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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 26 May 2022

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

General Question Time

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Good morning. The first item of business is general question time. In order to get in as many questions as possible, I would be grateful for short and succinct questions and responses.

Women's Safety (Public Transport)

1. Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the consultation with women and women's organisations regarding their safety while using the public transport system. (S6O-01142)

Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP): Women and girls deserve to travel in safety on Scotland's public transport system. That is why, earlier this year, I committed to undertake a consultation on women's safety across our public transport network. That will include working with national and local organisations that represent the interests of a cross-section of women in society, as well as with groups that represent female staff who work on the public transport network.

Options to take forward the work will be further informed by discussions with women's groups and organisations, trade union partners and wider stakeholders. That includes discussions with Engender, which I will be meeting in a couple of weeks, and the British Transport Police, which I met recently.

Once the scope of the work and the options as to how best to consult women on this sensitive issue are agreed, I will provide an update on how we will take forward our programme of engagement and the timescales around that.

Tess White: Last year, there were 46 sexual assaults against women on Scotland's railways, which was the highest number in a decade, and 301 women were unacceptably threatened, harassed or commonly assaulted. However, that is just the tip of the iceberg; the figure is likely to be much higher because the gender of the victim was not known in more than 2,500 incidents. Those figures are sickening. Every day, women are fearful that they will be victimised in a train carriage or on a station platform. What urgent action will the Scottish Government take now to

ensure that women can travel safely on public transport?

Jenny Gilruth: More generally in relation to women's safety on public transport, as the member alluded, there are data gaps. We know that that is because women are far more likely not to report sexual harassment when it happens and that, if they do report it, it is likely to be after the event. To that end, I have instructed my officials to take forward a programme of analysis, which will allow for better data collection in Scotland while recognising that the pandemic has impacted women's experiences of public transport.

Given that it is a sensitive topic, it is vital that the scope of the work is right. This morning, I spoke to the Scottish Rail Holdings Ltd board about it. I am keen to work with the board, and I recognise that the work will also have potential benefits for staff safety, which the member alluded to. I also look forward to addressing the Women in Rail conference next month and hearing from women who work on our railways about their experiences.

Following my meeting with Engender, I would be more than happy to meet the member to discuss any suggestions that she might have to ensure that the consultation is conducted as appropriately as possible, so that we have the data to improve women's experiences across the public transport network.

ScotRail (Proposed Cuts)

2. Paul O'Kane (West Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to reported concerns by the Scottish division of the train drivers union, the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen, regarding proposals to make further cuts to ScotRail services. (S6O-01143)

The Minister for Transport (Jenny Gilruth): ScotRail's temporary timetable has been implemented as a result of the on-going impact of ASLEF drivers choosing, as is their right, not to make themselves available for overtime or rest-day working.

The timetable is temporary and is delivering about two thirds of the planned May services. The difficult decision to implement it was made to give people certainty when they travel, and ScotRail has looked at how best to provide as much of that as it can during this challenging period for passengers.

Clearly, we all want a return to a much fuller timetable, which is why I am pleased to see ASLEF and ScotRail back around the negotiating table this week.

Paul O'Kane: Another day, another inadequate answer from the minister on this issue, which is

affecting our communities across every part of Scotland. The cuts are having enormous consequences in the lives of everyday Scots who depend on rail services to get to work, attend appointments and access childcare.

In a letter from ASLEF to the First Minister, Kevin Lindsay has called on the Government to get back round the negotiating table, and I appreciate that the minister has said that that will happen. Will the minister confirm that the Government will negotiate in good faith on the key issue of driver recruitment? ASLEF has said that 130 drivers need to be recruited in order to staff our railways safely? Will the minister and the First Minister get around the table in good faith to ensure that we end the negative cuts that are having such an impact on people across Scotland?

Jenny Gilruth: I remind the member that this is an industrial dispute. There are, of course, a number of other industrial disputes between railway unions and other administrations. For example, in London, where Labour is in power, there is a dispute in relation to challenges on the network. Regarding the member's question as to whether I will be in the room, it would not be appropriate for the minister to be in the negotiating room. It is for ScotRail, as the employer, to be in the room with the trade unions to reach a negotiated settlement. ScotRail will, of course, continue to negotiate in good faith.

I am delighted that ASLEF and ScotRail met on Tuesday, and they will meet again later today to reach a settlement. It is important to remember that the shortages are causing real challenges for passengers across the network. The timetable has been introduced because of an industrial dispute, whereby drivers are choosing, as is their right, not to work on their rest days. I respect that, but it means that ScotRail has to run a limited service. *[Interruption.]* We want to reach a resolution in a timely fashion. I am absolutely committed to working with our trade unions, which I have spent a lot of time with since my appointment, back in January, to ensure that public ownership is a success for our railways and that we re-establish the previous timetable to allow passengers to travel more freely.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Is it appropriate for the member to ask a question and then heckle the minister when she is trying to answer the question that he has asked?

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Gibson. I remind Mr Gibson that I am chairing the meeting.

I reiterate my call for succinct questions and responses. At the pace that we are going at, we

will not be able to get in all members who have a question.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Clearly, it is a long time since Labour was in power, and its members take quite a simplistic view on some of these issues.

Can the minister assure us that the Government will be acting as peacemaker and will maintain a good relationship with both management and unions?

Jenny Gilruth: Absolutely. The revised timetable in Scotland is temporary, as I have said, and the arrangements will be kept under review—ScotRail will review them next week. It is meeting ASLEF this afternoon, and I am hopeful of a positive resolution.

The Government supports fair work, the principle and practice of trade unions and the right of people to join a trade union. We remain absolutely committed to partnership working, and we have a strong desire to resolve the dispute through negotiation and compromise. That stands in stark comparison with the approach of the United Kingdom Government, with its recent threats to introduce new anti-strike legislation.

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): Throughout the week, the minister seems to have forgotten that the buck stops with her. She refers to talks today between ScotRail and ASLEF. What has she instructed ScotRail to do, exactly?

Jenny Gilruth: I assure Mr Simpson that I have not forgotten that the buck stops with me.

In relation to the action that I have taken, I have been meeting ScotRail representatives regularly for updates on how the timetable has been working, and to ensure that we have appropriate carriage allocation across the country. Right now, we are running a limited service—at about 70 per cent of the usual service. We need to ensure that we have appropriate carriage allocation. I raised that with ScotRail last Friday and again yesterday, and I will be speaking with ScotRail again today about carriage allocation more generally.

The other action that I have taken is to ask ScotRail to consider reintroducing a number of services. More information on that will be forthcoming from ScotRail later today, I hope, or on Friday. *[Interruption.]* No, I cannot tell the member, who is heckling me from a sedentary position. I am not here today to inform the member of additional services that ScotRail will be running, because ScotRail is the train operator; I am the Minister for Transport. Mr Simpson needs to recognise the difference between the two—I do not drive the trains.

I have been meeting repeatedly with ScotRail to improve the service that is delivered—

The Presiding Officer: Briefly, minister.

Jenny Gilruth: I remind the member that we are in this situation because of an industrial dispute between ASLEF and ScotRail, the employer. I invite him to reflect on his Government's reputation in relation to how the Conservatives deal with trade unions.

Rail Services (Driver Shortages)

3. Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what impact driver shortages will have on the availability of rail services for passengers in Mid Scotland and Fife. (S6O-01144)

The Minister for Transport (Jenny Gilruth): ScotRail's current timetable, as a result of driver shortages, is temporary and is delivering about two thirds of the previously planned May services that should have resulted from the new timetable this month.

ScotRail has advised that core services in the Mid Scotland and Fife area have been retained to ensure a reliable and regular service, but the last evening trains will be earlier on some routes. ScotRail has advised that trains will be lengthened when needed to reflect capacity and service reduction.

ScotRail will review the temporary timetable next week. In the interim, talks between ASLEF, which is the train drivers union, and ScotRail will take place later today.

Murdo Fraser: The last train that constituents of mine can take to get home to Stirling, Fife or Perth now leaves Edinburgh at 8 o'clock. Not only does that wreak havoc with potential social plans, but it causes real problems for shift workers in the national health service who cannot now take the train to get back from their place of work. My constituents do not want to hear buck passing or excuses; they want the issue to be sorted as soon as possible.

On Sunday morning, the minister's ministerial colleague Richard Lochhead told the BBC that he expected the issue to be resolved within a couple of months. Is that the Scottish Government's position? Can we have an assurance that it will take no longer than that to get some degree of normality back to the train services that my constituents depend on?

