health and Social Care; Social Justice, Housing and Local Government  
*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: Community Wealth Building – Delivering Transformation in Scotland’s Local and Regional Economies  
*followed by* Business Motions  
*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
*followed by* Approval of SSIs (if required)  
 5.00 pm Decision Time  
*followed by* Members’ Business  
 Thursday 26 May 2022  
 11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 11.40 am General Questions  
 12.00 pm First Minister’s Questions  
*followed by* Members’ Business  
 2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 2.30 pm Portfolio Questions: Constitution, External Affairs and Culture  
*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: Update on Delivery of Social Security Benefits  
*followed by* Business Motions  
*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 5.00 pm Decision Time  
 Tuesday 31 May 2022  
 2.00 pm Time for Reflection  
*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)  
*followed by* Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee, Health, Social Care and Sport Committee and Social Justice and Social Security Committee Debate: Reducing Scotland’s Drugs Deaths and Drugs Harm  
*followed by* Committee Announcements  
*followed by* Business Motions  
*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 5.00 pm Decision Time  
*followed by* Members’ Business  
 Wednesday 1 June 2022  
 2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 2.00 pm General Questions  
 2.20 pm First Minister’s Questions  
 3.05 pm Portfolio Questions: Justice and Veterans; Finance and Economy;

## Education and Skills

*followed by* The Queen's Platinum Jubilee 2022

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 23 May 2022, in rule 13.7.3, after the word "except" the words "to the extent to which the Presiding Officer considers that the questions are on the same or similar subject matter or" are inserted.

**The Presiding Officer:** The next item of business is consideration of business motions S6M-04462 and S6M-04476, on stage 2 timetabling, and S6M-04477, on stage 2 consideration of a bill.

*Motions moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Fireworks and Pyrotechnic Articles (Scotland) Bill at stage 2 be completed by 8 June 2022.

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Coronavirus (Recovery and Reform) (Scotland) Bill at stage 2 be completed by 14 June 2022.

That the Parliament agrees that under Rule 9.7.1(b) and 9.7.4 stage 2 of the Coronavirus (Recovery and Reform) (Scotland) Bill be taken as follows—

(a) the following committees will consider the Bill in the following order:

(i) the Criminal Justice Committee to consider sections 26, 30, 31, 32 in Part 3 and Part 5 with the schedule being considered immediately after the section that introduces it,

(ii) the Covid-19 Recovery Committee to consider Part 1, Part 2, Part 3 of the Bill (other than sections 26, 30, 31, 32), Part 4, Part 6 and the long title,

(b) the Criminal Justice Committee to consider (in the order set out in paragraph (a))—

(i) Sections 26, 30, 31, 32 in Part 3,

(ii) Part 5, including the schedule being considered immediately after the section that introduces it,

(iii) any amendment to provisions in sections 26, 30, 31, 32 and Part 5,

(iv) any other amendments specifically on matters relating to justice, including civil and criminal justice,

(c) the Covid-19 Recovery Committee to consider (in the order set out in paragraph (a)) all amendments other than those that are to be considered by the Criminal Justice Committee in accordance with paragraph (b).—[George Adam]

*Motions agreed to.*

## Decision Time

17:35

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** There are six questions to be put as a result of today's business.

I remind members that if the amendment in the name of Kevin Stewart is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Sandesh Gulhane will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S6M-04441.2, in the name of Kevin Stewart, which seeks to amend motion S6M-04441, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on supporting carers during the cost of living crisis, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

The vote is now closed.

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. The voting app has not registered my vote. I would have voted no.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Johnson.

**For**

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)

Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

#### Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)

O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the vote on amendment S6M-04441.2, in the name of Kevin Stewart, is: For 66, Against 52, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The amendment in the name of Sandesh Gulhane falls.

The next question is, that motion S6M-04441, in the name of Jackie Baillie, as amended, on supporting carers during the cost of living crisis, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

The vote is now closed.

**Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I apologise—I have had problems with the app. I would have abstained.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Ms Lennon. We will ensure that that is recorded.

**Foysol Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I would have abstained as well.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Choudhury. We will ensure that that is recorded.

**Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP):** *[Inaudible.]*—voted yes.

**The Presiding Officer:** Mr Doris, could you repeat that, please?

**Bob Doris:** I voted yes.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Doris. We will ensure that that is recorded.