Jenny Gilruth: Mr Fraser is right to ask for a degree of normality. I want nothing more than for us to restore the previous timetable that was in place. Passengers, including his constituents, need certainty. It is appropriate, though, that ScotRail, as the employer, meets ASLEF, the trade union, which will happen today, to reach a resolution that allows for the reinstatement of the

previous timetable and that brings greater certainty for passengers and the shift workers whom Mr Fraser is very concerned about.

Childcare Sector Omicron Impacts Fund

4. Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how many early learning and childcare providers, including private providers, received funding from the £9.8 million childcare sector omicron impacts fund that opened for applications in March this year. (S6O-01145)

The Minister for Children and Young People (Clare Haughey): The Scottish Government has made up to £35 million of dedicated financial support available for childcare services since the start of the pandemic, in recognition of the acute impacts on the sustainability of services. That includes the childcare sector omicron impacts fund, which made up to £9.8 million of support available to the sector in the 2021-22 financial year. More than 4,600 grants have been issued to services in the private, third and childminding sectors. The value of the grants available through that fund ranged between £950 and £4,500.

In order to support the long-term sustainability of the childcare sector, the Scottish Government is working with partners to progress the range of actions set out in the financial sustainability health check, including working with Business Gateway to pilot tailored business support offers for all types of childcare provider.

Rona Mackay: I hope that the minister will join me in celebrating our ELC workers, who are making a huge difference to our children's lives, day in and day out. As we emerge from the pandemic, can the minister set out how the Scottish Government is supporting our ELC settings to continue to deliver high-quality care for our children?

Clare Haughey: I pay tribute, alongside my colleague Rona Mackay, to the role that ELC providers have played across Scotland in ensuring that essential services could continue during the pandemic. They have played a key role in the effort to fight the virus and to support young children and their families over a very difficult time. I say a heartfelt thank you to them.

We continue to engage with partners to identify and better understand what the impacts of Covid-19 have been on young children, families and ELC practitioners, so that we can respond to their needs. In the 2022-23 period, we will invest more than £1 billion through local government to deliver funded ELC, including expanding the provision of 1,140 hours. The Scottish Government is also funding additional graduate-level posts in ELC settings in our most disadvantaged communities

across all 32 local authorities, and it is funding the Care Inspectorate to deliver a targeted improvement programme.

ScotRail Services (Cowdenbeath)

5. Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what plans it has to assess the impact of the new ScotRail timetable on passengers in the Cowdenbeath constituency. (S6O-01146)

The Minister for Transport (Jenny Gilruth): ScotRail's May 2022 timetable delivered a regular half-hourly service along the Fife coast, with direct services between Edinburgh and Dundee or Perth and a regular half-hourly service between Edinburgh and Cowdenbeath, via Dunfermline, for passengers in the Cowdenbeath constituency.

However, as a result of ScotRail now operating a temporary timetable due to driver shortages, Cowdenbeath constituency passengers will see a reduction in their services. The services via the Fife coast remain half-hourly but will also have to end earlier. I have asked ScotRail to look at the reintroduction of a number of services, where they are able to do so safely, in advance of a formal review of services next week.

Annabelle Ewing: As a regular commuter on Fife rail, the minister will be aware of the concerns that have been raised about the 23 May temporary timetable and the concerns regarding the 15 May non-temporary timetable. Can she confirm that both sets of concerns will now be looked at, further to an urgent review of both timetables by ScotRail, so that rail commuters and businesses in my Cowdenbeath constituency do not bear the brunt?

Jenny Gilruth: This morning, I travelled through Kirkcaldy, in my own constituency, and into Ms Ewing's constituency. I know how challenging the temporary timetable is for passengers, and I want to reassure Ms Ewing's constituents that the timetable is temporary. We need an urgent resolution for not just passengers but staff and the businesses that have, as the member said, already been impacted.

On the new May timetable, which was introduced a week prior to the temporary timetable, ScotRail listened throughout its consultation process. It added around 150 additional services and made changes including the retention of an all-day direct service between Edinburgh and Perth via Kirkcaldy and additional evening services in Fife.

We should remember that patronage is still not back to where it was prior to the pandemic, with many people not yet feeling safe to return to public transport and others choosing to work from home. I expect ScotRail to continue to review the May

timetable, once it is reinstated, as it did throughout the pandemic.

What is most important for Ms Ewing's constituents—and the constituents of members across the chamber, of course—is that we get a resolution between the unions and ScotRail as timeously as possible. I am committed to working with ScotRail to deliver that.

Economic Development (North-east Scotland)

6. Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the social impact of economic development in the north-east. (S6O-01147)

The Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity (Lorna Slater): The Scottish Government is committed to driving forward economic development activity in the north-east. The national strategy for economic transformation contains bold and ambitious actions to deliver economic prosperity for all of Scotland's people and places.

The strategy sets out an aim that, by 2032, Scotland's economy will significantly outperform its performance in the past decade, in terms of economic performance and the tackling of structural economic inequalities. It aims to put people at the heart of an economy that offers opportunities for all to succeed and where everybody—in every community and region of the country—will share in our economic prosperity.

Maggie Chapman: Trickle-down economics and other economic development models from the previous century do not deliver wellbeing for communities across my region. There is a clear need to better understand the interconnections across different sectors and move away from siloed strategy and policy development.

Can the minister outline how the just transition fund for the north-east and Moray will capitalise, build and sustain community engagement and deliver meaningful social and economic benefits? Can she also outline what more we can do to improve cross-sectoral working—by connecting transport, tourism, planning, culture and so on—to ensure that no community is left behind?

Lorna Slater: Our 10-year, £500-million just transition fund will accelerate the transition to net zero in the north-east and Moray, create new and exciting opportunities across the region and ensure that no one is left behind. The Minister for Just Transition, Employment and Fair Work has recently completed extensive engagement with more than 200 stakeholders in the north-east and Moray, and he has been clear that the fund must be co-designed.

Our commitment to both sectoral and regional just transition plans will reflect interdependencies and interactions with and between plans, which will ensure the future of industries, beyond carbon-intensive sectors, and that they are brought along on our transition.

In addition, £1 million of the £20 million that will be made available this year will be subject to participatory budgeting to empower communities to have a direct say in how money will be spent in support of a just transition in their local area.

Transmission Network Use of System Charges (Increase)

7. Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its analysis is of the latest transmission charging forecasts from National Grid ESO, in the light of transmission network use of system charges reportedly increasing in Scotland by between 39 and 73 per cent while charges are decreasing in the majority of zones in England. (S6O-01148)

The Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport (Michael Matheson): The transmission network use of system charges remain a key barrier to net zero in Scotland. Ofgem's analysis suggests that by 2040, Scottish renewables and low-carbon generators will be the only ones to pay a wider TNUOS charge, with all others—including gas generators based elsewhere in Great Britain—being paid credits.

In a net zero world, it is counterproductive in the extreme to care more about where generation is situated than about what type of generation it is. A new approach is needed rather than simple modifications to the existing methodology.

Paul McLennan: The disparity in approach would mean a 1GW offshore wind project in north-east Scotland paying £36 million a year in charges, compared with a project connecting in southern Wales receiving a £7.9 million subsidy. That difference is equivalent to nearly £10 for every megawatt hour that is generated, putting Scottish projects at significant disadvantage when bidding for contracts for difference.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that National Grid ESO and Ofgem need to recognise the barrier that the charges present to renewable power development in Scotland and that they need to introduce reforms that can support investment across Scotland? Will he advise what discussions have been held with National Grid ESO and Ofgem so that we can accelerate progress to net zero, keep down overall system costs and ensure fair competition when bidding for contracts for difference?

Michael Matheson: The transmission charging regime must reward developers that are

committed to investing in renewable generation. We have repeatedly made that call to the UK Government, because the existing TNUOS scheme discriminates against Scotland-based projects. We have raised the matter with not just the United Kingdom Government but National Grid ESO, with which I discussed the issue just last month. I also discussed the issue again yesterday with the chief executive of Ofgem and called for action in that area.

It is a serious issue that could compromise renewable energy projects in Scotland. It is unacceptable that Scottish projects continue to be discriminated against in this way.

First Minister's Question Time

12:01

Ferries (Construction Contract)

1. Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): The Scottish Conservatives have repeatedly called for John Swinney to come to Parliament and face scrutiny on the crucial role that he has played in the shambolic ferry contracts. Every time that we have requested—*[Interruption.]* Scottish National Party back benchers do not seem to like this, but just imagine—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Members! We are just beginning this session of First Minister's question time, and I would be very grateful if we could hear the question.

Douglas Ross: Every time that we have asked for a statement, every SNP back bencher and John Swinney have voted against him coming to the Parliament. However, today, he cannot avoid the questions to which islanders and Scottish taxpayers need answers.

John Swinney signed off the ferry contracts that have, so far, cost £250 million and denied islanders the ferries that they need. Will the Deputy First Minister finally tell the Scottish public why he signed off the deals?

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney): First, I note that I am answering questions today because the First Minister is still unwell with Covid. For many obvious reasons, I wish her a very speedy recovery. *[Applause.]*

I do not think that Douglas Ross is in the strongest position to question my engagement with the Parliament on key issues, because I gave a statement earlier this week, I answered questions last week and I handled a bill the week before. Unlike some Tory MSPs, you will not find me skiving off to the football for a few days when the Parliament is sitting. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Members! We will have quiet, please.

John Swinney: As a minister, I carry collective responsibilities for the actions of the Scottish Government. The responsibility for agreeing contracts lies with individual portfolios—in this scenario, with transport. My role was to provide the necessary budget for building the ferries. After the final decision was taken, officials briefed me about the contract being awarded and assured me, on the basis of the contract, that the budget that I had approved in August 2015 did not require to be changed.

Douglas Ross: I know that the Deputy First Minister does not do this very often, but he spoke about a statement that he gave to Parliament and a bill that he took through Parliament, and neither of those has anything to do with ferries, which is what this Parliament has asked to hear from him about. On every occasion, John Swinney has not just refused to speak but voted against himself giving a statement to Parliament.

John Swinney's fingerprints are all over the deal. Emails show that the Deputy First Minister confirmed that there were "no banana skins". He was on calls with finance officials, who said that Mr Swinney "now understands the background". His approval was essential. The contract was only "clear to award" after he signed it off, according to Scottish Government emails.

John Swinney charged ahead despite ferry experts warning against the contract, and despite legal advice that the SNP originally tried to cover up but could not redact properly, warning of the high risk of the contract being challenged and ruled ineffective. The SNP charged ahead despite the contract missing a key safeguard that is an industry standard, and despite the fact that the jobs at Ferguson were already safe and the yard had other options for work. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Members! We simply are not going to shout from a sedentary position.

Mr Ross, please continue.

Douglas Ross: That just shows how SNP members want to push this under the carpet and for it all to go away. They do not want scrutiny over the quarter of a billion pounds that has been spent without a single ferry that the islanders were promised being produced.

The Government charged ahead, despite there being no agreed design for the ferries, and despite the fact that the Ferguson bid was the most expensive of them all. Can the Deputy First Minister explain to people across Scotland why he approved those deals despite all the evidence that suggested he should not?

John Swinney: I made it clear in my first answer that I carry collective responsibility for the actions of the Government. I therefore accept that those decisions were taken by the Government, but they were taken individually by the transport minister.

I will give Douglas Ross the benefit of the note that he has quoted from, which was from a senior finance official. It said:

"Just finished my call with DFM. He now understands the background and that Mr McKay has cleared the proposal."

That is the complete sentence that Douglas Ross is missing. The decision had been taken, and I

was being briefed that there was no change to the budget that I had already sanctioned. Why is that answer not good enough for Douglas Ross? He has been given that answer on countless occasions.

As for his points about the Government not wishing to undergo scrutiny on this issue, it was looked at by a parliamentary committee, by Audit Scotland and by another parliamentary committee, and it has been the subject of a range of questions at question time. When Douglas Ross looks at all the papers, he will see that the contract arrangement demonstrates that the Government was taking action to deliver ferries for the island communities that require them, and we were taking decisions to protect employment on the lower Clyde. That is a record that this Government is determined to defend.

Douglas Ross: The Government would have to be pretty determined to defend a record that has not built any ferries and that has left islanders without ferries.

Honest John has missed the second sentence—

The Presiding Officer: Mr Ross, we will desist from using nicknames in the chamber. We will call people by their first names and surnames.

Douglas Ross: Sorry.

John Swinney read out a sentence from an email, but he refused to read the second sentence, and I wonder why. The second sentence says:

“So the way is clear to award.”

That is the conclusion of the email that reveals the Deputy First Minister’s involvement. It was escalated to the Deputy First Minister on 9 October 2015 at 17:15—[*Interruption.*]

SNP members do not want to hear this, but the email saying that the way to award was clear was sent only after the matter had gone to John Swinney.

Why did the SNP really sign off on this deal? It was not to save jobs, because we know that the jobs were safe. It was not the cheapest deal for taxpayers; it was actually the most expensive. It was not the most secure contract; it was the most risky. It was not backed by experts; they warned the Deputy First Minister and others against it. However, against overwhelming evidence, John Swinney signed off the deal anyway.

It seems obvious to everyone what happened here. The Scottish National Party wanted the political praise for keeping the yard open ahead of an election, so it ignored all the alarm bells. It looks an awful lot like the SNP made a dodgy deal, and now it is trying to cover that up. Can the Deputy First Minister—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Can we please hear Mr Ross’s question?

Douglas Ross: The Deputy First Minister is trying to listen, despite some of the comment behind him. Can he really tell the public that there was no political motive behind the award of the contract?

John Swinney: There was no political motive behind the contract. The objective of the Government was to ensure that the ferries that were required would be built, and that is what we are concentrating on achieving. We were also determined to ensure that employment on the lower Clyde was supported with contracts from the CalMac Ferries network. For Mr Ross to say that, somehow, the yard could stay open without any contracts is for him to deny the physical reality of the way in which a yard would be run.

I point out to Mr Ross that Audit Scotland went through the procurement process and indicated that that process, which resulted in Ferguson’s becoming the preferred bidder, was entirely standard. On that basis, the transport minister took the decision to award the contract, and, as the note says about me,

“He now understands the background and that Mr McKay has cleared the proposal.”

Douglas Ross: Read the next sentence.

John Swinney: Mr Ross is trying to invent something else. What I have explained to Parliament, consistent with my—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: There continues to be quite a lot of heckling, and I would be very grateful if members could resist the temptation to do so, as I would very much like to hear the Deputy First Minister.

John Swinney: Consistent with my obligation under the ministerial code of conduct to give truthful answers to Parliament, I am making it clear to Parliament that the memo that Mr Ross has quoted from was simply recording the fact that I had been briefed about a decision that another minister had taken and that, therefore, the way was clear to award the contract, because I had been briefed, the budget was in place and Mr Mackay’s decision could stand.

Douglas Ross can go around smearing and inventing all the information that he wants, but the people of Scotland will see through his grubby tactics today.

Douglas Ross: What the people of Scotland can see is that quarter of a billion pounds of taxpayers’ money has been spent on two ferries that have so far not sailed, which were promised by the Government to the islanders who desperately need them for their connectivity. For

the Deputy First Minister to respond in the way that he has done undermines what those communities need right now.

It seems that the ferry deal was the best deal for the SNP, not the best deal for Scotland, and that ScotRail is going the same way for commuters as the ferry deal has gone for islanders. Just a month after the Deputy First Minister's SNP Government took control of our railways, one in three train services has been cut.

Earlier this week, in a rare move, business groups, including the Scottish Tourism Alliance, Scottish Financial Enterprise, the Scottish Chambers of Commerce, the Scottish Retail Consortium and the Institute of Directors, united to warn of the harsh impact that their members face as a result of the ScotRail cuts. Delays, last-minute cancellations and service reductions are causing real problems for passengers across the country.

Next week, our national men's team will play its biggest match for more than two decades. The tartan army will need to get to and from Hampden on ScotRail. Will the Deputy First Minister's Government have got a grip of the situation by then? If not, when can people expect to have the rail service that they need?

John Swinney: When we look at the specific questions that Douglas Ross has put to me on the Ferguson's issue, it is abundantly clear why a statement by me to Parliament was unnecessary, because he had nothing of any substance whatsoever to put to me.

I have been a member of the Parliament for a long time. The assessment has often been made that, when a political leader changes the topic of their question during First Minister's questions, that is an indication that they are in trouble. That is exactly where Douglas Ross is.