#### For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)

Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

#### Against

Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)

Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

#### Abstentions

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on motion S6M-04441, in the name of Jackie Baillie, as amended, on supporting carers during the cost of living crisis, is: For 66, Against 32, Abstentions 21.

#### *Motion, as amended, agreed to,*

That the Parliament is concerned by the escalating pressures that the cost of living crisis is putting on both the social care workforce and unpaid carers across Scotland, the majority of whom are women; recognises the severe and ongoing impact of Brexit on the recruitment and retention of social care workers; believes that responsibility for employment law should be devolved to the Scottish Parliament so that it can embed fair work principles, including enshrining the real Living Wage for all ages; notes that the minimum hourly rate for adult social care workers in commissioned services in Scotland increased by over 10% to £10.50 per hour in the last year; supports the Scottish Government's commitment to scrapping non-

residential care charges and introducing the National Care Service; further supports that the principles of fair work and ethical commissioning will be embedded within the National Care Service; welcomes the additional £5 million for short breaks for 2022-23 to enable more families and young carers to take a break from caring; encourages local authorities to engage with social care providers and contractors to address increased fuel costs for staff, particularly through mileage rates, and calls on the UK Government to take forward an emergency budget to address the cost of living crisis and increasing fuel costs, not least its impact on unpaid carers.

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S6M-04445.2, in the name of Shirley-Anne Somerville, which seeks to amend motion S6M-04445, in the name of Michael Marra, on protecting attainment funding, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

The vote is now closed.

**Daniel Johnson:** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. The app was not working for me. I would have voted no.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Johnson. We will ensure that that is recorded.

**The Minister for Children and Young People (Clare Haughey):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I would have voted yes.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Ms Haughey. We will ensure that that is recorded.

#### For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)

Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

#### Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)

Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on amendment S6M-04445.2, in the name of Shirley-Anne Somerville, is: For 67, Against 52, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S6M-04445.1, in the name of Oliver Mundell, which seeks to amend motion S6M-04445, in the name of Michael Marra, on protecting attainment funding, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

**For**

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)

Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

**Against**

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)

McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on amendment S6M-04445.1, in the name of Oliver Mundell, is: For 51, Against 66, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The final question is, that motion S6M-04445, in the name of Michael Marra, as amended, on protecting attainment funding, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

**Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My card was in and I tried to vote, but the thing had disconnected—it was nothing to do with me. [*Laughter.*]

I would have voted yes.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Ms Grahame.

**For**

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)

Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

**Against**

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)

Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 67, Against 51, Abstentions 0.

*Motion, as amended, agreed to,*

That the Parliament notes the Scottish Government's commitment to invest a record £1 billion through the Scottish Attainment Challenge to recover from COVID-19 and accelerate progress in closing the poverty-related attainment gap through the refreshed Scottish Attainment Challenge, an increase from the £750 million invested over the course of the last parliamentary session; recognises that poverty exists in every community in Scotland; welcomes the clear, funded role in tackling the poverty-related attainment gap; notes that the refreshed Scottish Attainment Challenge model was developed in partnership with, and agreed and welcomed by, COSLA; welcomes that headteachers will continue to be empowered to reduce the poverty-related attainment gap in their school communities; notes the refreshed mission of the Challenge, which focuses on improving outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty, contributing to the Scottish Government's ambitions to tackle child poverty, and supports complementary action being taken forward by the Scottish Government to tackle child poverty, including the delivery of five family benefits, including the Scottish Child Payment, increasing the school clothing grant, and through services to support income maximisation.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes decision time.

## Adverse Weather Events

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-03646, in the name of Tess White, on improving the disaster response to serious weather events. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

*Motion debated,*

That the Parliament recognises that parts of Scotland, and particularly the north east, have been seriously affected by adverse weather events such as Storms Arwen, Barra, Malik and Corrie, at the end of 2021 and early 2022, which tragically led to a loss of life; acknowledges that these weather events resulted in a loss of power for thousands of households, in some cases for a protracted period over a number of days, and that the water supply, telecoms, rail and road infrastructure were also compromised; notes the view that it is vital for all those involved to learn lessons from the disaster response to these storms and to make appropriate and prompt improvements to increase community resilience in future; further notes the six recommendations of the Scottish Government's Storm Arwen review, published in January 2022, and notes the calls on the Scottish Government to set out an action plan for the implementation and delivery of these recommendations ahead of the update in June 2022; considers that the communication of information during emergencies is particularly important and notes the view that more must be done in advance of serious weather warnings to notify communities how they can access up-to-date information when telecoms are down; pays tribute to those volunteers who mobilised following these storms to support vulnerable individuals, and those who became newly vulnerable as they lost power, telecoms and water supply in communities such as Fettercairn, Stonehaven and Glenbervie, and notes the calls for people who can to engage with the British Red Cross and other organisations about opportunities to volunteer in their communities as emergency responders alongside local partners.