Mr Ross knows full well—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Members! Please continue, Deputy First Minister. People are following the proceedings and would like to hear them.

John Swinney: Mr Ross knows full well that negotiations are under way between the employer—ScotRail—and the trade unions to resolve the industrial dispute that is limiting services. That dialogue is under way, as it should be.

He asks about the Ukraine match. We obviously want more services to be in place to deal with the Ukraine match. I am confident that ScotRail will have additional services in place to ensure that the specific requirements of access to Hampden will be addressed. Announcements will be made about that in due course.

I suspect—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Mr Ross!

John Swinney: I suspect that the degree of agitation from Mr Ross today is an indication of the depth of the trouble that he is in. I do not think that anything that I say today will satisfy Mr Ross. He is going to doubt what I say and question my integrity. I am giving Parliament honest answers, which is more than can be said for the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, who Douglas Ross is prepared to support.

Rail Services

2. Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): Across the country, thousands of people are being left out of pocket and are struggling with this week's rail chaos. There are countless examples. I will give the Deputy First Minister one of them.

Leanne lives in Dumbarton and works at a service station in Helensburgh. She takes the train to and from work. There is now no service after 8 pm and she finishes her shift at 10.30 pm. She is unable to drive and no public transport is available. How does the Deputy First Minister expect Leanne and countless others to get home?

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney): I sympathise entirely with the position that Leanne finds herself in. That is why the discussions between the rail trade unions and ScotRail that will take place this afternoon are so important in resolving the issue.

We must operate a safe railway and can do that only with fully and properly trained drivers. The network currently relies on rest day working by ScotRail's train drivers, which is a practice that we are trying to eliminate. For properly understandable reasons, driver training was interrupted by Covid. More drivers are available now than have been in the past and we are trying to make progress on boosting driver numbers to resolve that issue.

We have to resolve the dispute, and that is what the discussions are about. I encourage ScotRail and the trade unions to reach a conclusion to that process so that individuals such as Leanne can have the rail service that they should have access to.

Anas Sarwar: The Deputy First Minister did not answer the question. Unlike the Deputy First Minister, Leanne does not have a ministerial car to get home. [*Interruption.*] Members can hum and haw all they like, but this is real lived experience for their constituents, too, and they should care about their constituents. In the middle of a cost of living crisis, Leanne has to spend £20 on a taxi. That means that she has to work for two hours just

to pay to get home. That is the reality for thousands of people across the country.

Let us look at the facts. At the start of 2020, there were 2,400 rail services a day. In February, the Scottish Government made a permanent cut of 250 services a day. The latest chaos sees that number increased to almost 1,000 services a day being cut.

The message from ScotRail and the Scottish Government is simply that people must make their own arrangements. Normally, when there is a significant disruption in rail services, a replacement bus service is provided. Will the Deputy First Minister tell us how many of the 1,000 services a day that have been cut have a replacement bus service?

John Swinney: Mr Sarwar asked me questions about the capacity of our rail services, and I want to address those points.

If we look back at the situation in 2015, we see that there were 1,086 drivers on the ScotRail network. In December last year, it was 1,168, so there has been growth in the number of drivers. ScotRail would have trained a further 130 drivers had the process not be paused during the pandemic for what were, as I think we all accept, understandable reasons. There is now a pool of almost 900 pending driver applications, which gives us a supply of candidates coming into driver training that will allow us to expand the availability of driving personnel. Indeed, the ScotRail board gave authority for the recruitment of a further 135 drivers to move forward to the next stage.

I put those points on the record to address the capacity of the rail services and show the investment that has been made to ensure that we have adequate numbers of drivers in the future. We are in a period of difficulty just now because drivers are exercising their voluntary right not to undertake rest-day working. We are trying to resolve those issues by the negotiation that is taking place and, through ScotRail, we have put in place an amended timetable that gives more certainty about the availability of services rather than last-minute cancellations. The feedback that we got from Transport Focus showed that that was the most important issue to address for the travelling public so that they had certainty about the transport that was available.

Anas Sarwar: The Deputy First Minister spoke but he did not answer the question. I WhatsApped the ScotRail business account this morning to ask about how many replacement bus services ScotRail had. The answer was:

“Hi there, no, there isn’t.”

There are no replacement services across the country. In the middle of a cost of living and

climate crisis, the Scottish National Party-Green Government is leaving people stranded with no public transport and asking them to use gas-guzzling vehicles instead. In practice, that failure means tens of thousands of people struggling to get to and from work, more people being out of pocket and made poorer, millions being lost for local businesses and the industries that suffered much during Covid taking another hit.

While the Deputy First Minister and his colleagues have 28 chauffeur-driven cars that cost more than £1 million to get them to and from their work, the SNP-Green Government is cutting 1,000 rail services a day, offering no replacement bus services and forcing people to work hours just to pay for a taxi home. Should he and every other minister not hand back the keys to the ministerial chauffeur-driven cars until they get that sorted and get Scotland moving again?

John Swinney: This Government is providing practical help to people with the cost of living. For example, the Scottish Government has doubled the Scottish child payment to £20 per week. It will go up to £25 per week. None of that support is available in any other part of the United Kingdom, including in Labour-run Wales.

The Scottish Government has assisted individuals with council tax support. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Members!

John Swinney: We have assisted individuals with direct support through the carers allowance and other measures.

While we are doing all of that to support members of the public in the cost of living crisis that they face, what is the Labour Party doing? It is getting into bed with the Tory party in council administrations around the country. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Members!

John Swinney: Anas Sarwar told the country on 5 May:

“don’t reward this toxic, out of touch, corrupt Tory Party with your vote.”

What is the Labour Party now doing? It is rewarding the

“toxic, out of touch, corrupt Tory Party”

with jobs at West Lothian Council and the City of Edinburgh Council. The Labour Party and the Tory party are working together. Vote Labour—get Tory. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Members!

We move to general and constituency supplementaries. [*Interruption.*] Members, until we have silence, I will not proceed to the next question.

Falklands War

Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): The Deputy First Minister will be aware that this year marks the 40th anniversary of the Falklands war, a conflict that claimed the lives of members of the Scots Guards and 45 Commando, which is based in my constituency. Does he share my disappointment that the United Kingdom Government's Falklands veterans concessionary flight scheme remains suspended, denying holders of the South Atlantic medal, and next of kin, their only realistic chance of visiting the islands at this poignant time?

I understand that the scheme was paused because of the pandemic and that there have been indications that it might resume at some point later this year. Will the Deputy First Minister join me in calling on the UK Government to restart it as a matter of urgency, so that those to whom this anniversary means so much can, if they wish, visit the Falklands and pay their respects to fallen comrades?

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney): It is understandable that non-essential travel to the Falklands was suspended in 2020 due to the Covid-19 restrictions, but I very much agree with Mr Dey, who pursued many such issues for some time, as Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans. It is extremely important that the flights resume at the earliest possible and practicable time, especially in this, the 40th anniversary year—I appreciate that that is also the subject of today's members' business debate. The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans has written to the Secretary of State for Defence to seek clarity on the projected timeline for the resumption of flights and to impress on him the importance of continuing to provide that critical support to veterans of the 1982 conflict.

Census 2022

Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con): A week before the census deadline, National Records of Scotland announced that only 84.8 per cent of households had filled in the census. In Dundee, almost a fifth of households had not completed it. In Glasgow, the figure was close to a quarter. Last year, the return rate in England and Wales was 97 per cent. With just five days to go, does the Deputy First Minister agree that the census has been a disaster from start to finish, and that it was a mistake to separate the Scottish census from the wider United Kingdom census?

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney): No, I do not agree with that point. Obviously, a lot of hard work is going on to ensure that the census is completed. In due course, the final returns will

be disclosed by National Records of Scotland, which has to undertake some analysis. Arising from that, Angus Robertson, the Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture, will update the Parliament on the progress of the census and the strength of the information that is available for us to use in the future development of public policy in Scotland.

Nursing and Midwifery (Staffing)

Paul O'Kane (West Scotland) (Lab): On Monday, Julie Lambeth, chair of the Scotland board of the Royal College of Nursing, said that fair pay is needed to stem an exodus of staff and retain younger nurses in our national health service. She also made it clear that, right now, the two priorities for dedicated nursing staff are pay and safe staffing.