17:48

**Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con):** Storms Arwen, Barra, Malik and Corrie were so severe that they tragically resulted in loss of life. I know that the thoughts of us all are with the loved ones of those who died. Those major storms had a shattering effect on communities—especially rural communities—across Scotland. The north-east in particular experienced profound and prolonged hardship. Households and businesses lost power for several days and people could not heat their homes or premises in the depths of winter. Their connectivity was compromised because road and rail infrastructure was damaged. Their communications were cut off because they could not charge electrical items.

Following storms Malik and Corrie, the storm damage was so severe that Edzell was completely cut off by fallen trees. In Fettercairn sheltered housing complex, Queen Elizabeth Court was without power for three nights. In Stonehaven, residents did not know where to go to access

much-needed support. Such was the scale and length of the emergency that many of those affected became what the British Red Cross describes as “newly vulnerable”. By a certain point, everybody becomes vulnerable.

I pay tribute to the extraordinary efforts of responders on the ground who operated in very difficult and complex conditions, whether they were repairing line faults to restore power supply or going door to door to provide welfare support. The voluntary and community sector was integral to the response, and every volunteer deserves our recognition and thanks. I hope that others will consider signing up, too.

Although there was a massive operation to facilitate recovery, it was painfully clear that more should have been done to build resilience and protect communities. As we look ahead, we can see that the Scottish Government’s storm Arwen review is a step in the right direction. The six overarching recommendations and 15 action points highlight areas of improvement, but I strongly believe it needs a delivery plan. It needs to have clear timescales for implementation before this coming winter. There also needs to be greater transparency around the resources that are available to local resilience partnerships to take these recommendations forward. We know the risks of taking no action, and those risks are simply too great. Those recommendations must be implemented expeditiously.

I have talked to constituents and businesses about how they were impacted by the storms and I have held discussions with the British Red Cross and Scottish and Southern Energy Networks about the changes that urgently need to be implemented to better prepare people, communities and infrastructure for extreme weather events.

A key issue that emerged from those discussions was communication about advising people what preventative measures to take to prepare for a red alert and also what to do when the usual channels of communication are unavailable for prolonged periods. When the red alert was first issued for storm Arwen, there was no signposting to the Ready Scotland website. It has advice for putting together an emergency kit, including wind-up radios and torches, but it appears that public awareness of that resource was, and remains, worryingly low. Equally, many people across the north-east could not use conventional lines of communication to access vital updates about the developing situation, from which roads were closed and when to expect power to be restored to where to access support locally from rest centres and welfare vans.

**Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP):** I agree with everything that Tess White has said so far. Would she agree with me that the local radio

stations could have played a bigger role in getting that message out, given that a lot of households would have had battery-operated radios, and that they could perhaps play more of a role in future in getting those messages to people?

**Tess White:** Gillian Martin makes a very good point about radios and radio stations. It is important that we deliver the 15 points in the storm Arwen review and that we have specific, measurable and time-agreed plans so that all of the recommendations are in place and effective before this winter.

The British Red Cross has suggested that the Scottish Government should fund research with communities affected by the recent storms to understand how best to communicate in advance of and during emergencies. I support that recommendation, and I ask the Deputy First Minister to address that point in closing.

Earlier this week, I visited SSEN’s headquarters in Perth, where I was briefed about lessons that it has implemented following the storms. SSEN recognises that the estimated power supply restoration times during storm Arwen were overly optimistic—that point is also recognised in the Scottish Government review and the interim reports from the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. That was deeply frustrating for customers trying to make informed choices about alternative arrangements, and many felt, understandably, let down and angry. I understand that SSEN has acted on that feedback and has put a new process in place, as well as a £1 million community resilience fund. It is for the north of Scotland and was launched in February.