Nursing and midwifery vacancies climbed by a shocking 170 per cent between 2020 and 2021, and I have heard at first hand from nurses who have made it clear that the current normalisation of staffing gaps is taking its toll on their mental and physical health. Those are some of the most dedicated and hard-working staff in our NHS, who are leaving the profession that they love, broken.

When will the Government get a grip and engage with the RCN on safe staffing, fair pay and the meaningful workforce planning that has been so desperately lacking?

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney): Mr O'Kane has raised serious issues. Negotiations are under way on both pay and safe staffing. The Government is engaged in that process as we speak. Within the significant constraints in which we are operating, we are working to ensure that we can address the issues that are of concern to members of the Royal College of Nursing.

I point out to Mr O'Kane that nursing and staffing levels in the national health service are higher than they were when we came to office, and are at record levels. We will continue to support nursing staff in the excellent and outstanding work that they do and on which we all depend.

Electricity Bill (E.ON Energy)

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): A vulnerable constituent, who is a young man with Asperger's syndrome, rents a small cottage on a farm in Peebles. His predicted electricity bill was £35 per month, but he is actually being billed £1,500 a month. Technicians have advised that he is probably receiving bills from the farm, so he is now sitting with a so-called debt of nearly £4,000. Despite the efforts of my office to get E.ON Energy

to respond, and even to get in touch with its chief executive, we have had radio silence. Does the Deputy First Minister agree that, with all the bad publicity surrounding E.ON's profits and its recommendation that customers should get in touch if they have financial difficulties, that does not inspire confidence?

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

On the basis of the information that Christine Grahame has put to me, that is a serious situation. I know Christine Grahame well, and she is an assiduous constituency member of the Parliament. I am absolutely certain that she will pursue E.ON with tremendous energy in order to get answers and engagement, and I encourage that company to engage with her. If there is anything that Government officials can do to assist, I would be happy to arrange for that assistance to be provided.

The case that Christine Grahame has raised is an illustration of the severity of the situation that some individuals in our society will be facing, and they need the support of their members of the Parliament in those circumstances. The Government also funds Advice Direct Scotland to provide free advice, support and assistance to households, and I encourage anyone who needs that assistance to secure it. The scale of energy bills will be a significant problem for individuals in the period that lies ahead.

Bariatric Surgery

Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): One in 25 Scots is severely obese, but the backlog in waiting times pre-pandemic has led to Scots, in desperation, flying overseas in increasing numbers for bariatric surgery. One medical tourism organiser has flown around 60 people per month from Scotland to Turkey. However, an alarming number of patients return from overseas surgery with no effective aftercare plan, as I was told by someone who recently returned from Turkey, or they return with complications such as leakage of stomach contents or a hernia.

Will the Deputy First Minister join me in asking patients not to seek weight loss surgery overseas, but instead to wait to be treated in the United Kingdom, where we have the best bariatric surgeons in the world, and where that treatment will include the essential follow-up that is vital for patient safety?

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

I am happy to associate myself with the call that Dr Gulhane has made. I saw some media reports on that subject this morning that highlighted the point that he has made that, although travelling overseas may secure initial treatment at a faster

pace, the complications and implications of that are then carried by the National Health Service, and that can be a significant burden for the NHS and for individuals. I whole-heartedly endorse the point that has been made by Dr Gulhane and encourage individuals to follow the advice that he has given to the Parliament.

Fornethy House Residential School (Survivors Campaign)

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): My constituent Marion Reid has come to the Parliament today, along with other survivors of Fornethy House residential school, to highlight their plight. So far, more than 200 brave women have come forward—I suspect that that is the tip of the iceberg—and shared their traumatic, awful experience of physical, mental and sexual abuse at the hands of staff at Fornethy in the 1960s, where young, vulnerable children were sent, supposedly to help them to recover from illness.

Understandably, those women feel that no one is listening to them. The Deputy First Minister has said that he will meet them. Can I ask him to ensure that that meeting takes place urgently? More importantly, will he ensure that he and the Government listen to those women, that no stone is left unturned to get answers for them and that the perpetrators are brought to justice?

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

There are a couple of different issues in that question.

Mr Smyth's last point was whether every effort would be made to ensure that perpetrators of abuse are brought to justice. Properly, that is a matter for Police Scotland and the Crown. I endorse the points that Mr Smyth has made about the importance of an approach being taken to bring any perpetrator of abuse to justice, but he will understand that that is a process that is independent of the Government.

The substance of the issue around Fornethy is very sensitive, and I have agreed to meet with a group of survivors, I think in response to a parliamentary question from Monica Lennon. I will do that as soon as it is possible to do so.

I applaud the courage of individuals who have come forward, and I know that their concern is that the redress arrangements that the Parliament has put in place do not automatically include individuals who were in Fornethy for a short period of time, because it is primarily focused on individuals who were abused during long-term care placements.

To Mr Smyth and his constituent I say that there is obviously scope for individuals to apply to Redress Scotland for a redress payment, and

each individual's circumstance will be individually addressed and assessed. It is not the case that there is a prohibition on applications from Fornethy survivors; it is that each individual case will be assessed on its merits.

Again, I will happily see the group, and will do that as soon as I possibly can.

Scottish Bus Week

3. Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): To ask the First Minister how the Scottish Government is celebrating Scottish bus week. (S6F-01132)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney): I am pleased to support the first ever Scottish bus week and to celebrate the many environmental, economic and social benefits that buses provide to our communities.

The Scottish Government has put buses at the heart of Scotland's just transition, funding more than 500 low-carbon buses across Scotland; providing free bus travel for people under 22 and for older and disabled people; and investing more than £500 million in bus priority infrastructure.

I urge all members to join us in supporting Scottish bus week and encourage more people to travel by bus.

Ariane Burgess: Thanks to the introduction of free bus travel for under 22s, which was delivered with Greens in Government, more than 300,000 young people across Scotland, including 20,000 in the Highlands and Islands, are now enjoying free low-carbon travel.

Here, in the capital, the proposed Scottish National Party-Green Party council coalition agreement included significant measures to increase bus patronage. Is the Deputy First Minister as shocked as I am that, instead of embracing progressive politics, Labour has put those positive measures at risk by colluding with the Tories to cobble together an administration?

Can the Deputy First Minister outline how the Government will work collaboratively to provide quality bus services across Scotland?

John Swinney: As a consequence of the partnership that was agreed between the Scottish Green Party and the Scottish Government, young people under the age of 22, rightly, travel free. Because of that agreement, there was an opportunity for other parts of the country to go further in relation to that type of collaboration, and I am only sorry that, in the city of Edinburgh, the Labour Party's collaboration with the Conservative Party has thwarted further ambitious proposals being brought forward.

We know that all of these grubby deals at a local level have been approved by Jackie Baillie—frankly, that explains a lot about that particular agreement. However, as I said, I very much regret that there was not the opportunity to take forward some of these proposals and to advance the interests of people in Scotland by the collaboration that we have seen in this Parliament.

Food and Drink Prices and Shortages

4. Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's response is, regarding the impact on Scotland, to comments by Ian Wright of the Food and Drink Sector Council regarding the United Kingdom's preparedness for increasing food prices and shortages. (S6F-01149)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney): Through Brexit, Covid and, now, the illegal war in Ukraine, we have seen how resilient the food sector is despite all the challenges that it has faced. Food supply continues to be strong. However, the Scottish Government takes seriously the food security of Scotland and, in response to the war in Ukraine, the Scottish Government, together with industry, has established a short-life food security and supply task force. The task force is currently considering a range of issues, and it will recommend actions that can be taken to strengthen food security and supply in Scotland. I expect the task force to report in due course.

The United Kingdom Government holds many of the levers to address the on-going pressures, but we will continue to use all the powers that we have available to support people in Scotland.

Jim Fairlie: Scotland's food and drink sector has been on a journey that has been marked by numerous successes, not least in providing a constant supply of world-class foods, employing more than 115,000 people and providing a high-value export market. However, it is clear to me that that totemic industry is in grave danger from the incompetence and intransigence of the UK Government, as was highlighted by Mr Wright. That not only endangers our food industry; it threatens the ability of people to source the high-quality food that we want them to have. Does the Deputy First Minister therefore agree that the only way in which we can protect that industry and all our industries is through an independent Scotland?

John Swinney: I agree with Mr Fairlie on that point. The food and drink industry is currently facing numerous significant and challenging impacts as a result of the UK Government's mishandling of Brexit at the time of a pandemic. Those issues are being added to by the challenges that come from the cost of living crisis

and the war in Ukraine. All those issues—the cost of living, the implications of Brexit, the barriers to trade and the obstacles to the free movement of individuals—can be addressed by independence. That is why Mr Fairlie is absolutely right to put that point to Parliament.

Waste Burning

5. Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's position is on whether burning waste is good for the environment. (S6F-01137)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney): In considering the treatment of Scotland's unavoidable and unrecyclable residual waste, there are no options that are good for the environment. That is why we are taking actions to reduce the amount of waste that we produce, to increase the proportion that we recycle and to minimise the impact of treating any remaining residual waste.

We recently published an independent review of the role of incineration in Scotland's waste hierarchy to ensure that how we treat residual waste is aligned with our net zero ambitions. A key finding of the review was that, although incineration can be less climate damaging than landfill, incineration capacity could outstrip the supply of residual waste if most of the facilities in the pipeline of developments are built.

We will set out our initial response to the review in June.

Sharon Dowey: Residents of Ochiltree are rightly upset by proposals to construct a new incinerator there. A report that was commissioned by one of the First Minister's ministers, Lorna Slater, who pledged to end the building of new incinerators in her party's manifesto, says that there is not even enough demand for new facilities. The local Scottish National Party has been embarrassingly silent on the issue, but local residents, politicians and community groups are united in their opposition to the plans. Will the First Minister bring in a moratorium on new incinerators? How does that facility fit into her plans to reach net zero?

John Swinney: I will make two points. First, obviously, the individual application that Sharon Dowey referred to is a live planning application, so it would be completely inappropriate for me to comment on it. It is a live planning application with East Ayrshire Council, which might explain why local politicians are silent on the issue, as well. If they were not silent on it, they would be in breach of their code of conduct. We should all be mindful of the rules under which we are all supposed to operate.

My second point relates to the strategic question of incineration. In my earlier answer, I indicated that we have sought expert advice on that question. We have received that, and we are very grateful to Dr Colin Church for the review. That is being considered within Government, and ministers will give a response in June.

The point that I made in my original answer about the risk that, if all the developments that are being proposed were consented, we would end up with more capacity than would be justifiable with the level of residual waste is, obviously, a factor that has to be considered as part of the exercise in reviewing the whole question of incineration. Ministers will respond to Parliament on that in advance of the summer recess.

Cost of Living

6. Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's response is to comments by Citizens Advice Scotland that one in five people are running out of money before payday. (S6F-01144)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney): The United Kingdom cost of living crisis is impacting all households, with those on the lowest incomes being hardest hit. It is shocking and shameful that, week after week, the UK Government has refused to take the direct and bold action that is required to support households in need. We await the statement that is being made in the House of Commons today.

We have repeatedly urged the UK Government to use the levers that it has, including by introducing a windfall tax, cutting VAT on energy bills, increasing the warm home discount, and following our lead in uprating benefits.

In contrast, this Government is investing almost £770 million this year through a package of cost of living measures and social security support that is not available anywhere else in the UK, and it is investing £12 million to support free advice services.

Pauline McNeill: Currently, 20 per cent of people cannot make it to payday, and, with the energy price cap set to soar this October to almost £3,000 as well as exorbitant inflation, even more people are facing impossible demands on household budgets. The mental health toll will be huge.

One of the Scottish Government's responses was to give a £150 council tax discount to Scottish households. However, Chris Birt of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation said recently:

"£150 will barely touch the sides of the gaping hole in many low-income households' budgets".

He added:

“There was no perfect solution available to the Finance Secretary, but this isn’t a good one”.

In addition to what the chancellor will announce today—I agree with John Swinney that it is something that the Tories have been forced into—I must ask this Government what steps it will take to be bolder. What new plans will it have to play its part in ensuring that struggling households can look to this Government for the support that they need?

John Swinney: One of the measures that this Government has taken has been to double the Scottish child payment to £20 per child per week. We are increasing it to £25 from the end of the year, and we will extend it to under-16s. That is not provided in any other part of the United Kingdom.

I remind Parliament that that measure was voted against by the Labour Party, because it voted against the budget. Much as I respect Pauline McNeill, I have to say to those in the Labour Party that, if they are going to come to Parliament and demand that we do things, the nice and decent thing would be to vote for those things when we put them to Parliament.

Secondly, yes, we will await what the chancellor says or is saying—I am not sure whether he is speaking at this precise moment. However, instead of complaining about what the UK Government is or is not doing, why do we not have the powers in this Parliament to take the actions that will remedy the situation?

Lastly, it also comes down to the decisions that are taken by individual public authorities in Scotland. Yesterday, in my own council area, in Perth and Kinross, we removed the Conservatives from power and a Scottish National Party administration was appointed. Its first act—its first policy—was to apply £700,000 of new money in cost of living measures to support my vulnerable constituents. What was the first act of some Labour authorities around the country? It was to give new jobs to the Tories—that is a disgrace for the Labour Party.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes First Minister’s question time. There will be a brief pause before we move to members’ business.

Falkland Islands

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): I ask members and those in the public gallery who are leaving to do so as quickly and quietly as possible.

The next item of business is a members’ business debate on motion S6M-04082, in the name of Sharon Dowey, on marking the 40th anniversary of the liberation of the Falkland Islands. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament marks the 40th anniversary of the liberation of the Falkland Islands in 1982; notes that the anniversary is recognised as a national holiday in the Falklands; recognises all the brave sacrifices made by the British military personnel, their families and the British public throughout this 74-day war; celebrates what it sees as the unity demonstrated by UK citizens in a time of great need to restore freedom for the people in the Falklands; highlights what it considers are the strong cultural links between Scotland and the Falkland community and recognises the significant contribution that members of the Armed Forces from Scotland made to liberating the Islands in 1982; commemorates the lives of the three civilian Falkland Islanders and 255 British military personnel that were sadly lost, as well as the hundreds that were injured; notes the significant role that many civilians reportedly played in supporting the Task Force on its campaign in the South Atlantic; further notes the support that it believes the UK Government continues to provide to the Falklands’ right to self-determination and their wish to remain a UK Overseas Territory; expresses its support for veterans on both sides and Islanders who it understands still struggle with mental and physical scars as a consequence of the events that they have experienced or witnessed; acknowledges the year-long programme of different honouring and celebratory events across the world that aim to commemorate the sacrifices made in 1982; values the Falkland Islands as what it considers a forward-looking community with a strong sense of culture and heritage, and celebrates what it sees as the great progress made in the Falkland Islands since 1982.

12:50

Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con): It is my pleasure to bring this debate to the Scottish Parliament to mark 40 years since the end of the Falklands war. The war lasted 74 days and resulted in the loss of 907 lives—three islanders, 255 British personnel and 649 Argentine soldiers. The citizens of both Britain and the Falkland Islands owe a huge debt to those who lost their lives. They were defending liberty, democracy and the right to self-determination, not to mention Falkland Islanders’ right and desire to remain British. They did that in the face of a foreign aggressor—something that feels particularly relevant today—travelling to a distant land 8,000 miles away “across an angry sea”, as one soldier put it. It was a plunge into the unknown to defend a people they had never met and, in many cases,

knew little about. That is truly admirable and something that we can appreciate collectively as a Parliament. Their conduct is a shining example of the very best of the British armed forces. They acted with professionalism, ruthlessness, skill and compassion to bring freedom back to the Falklands.

Last week, I had the honour of hosting a reception in the Scottish Parliament along with Richard Hyslop, the Falkland Islands representative in the United Kingdom and Europe. After the speeches, Richard played a short video made by schoolchildren in the Falklands, in which they expressed their thanks to those who fought for their freedom. It was a touching tribute that affected many of us who were present. The comment that stuck me most was the one that was made at the end by a wee girl, who said, "Thank you for keeping us British. Things would not have been the same without you." It was a reminder that those who fought and gave their lives laid the foundations for the Falklands of today, and their sacrifice has not been forgotten.

The video also showed that the Falklands is a changing place and not the 1982 time capsule that remains in many British minds. For most people, thinking of the Falklands conjures up grainy photographs of marines in cagoules crossing a foreboding landscape of penguins waddling on beaches, or perhaps the liberation of Stanley in the war's final days. Few people in 1982 could have foreseen the dramatic changes that have swept this small but significant territory over the past 40 years.