There has also been feedback from responders that the identification of vulnerable people and the provision of timely assistance to them was delayed by the poor availability of information and lack of data sharing between organisations. There is great scope for co-operation between key stakeholders in that area.

The scale of human endeavour to help the stranded and hungry will stay with us in the north-east for a long time, as will the haunting images of the devastation in places like Kemnay, Fettercairn and Edzell, where forests were all but flattened. I was in Stonehaven after storm Malik and storm Corrie hit and I saw first hand how much the community rallied together but also how much better the response at a structural and systemic level could and should have been. Ahead of the winter months, people right across Scotland need to know that lessons have been learned and change delivered. They cannot go through this again.

17:56

**Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP):** I am grateful to Tess White for giving us the opportunity to again talk about the implications of what we experienced with the storms that she mentioned.

I am going to talk about storm Arwen in particular. On 26 November, at the high point of it, there were 19 full hours of winds at 97 mph and then a subsequent seven days of power outages and, sometimes, water outages for many households. Many of the households who were without power, as Tess White has rightly said, did not know what response measures were being put in place. She rightly points to the communication methods that were used. I certainly got the impression from quite a lot of people who I spoke to, including family members who were without power, that they were not aware of where the food trucks were or where they could go for hubs to charge their mobile phones or get a signal, but that did not mean that those things were not happening. There was a high level of response from volunteers, Aberdeenshire Council, the police and emergency services and third sector organisations, all of which put in a great deal of effort to make sure that people could get boiling water, heat or whatever.

In terms of future resilience, I am clear that households should be given an indication of where those hubs will always be in the event of any emergency. For example, Turriff swimming pool and the community centre opened their doors so that people could have showers and get hot water. If they are willing, they should be the hub for Turriff, and I know that they have indicated that they would be.

When we were having resilience meetings—I suppose the wash-up meetings—with Aberdeenshire Council, with Jim Savege, the chief executive, and Murray Main, our retiring chief superintendent, one of the councillors came up with an idea. It was a throwaway thing, but it is a really good idea: a fridge magnet that tells you where the emergency hub for your area is and says, “This is where to go in the event of an emergency, should you need help”. If there were a permanent arrangement about where the hubs would be, we would not have to rely on people finding out where the hubs are—they would always be in the place where they are.

I want to mention vulnerable customers and SSEN in particular. I think that SSEN had a vulnerable customer helpline, but I know that quite a few people, including some people who needed medical devices to work, phoned the helpline but it did not do anything. I think that, ahead of winter, SSEN needs to get a list of the people who registered for that helpline and the people who got

in touch and start phoning around to find out why they think that they are vulnerable and what they need, so that it has an updated list of who might need help should we have a situation like we had before—let us hope that we do not.

There is another job of work that SSEN has to do, which relates to what Tess White said about funding. SSEN seriously needs to look at its infrastructure. For example, there are power lines with trees around them that are not being cut back. As has been mentioned by Tess White, in the storms, those trees were falling down and taking down power lines. SSEN must make a significant investment in putting powerlines in subterranean locations. I know that that is an expensive thing to do, but it is an awful lot better than having households without power.

Presiding Officer, I do not know how much time I have got left because I cannot see the clock, but I will bring my speech to a close, although I could say an awful lot more. I have already mentioned the radio issue. I think that it should be recommended that, in general, everyone has a battery-operated radio in their house, and I think that the local radio stations have taken on board my criticism that they could have done a lot more to get the messages out.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Ms Martin, and I apologise that I forget to set the clock but I think you were probably around four minutes.

18:00

**Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con):** I start by thanking my colleague Tess White for securing this debate and giving us the opportunity to address the response to what were exceptional weather events. The problem was not just the serious damage that storms Arwen, Malik, and Corrie caused but that they occurred soon after each other, when communities were still trying to recover.

I pay tribute to all the brave volunteers who supported their local communities through actions ranging from checking on their neighbours to helping set up local hubs. The generosity of people during these times, as through the pandemic, has been inspiring. However, we should not need to rely so desperately on those individuals during emergencies. There is a significant lack of resilience planning including, for example, around the creation of dedicated local hubs. Some of that work is still not completed since storm Frank in 2017—a five-year delay that this Government should have been on top of.

It is obvious that, when storms of this magnitude hit, telecommunications go down, and even at the best of times, my constituency does not have reliable broadband. Information often does not

reach those who are most vulnerable, and those who have a signal face the issue of having no means to charge their devices.

I should commend SSE at this point for some excellent communications. Greg Clarke, in its office, deserves a special mention for tirelessly updating us and helping constituents who contacted us. I also commend Aberdeenshire Council, which, after a poor start, adapted and significantly improved. Sadly, Scottish Water's response was woeful and I hope that, given that it falls under the Scottish Government's remit, something will be done to address that.

During times of serious weather emergencies, we need to ensure that those who are vulnerable get help. Sadly, I heard from people who were isolated and had not heard from anyone for days, including one constituent who was stuck in his wheelchair for three days because the hoist could not be powered. Being stuck in a chair in front of a fire for that length of time is beyond most people's imagination and was certainly the most harrowing example that I came across.

Priority lists, which have been mentioned, were not being shared and consolidated, and information about visits from health and care partnership teams was not being communicated to others. Councils, energy networks, local resilience partnerships and the authorities must be able to collaborate in their emergency response.

There are also post-event actions that need addressing, and compensation schemes should be improved. Electricity companies have claimed that restoring the power for a period that is not even long enough to boil a kettle counts as a reset of the compensation timetable. That may obey the letter of the law but certainly not the spirit. Another point about compensation is the inflexibility of the Bellwin scheme. The cost to Aberdeenshire Council was over £950,000 but it received nothing. We would like to see some more discretion for compensation or at least some kind of sliding scale to support our local authorities.

There are other smaller issues, such as the ability to get codes for defibrillators, the supply and reservation of generators for care homes, telephone masts and water pumping stations, and also the use of unique property reference numbers instead of postcodes, something that particularly affects rural parts of Scotland.

We await the Scottish National Party Government's detailed plan of action, but from the answers that I have received so far, I have low expectations. I am told that the national centre for resilience will not undertake a review. Of what value is that body, based in Dumfries, to my constituents if it will not review events like this? How exactly does it help communities? What does

it contribute to resilience planning if it does not address the points that have been raised tonight? At the moment, it feels like every community council is having to reinvent the wheel with zero budget and only the briefest of guidance.

18:05

**Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab):** I thank Tess White for bringing the debate to the chamber. I declare an interest as a director and trustee of the Glasgow City Heritage Trust.

I note the points that were made in the opening speech about the immediate recommendations of the report into storm Arwen and how important they are, but I think that we need to take cognisance of some of the longer-term impacts and continuing effects of storm Arwen—most notably, in relation to buildings that were damaged in that storm.

There is a particularly egregious case in Glasgow that I have been dealing with over the past few months. On 29 January, hundreds of residents in the Park Circus area of Glasgow were evacuated from their homes due to damage that was sustained at the historic Trinity College tower from storm Malik. There had been long-term concerns about the structural integrity of that building, but motion sensors in the building were triggered by the storm, which caused building-control engineers to attend immediately and evacuate not just the building and the owners there, but the surrounding streets. An impasse continues to this day, with residents unable to get back into their homes. There is uncertainty and there is a dispute between council building-control engineers and the owners' engineers about the nature of the repairs and what is required.

That shows that there is a lack of accountability and a lack of communication under emergency delegated powers for building safety and building control. Those powers have not been addressed well enough in the context of such disasters. Residents have suddenly found themselves not just out of their homes and displaced for an indefinite period, but faced with bankruptcy. That is not only because of the costs to repair the building—they are in dispute with the council about the nature of the repairs—but because of the costs of compensating other residents who have been displaced from their homes because of the exclusion zone. That represents a serious challenge that we need to think about for the longer term. The report does not adequately address that matter, and this is a case that we need to take seriously.

There have been efforts in Parliament and the Government to address the matter more widely and for the longer term. The Built Environment

Forum Scotland produced a series of recommendations in 2019 to improve the resilience of heritage buildings. The aim was to establish long-term solutions that would assist and compel owners in multiple-ownership properties—in particular, tenements—to maintain their buildings, and to have in place financial resilience so that there would be no shortfall when there is a sudden maintenance event, such as a storm hitting and causing unexpected damage.