It was clear from my conversations with Falkland Islanders that they have prospered only since the war's conclusion. Both Richard Hyslop and his deputy, Michael Betts, were eager to tell me about the exciting developments that are taking place in Stanley. There has been a huge increase in tourism, not to mention that its booming economy is the envy of South America. If we were to take a walk through Stanley today, perhaps along Thatcher Drive, we would see new houses going up, more fishing boats in the harbour and the development of a distinct Falkland Islands culture—Britishness with a Latin twist, with their own favourite national sports and food, namely Falklands squid and lamb. The Stanley of 1982 is now, for many, just a memory, just as the war thankfully is, too, but we must preserve those memories. We owe that much to those who fought and lost their lives in defence of freedom.

Given more time, it would have been good to delve into the rich connections between Scotland and the Falkland Islands, or the Scottish role in the British response, whether it was the merchant navy sailors or members of the Special Air

Service, but I suspect that others will touch on that in their contributions.

Before I end, I thank those who came to the reception that I mentioned earlier: representatives from the South Atlantic Medal Association 1982 and the Lothian Veterans Centre; representatives of the British Army, the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force; and not forgetting the governor of Edinburgh castle, Alastair Bruce, and members of the Royal British Legion. In addition, Poppyscotland was a great help in organising the event.

It was fascinating to talk to Ian Gardiner, a veteran from 45 Commando Royal Marines, who went on to become an author and military expert, and who writes vividly about his experiences during the war, particularly in the battle of Two Sisters, the fierce night battle that took place 1,000ft above Stanley.

It would not have been a Falklands event without the presence of a strong contingent of islanders. It was great to invite to the Scottish Parliament members of Falkland Wool Growers, the chief islander of Tristan Da Cunha and students from the Falklands who are studying in Scotland, and to learn more about island life from them at first hand. We had speeches from Richard Hyslop, whom I have already mentioned, and from Keith Brown MSP, who has the honour of being the only parliamentarian who served during the conflict—in his case, with the Royal Marines. He spoke memorably about his experiences during the war and of friends lost and battles fought—things that few of us in the chamber will ever know.

I thank the MSPs from across the political spectrum who attended the event. It is fair to say that, despite our differences, we all saw how much British identity means to the people of the Falklands, which was touching. What is more, we can all respect the sacrifice that was made 40 years ago, which has ensured that Falkland Islanders have remained free from foreign rule to this day.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Dowe. It is always good to hear of events that are well attended by islanders.

12:57

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I sincerely thank Sharon Dowe for securing the debate. I, too, wish to commemorate all the lives that were lost and those who were injured both physically and mentally, including British troops, civilians and Argentinians.

I also recognise the professionalism and courage of our armed forces. As well as three Falkland Islanders, in total, 904 military personnel were killed in the conflict. Of those, 255 were British military personnel, and 649 were Argentines. British forces reported that 775 were wounded in the war, with 115 being captured between April and June. Meanwhile, 1,657 were reported wounded among Argentina's military personnel, and more than 11,000 were captured.

I will go back 40 years, because, for me, those people might not have lost their lives or been injured. Before a shot had been fired, pretty well none of us knew where the Falklands were or what the UK Government had to do with it. As I travelled on the bus to my law studies, I recall how horrified I was to hear passengers in front of me cheering that we should "bash the Argies".

As we came to learn more, we found out that there had been an incursion on the island by metal workers with some Argentinian marines, who raised the Argentinian flag, which raised the alert. The island was thousands of miles from our shores and had a population in the low thousands. The islanders were not British citizens—citizenship was granted to them only after the war. Of course, I shared the concerns for their wellbeing and safety, but I know that I was not alone in having grave concerns about launching into a war. The country was not united in the decision to attack, nor in the way in which the war was conducted.

There was, I believe, an opportunity to resolve the dispute over the sovereignty of the Falklands by diplomacy. It might have failed, but it was not given enough time and space.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Would Christine Grahame accept that the UK Government at the time made strenuous efforts through the United Nations to reach an accommodation, and that it made all sorts of proposals for joint sovereignty over the Falkland Islands, which were rejected by the Argentinian Government?

Christine Grahame: We disagree about that, but I will talk about the press coverage at the time and how the press behaved.

The sinking of the General Belgrano, an ageing Argentinian cruiser, caused the loss of 323 Argentinian lives on 2 May 1982, after it was attacked as it sailed either to or out of the 200-mile exclusion zone. I do not know the ins and outs of what was correct, but the matter is certainly still disputed. There was retaliation two days later, of course, with an attack on HMS Sheffield, which was sunk off the coast of the Falkland Islands, killing 20 men. There was no going back after that.

I recall—before even one British ship had sailed—the increasingly feverish warmongering,

which was fuelled, in particular, by a circulation war between *The Sun* and the *Mirror*. *The Sun* had a bloodthirsty stance from the start, which included inviting readers to sponsor Sidewinder missiles and offering free "Sink the Argies" computer games. It never relented. *The Sun* splashed with the poster front page, "We'll Smash 'Em", printed over pictures of Winston Churchill and a bulldog. Finally, there was the infamous "Gotcha".

The Sun became increasingly frustrated with politicians who were attempting to negotiate a settlement—I agreed with them—to avoid a "shooting war", as it was called. At one point, the US Secretary of State, Al Haig, was accused of "standing in the way of war"

because of his efforts to avoid bloodshed. The paper even urged the Government to reject an offer of peace talks from the Argentinian military regime, with the headline "Stick it up your junta", which became its catchphrase for the war.

Not all the press was like that, of course, but, for good measure, *The Sun* described the BBC and the "pygmy" *Guardian* as "traitors in our midst". *The Mirror* was a "timorous, whining newspaper". *The Mirror* retaliated by saying that *The Sun* had "fallen from the gutter into the sewer".

That language worried me at the time. I was worried about how we were considering the dangers, in particular the dangers that we were putting our troops into in war. Very few politicians have experienced the front line of war, excluding my colleague Keith Brown. Those who speak about it speak very differently of conflict, including at Westminster, and I always listen to them.

Dr Johnson, in seeking to prevent an earlier Falklands conflict, said:

"It is wonderful with what coolness and indifference the greater part of mankind see war commenced. Those that hear of it at a distance, or read of it in books, but have never presented its evils to their minds, consider it as little more than a splendid game".

I return to the lives lost and damaged. They must not be forgotten—I have not forgotten them—but I have also not forgotten how the loss of those lives might have been prevented, with intelligence and diplomacy being tried first and tested to its limits before putting our armed forces into conflict. Some 1,000 died, and thousands more were injured. We owe it to them and their descendants, and to our armed forces today, to exhaust every diplomatic international avenue before ever resorting to the brutality of war.

13:02

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I congratulate Sharon Dowey on securing this

debate on what is a very important anniversary. I join her and other members in recognising and remembering the lives lost—the British servicemen who were lost, the civilians lost and the Argentinians who were lost, as many of them were conscript soldiers who had no particular appetite for the conflict but were forced into it by an evil military junta that was trying to divert away from its domestic problems by invading British sovereign territory.

I had the privilege of visiting the Falkland Islands in 2012, on the 30th anniversary of the liberation, along with Keith Brown, and Christina McKelvie was there as well. It was a fascinating and, at times, a very moving visit. I had the great honour of laying a wreath in memory of the cook Brian Easton from Alyth in Perthshire, who had served on HMS Glamorgan and was killed on 12 June 1982 when that ship was hit by an Argentinian missile. He was 24 years old. I know that his former colleagues appreciated that gesture that I was able to perform.

Like other members, I have my own memories of the Falklands conflict. I was sitting my highers at the time—I was 16 years old. Mr Carson is nodding—he is obviously of a similar vintage. Against the backdrop of sitting my highers, I well remember the news reports coming through daily, first about the sailing of the task force and then about the conflict in the Falklands. To this day, names such as Goose Green, San Carlos and Bluff Cove are still resonant in my memory from that time. As it did for many people of my generation, the Falklands conflict had a substantial impact on the formation of my political opinions—not least my view of the leadership of Margaret Thatcher and her Government at that time.

A number of myths have grown up around the conflict. Christine Grahame made some fair points, but I think that she overstated the enthusiasm for war that existed in the UK Government then. We must remember that Margaret Thatcher's Cabinet was predominantly made up of middle-aged men who had themselves known war—they had fought in the second world war—and they were not enthusiasts for it at all. The then UK Government made enormous efforts to reach an accommodation with the Argentinians, through the United Nations.