Legislation will be slow in coming. The report that the Scottish Law Commission proposes will take until 2026, which is nearly a decade after the recommendations—or, at least, the exercise to investigate recommendations—were put in place. The requirements are quite straightforward: buildings should be inspected every five years and owners' associations should compulsorily establish sinking funds and building reserve funds.

There are complex policy and legal issues, notably around the interaction of the proposed legislation with existing property titles and human rights concerns, but we need to move much faster if we are to address the major strategic threat that extreme weather events pose to our built environment, and the subsequent huge effects on people's lives when they are suddenly kicked out of their homes and lose shelter and the fundamental right to property.

We need to look at what the Scottish Law Commission is saying, which is that it will take until 2026. That is way too slow; it is not fast enough, so we need to look at a way of increasing the pace. Sadly, it is an indictment of the level of importance that the Government is placing on the issue that we do not have enough rigour in the approach. We have seen all too clearly, as a result of storm Arwen, the serious impact that storms can have. The Trinity College tower case is but one egregious example, but with 76,000 pre-1920 tenements in Glasgow, with an estimated repair bill of £3 billion, the problem will only get worse as time goes on. Let us get ahead of the problem instead of dithering for another parliamentary session.

18:09

**Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP):** I very much welcome the opportunity to explore the issues that are highlighted in Tess White's motion, so I congratulate her on securing the debate.

The "lessons to be learned" mantra was never more appropriate than it was in relation to the impacts of the storms that battered Scotland late last year, and in relation to our preparedness for and response to them. If I were to be asked what one thing we should focus on in that context, I would say that it is communication.

The scale and nature of storm Arwen were unprecedented. My household, and those of many of my constituents, had not found itself without heating, lighting and telephone before. The lack of heating and lighting for the evening of 26 November into the next day was of considerable inconvenience, but my biggest personal challenge, being Minister for Transport at the time, was that I had to drive around to find a phone signal so that I could chair a transport system recovery meeting. However, that is not the communication issue that I want to home in on.

We have, as a society, become utterly reliant on the phone and the internet to communicate and to source information. When neither is available, as we discovered in the immediate aftermath of storm Arwen, there is a problem. Being told either to phone a helpline or to check a website for updates on when power might be restored, or what practical support is available in one's locality, is of little real use when the phones and internet are inaccessible.

**Gillian Martin:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Graeme Dey:** Do we have time, Presiding Officer?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Yes.

**Gillian Martin:** I am grateful to Graeme Dey for giving way. It allows me to make the point that BT was going to make all the lines fibre, but there have been significant interventions by our SNP group in Westminster to make sure that BT rolls back on the Digital Voice fibre roll-out. We cannot do without copper wiring in situations such as we were in at the end of last year.

**Graeme Dey:** That is a lesson that needs to be taken on board from the situation.

The disruption and inconvenience that were suffered in Carnoustie, where I live, lasted hours, but in several smaller communities in Angus they went on for days. The response to that, although it was ultimately extensive, was inadequate in the early stages. Not every smaller community was aware, for example, of the presence in nearby towns of food vans from which they could access free hot meals. Getting detailed information about anticipated supply restoration timetables was, frankly, a nightmare. I know because, as the local member of the Scottish Parliament, I found it to be virtually impossible to get information for constituents who were becoming increasingly frustrated by the lack of news about when their homes would again be warm and lit, and when cooking a meal would become an option.

That was problematic because—as has been pointed out—had people been in possession of accurate information they would have made

different choices; they might have gone to stay with friends or relatives, rather than sitting tight and toughing it out. The advice on how long they would have to do that for was either impossible to obtain or—perhaps understandably—wrong. However, I know from subsequent discussions with SSEN that there is recognition that communication of information was not what it could have been, so it is exploring how to get better at information and data sharing, which is obviously welcome.

There are other questions to be answered, as Gillian Martin noted. The dependability of some of the power supply infrastructure and the proximity of trees to lines are just two examples.

Settlements that I represent that are far from remote still do not understand why they were so badly hit by storms Arwen and Barra. I very much welcome the dialogue that is currently under way between SSEN, the local authority and communities in my constituency about how we can make them more resilient to such events, such as what they might need to have available in the local village hall to provide a fully functional haven for residents if and when similar storms strike again in the future.

From a distinctly local perspective, lessons are being learned and solutions are being implemented. There are things that we got right in Angus—I acknowledge the role of the council and voluntary sector partners in that—but there are other responses that need refining, at the very least. I am pleased that is happening.

Having looked at the Scottish Government's review recommendations, I do not doubt that it is seeking to ensure nationally that we have learned from what happened last November, and that we will be better prepared for future severe events. I look forward to hearing from the Deputy First Minister, when he closes the debate, a flavour of what the planned update on progress, which is due next month, will contain.

18:13

**Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** I congratulate Tess White on securing this incredibly important debate.

The impact of these storms across Scotland, but especially in the north-east, were devastating, and Tess White and many members have given powerful testimony throughout the debate. It bears reiterating that what we saw on the ground was our local communities stepping up, whether it was local businesses such as Cafe83 in Kemnay taking hot drinks and soup to a care home or the shire council setting up welfare centres delivering over 3,000 meals and carrying out 8,000 welfare checks.

I want to make two specific points today. Tess White's motion flags that those weather events resulted in a loss of power for thousands of households, in some cases for a protracted period over a number of days, and she is right. The north-east had more than 10,000 homes left without power for at least four nights.

We know that the Scottish Government has a drive towards heat pumps as one solution to decarbonising homes, but these are powered by electricity, which means that during blackouts, as we saw in the north-east, the only reliable source of heat for many were things like oil heaters and open fireplaces. I had innumerable constituents contact me expressing their relief that they still had fires or oil heating during the outages. The people of Scotland entirely understand the importance of reaching our net zero targets, but they cannot come at the expense of people's safety. If the Scottish Government is going to persuade people in the north-east to change their heat source, it will have to deal with the very real fears that people have of being left freezing in such situations.

Secondly, I want to pick up on Graeme Dey's important point. Many of my rural constituents told me of their terror at their communications being cut off. With the increasing tendency away from land lines and the move to digital voice, people's mobiles are more important than ever. Gillian Martin probably knows this, but if not, she will be concerned to learn that, on its website, BT actually says:

"In the same way, your broadband won't work during a power cut, so you won't be able to make or receive calls using Digital Voice. This includes 999 calls."

That is terrifying for people. Members have rightly talked about helplines being set up, but after folk have run out of battery, they are in the dark about what is happening and how to get help.

Several months ago, I asked the Scottish Government what planning and action takes place to ensure that people who experience power cuts are able to contact the emergency services when their mobile battery has run out or the land line is internet based. In its response—having blamed the United Kingdom Government, of course—the Scottish Government did not answer the question, so we still do not know precisely what it proposes for those who experience a power cut and are either dependent on mobile phones or the new digital voice. That absolutely needs to be addressed in the contingency planning, and the Scottish Government needs to start taking responsibility for such things happening in Scotland, not offering diversions by blaming the UK Government.

Tess White is absolutely correct. It is beyond time that we started properly learning from these storms and implementing effective preparation and

mitigation strategies, as a number of members have rightly suggested. We cannot hide behind statements that such storms are exceptional or unprecedented. We must do better. Local communities stepped up. It is beyond time that the Scottish Government does the same.

18:17

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney):** I congratulate Tess White on securing this debate on an important subject, which has consumed a large part of my energy and focus over the course of the winter months, given the gravity of storms Malik, Barra, Corrie and Arwen and the close succession in which they inflicted significant damage on our society.

In her contribution, Tess White made reference to some of the scenes. Those scenes were, frankly, of staggering horror in the damage that was done in communities such as Edzell, a village that I represented for many years. I was stunned by the images of the damage to the natural environment around Edzell. The scale of the impact in the example of that one community demonstrates the severity of what was being experienced. In relation to the impact of severe weather incidents, we are in a different situation today from the one that were in in the past. Generally, in my lifetime we have not seen weather incidents of this nature. The climate has been relatively benign, but in recent years we are seeing a significant shift in the climatic conditions.

That is why we have to take the actions that we have to take on net zero. Liam Kerr raises absolutely legitimate issues about some of the solutions that might be put in place, but I point out to him that if someone is using an oil-fired central heating system, they do not have much chance of using that if the electricity is off as well, because it will be reliant on electricity to fire the boiler.

**Liam Kerr:** I understand the point that he is making, but what does the Deputy First Minister advise for those who want to convert to something such as a heat pump but are afraid to lose the back-up of, let us say, an open fire?

**John Swinney:** That is a slightly different issue from the one that I am making about power systems, because there are inherent vulnerabilities in all electricity-fired systems. We cannot escape that point in this debate.

There is a necessity for us to respond to significant weather incidents. Mr Sweeney raised the issue of Trinity tower, which of course raises a different element of the impact of significant and acute weather incidents. The issues that he highlighted raise questions about the resolution of different professional assessments of particular

cases of that type. They are very difficult to legislate for and ultimately require dialogue, engagement and resolution, where—we hope—there is good will to reach points of agreement.

Of course, there are wider issues that arise from the matter. One of the common issues has been access to communications; Graeme Dey made the point about the significant dependence that society now has on digital connectivity. That is an important observation, and the power companies have to respond to that dependence by having in place better sources of information, and they have to advertise that information in advance of incidents, so that individuals are better prepared.

**Tess White:** The storm Arwen review is welcome, but there is a concern that it will not be acted upon by winter. Can the Deputy First Minister commit to having deliverable timescales in place before winter?

**John Swinney:** I assure Tess White that that will be the case. The Government commenced the review of storm Arwen when the clean-up was still under way, and we have published the outcomes of that. There was a slight delay because of the other storms that came along, but that has all been published. I think that the delay was only about 10 to 14 days. We published those outcomes and we are working with the Scottish resilience partnership and local resilience partnerships. I hear Alexander Burnett putting everything at the door of the Scottish Government—he is entitled to do so—but the Scottish Government cannot direct local resilience operations and it would be folly to think that we should be able to do that. Indeed, Aberdeenshire Council would vigorously resist that, because it wants to be delivering local resilience in its community. There has to be a partnership approach. I assure Mr Burnett that that is the case with the Scottish resilience partnership, which the Government leads, and local resilience partnerships.

**Paul Sweeney:** Will the member give way?

**John Swinney:** If Mr Sweeney will give me a moment, I will give way to him after I address this point.

We have to work with power companies to make sure that there is better knowledge and resilience available to individuals. One event that I saw in my constituency the other week was in the town of Alyth, where SSE used a community awareness day to bring along some of the resilience kits that it was making available. The kits included—this goes back to the point that Gillian Martin raised—battery radios. My household no longer had a battery radio, but we have now, after I went to that information event, and I am grateful to SSE for that. There will be precious few households that

have battery radios nowadays. With our dependence on digital technology, having access to a means of communication of that type is important for people, so that they are able to hear the information that is available.

**Paul Sweeney:** On partnership and dialogue, would the Deputy First Minister consider consulting councils and other stakeholders that have been affected by building controls applying emergency powers where they declare a building to be dangerous? That has an incredibly onerous effect on residents and that is little appreciated, unless one is at the sharp end of it. In a democracy, that feels rather overwhelming and there have been overzealous applications of such powers. There is no room for discretion and no room for assisting residents in recovering personal belongings—even professionally or medically vital equipment. We need a more conciliatory and co-operative approach going forward. Could that be incorporated into the study that the Government is doing on the issue?

**John Swinney:** Mr Sweeney makes a number of serious and significant points. I am aware from some contacts that I have of the disruption to people's lives that is still going on as a consequence of Trinity tower. Let me take away those issues and I will endeavour to ensure that the Government uses its available channels to encourage dialogue to resolve some of those questions.

I want to reassure Parliament that lessons have been learned and the actions that are arising out of the review will be implemented, and I want to make one final point, which is about the preventative interventions that we can make. One of the strongest is the management of power lines around the country, which Gillian Martin spoke about. I visited Gillian Martin's constituency to look at the impact of the damage that was done by storm Arwen, given the proximity of forestry to power lines. In the community that I visited, it was not that one tree had to be removed to restore power to a particular settlement. A dozen separate incidents had to be resolved to secure power connections, which is why the restoration took so long. The power companies have to invest more heavily in removing forestry and foliage to protect power lines, so that they are not damaged by such incidents.

Of course, we will continue to face incidents of this type, given the severity of weather that we now experience. I assure Parliament of the Government's determination to work in partnership with local resilience partnerships to address the issues. We will, of course, keep Parliament updated on the progress that is made in the months that lie ahead.

*Meeting closed at 18:27.*

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