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans (Keith Brown): We can disagree about how the diplomacy was conducted, but on that point would Murdo Fraser concede that the actions of the UK Government before that point—for example, in taking away HMS Endurance and other steps that sent entirely the wrong message to the Argentinians—resulted in the honourable resignation of Lord Carrington?

Murdo Fraser: I will not disagree with Keith Brown; he makes a very fair point. However, he and others should also recognise that there was no gung-ho attitude in the UK Government at the time. It was desperate to try to avoid conflict—not least because of the substantial risks of sending a task force thousands of miles away to the south Atlantic, with no idea as to whether that mission would be successful.

Christine Grahame: Will the member take an intervention?

Murdo Fraser: If I have time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can give you the time back, Mr Fraser.

Murdo Fraser: I will give way.

Christine Grahame: In fairness, I think that Murdo Fraser will concede that I was describing the gung-ho attitude of a particular tabloid newspaper, which gave me concern about how the public then began to own such an attitude.

Murdo Fraser: I am grateful to Christine Grahame for that clarification, and I recognise the point that she makes. However, although strenuous efforts were made to arrive at a diplomatic settlement, those were resisted by the Argentinians, which left armed conflict as the only way to resolve the matter.

I will conclude, Presiding Officer, as I have probably taken up too much time already. I encourage others who have not been to the Falkland Islands to make the visit. Today, they have a vibrant economy and society, as Sharon Dowey has pointed out, and as a tourist destination they are growing enormously. Visitors can see wildlife; historic sites linked with the conflict of 40 years ago; and penguins in large numbers—those are always a delight. I hope that we will continue to see the Falklands economy growing and thriving, thanks to the sacrifice that was made by our soldiers, airmen and sailors 40 years ago. We should continue to recognise their memory.

13:07

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): I very much welcome the debate, and I congratulate Sharon Dowey on securing it.

The fact that the Falklands conflict occurred 40 years ago means that, for many, it is history. However, a survey that was carried out by the charity Help for Heroes reminds us that a quarter of respondents aged between 18 and 24 had never heard of the conflict; nearly one in two of those aged between 18 and 34 did not know in which decade it took place; and 11 per cent thought that it was the UK rather than Argentina

that had invaded the Falklands. Therefore, although it is important that the debate should go on the record and that we should express our solidarity with the Falkland Islanders, it is also important to learn lessons for the future.

For me, the conflict was marked by the fact that the UK was led by Margaret Thatcher, with whom I disagreed profoundly on almost every topic that we could mention. However, the earlier exchange between Christine Grahame, Murdo Fraser and Keith Brown shows what is important in the debate, because we are a democracy and we can have such discussions and look back on history without any of us being put at risk. We can also see the importance in a democracy of having peace making and diplomacy as well as armed forces.

It is important for us to celebrate the fact that the people of the Falkland Islands, who have strong links with the UK—and Scotland, in particular—were united in wanting to retain those links and their UK characteristics. They relied on our armed forces to restore their freedom.

An important part of Sharon Dowey's motion is that we need to express our support for those who lost their lives on both sides of the conflict, whether they were from Argentina or our own armed forces. The people who were injured also had to deal with the aftermath of the conflict. A veteran of the Falkland war said that "not a day goes by" when he does not think about his experience of the conflict and about those who were badly burned when his ship was sunk by Argentine jets 40 years ago. For many people, the aftermath lives on today.

We also need to celebrate our links with the Falkland Islands—Scotland's links, in particular. I thank Michael Betts, the deputy representative for the Falkland Islands Government, for meeting me last week. It was good to reflect on the similarities between Scotland and the Falkland Islands. As I mentioned, those include the fact that Scotland has islands, a similar topography and weather, lots of wind power, sheep farming and climate-proofed homes. Sheep are important to the Falkland Islands community, and the community is looking to get recognition to brand its wool as Falklands wool, because it is of excellent quality and is organic.

There are also important similarities relating to climate change. The Falkland Islands have high wind and solar power generation, like Scotland, because they do not have an alternative due to their location.

There are links between the Falkland Islands and universities in Scotland and the rest of the UK. There is also a reliance on the state because of the size of the country; people have an

expectation of provision from the state. They get support to go on holiday, they have a very good welfare system and they have funded university and living fees to enable them to come to the UK to study—the vast majority of people return home.

It is important that we reflect on the achievements of the Falkland Islanders and on our links to them. We have strong links through the work of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and our British islands and Mediterranean region branch.

I started by saying that 40 years was a long time ago and that, for many, the conflict is history, but it is important that we continue to try to improve the relationship between the UK and the Falkland Islands' nearest neighbour, Argentina. It is critical that respect for the Falkland Islanders is at the heart of that relationship and that we continue our support. Wars are expensive, both financially and because they cost lives.

As we look to the future, let us consider this as a unique opportunity to welcome support and recognise the sacrifices that were made 40 years ago as well as to celebrate our cultural links, work together to share our expertise and academic links and continue exploration of best practice between our countries and people. Let us look at how we can continue to strengthen the link between Scotland and the rest of the UK, and the Falkland Islands.

13:13

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak today. I congratulate my colleague Sharon Dowey on bringing the debate to the chamber.

Not only was the invasion and occupation of the Falkland Islands by Argentine forces on Friday 2 April 1982 a horrific and illegal act, but it marked a significant turning point for the then UK Government, and it was a test for the then Prime Minister's leadership and Government.

A British naval task force was sent to reclaim the Falkland Islands, but assembling that force was no simple task. Amassing defence for the islands—which are 8,000 miles from the UK, in the south Atlantic—whether by sea or air, was going to involve logistics and planning of epic proportions. The 26 ships—a number that later rose to 44—of the Royal Navy that took an active part in the campaign were supported by 22 ships of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary. They included six specialist logistical landing ships, two ships from the Royal Maritime Auxiliary Service and 54 requisitioned vessels. Many of those civilian ships had to be fitted with extra equipment for the long voyage, including helicopter landing decks, specialist communications apparatus and water-

treatment plants. In addition, the cruise liner SS Uganda was requisitioned and converted to serve as a hospital ship.

As well as sea-borne capabilities, we needed air superiority, which was a monumental task to achieve. Although the air tasks were clear, the assets that we needed were not clear at all. Even from the base on Ascension Island, there were no aircraft that could fly to the Falklands and back. Therefore, air-to-air refuelling had to take place, including as part of operation Black Buck, which was the famous op involving Vulcan bombers from RAF Waddington that thwarted Argentina's ability to fly over Port Stanley. One aircraft had to be refuelled by air 17 times over a period of 15 hours and 45 minutes.

Such a short speech does not do justice to the significance of the operations that took place, nor can it come close to acknowledging the significant contributions that were made by so many military and civilian personnel. We have already heard about the loss of 255 British servicemen, including 15 personnel from Arbroath-based 45 Commando and the second battalion of the Scots Guards, plus three individuals from the Falklands, who were included in the more than 900 lives that were lost in total. The British success in the war came about chiefly due to our ability to project and sustain a task force in an impromptu military campaign for which there was no prior planning.

As we know, Argentine forces surrendered on 14 June 1982, which is a date that has gone down in history. It is known in the Falkland Islands as liberation day, and it is a national holiday. As the Falkland Islands Government has said, Falkland Islanders are profoundly grateful for the strong support that the UK Government continues to provide in acknowledging their choice to remain a UK overseas territory. The people of the Falkland Islands continue to be forward looking, with a strong sense of culture and heritage.

The immense bravery and fortitude that was shown by the Falkland Islanders and armed forces personnel amid the harsh terrain and conditions of the conflict should never be underestimated and should be universally commended.

13:17

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans (Keith Brown): I thank Sharon Dowey for securing this members' business debate to mark the 40th anniversary of the liberation of the Falkland Islands.

I also thank Sharon Dowey for her sponsorship of last week's 40th anniversary commemoration event in the Parliament, which was a fitting way for us to reflect on the impact and legacy of the Falklands conflict. When I tried to mention all the

MSPs who were in attendance that night, I missed out two. I am happy to rectify that now by mentioning them by name—they were Pam Gosal and Tess White.

I also mentioned by name someone who was not there—Murdo Fraser. I do not know where he was that night. [*Laughter.*] However, I seized on the fact that he came down to the Falkland Islands in 2012, as Christina McKelvie and I did. It was a fantastic opportunity to see a place that is remarkable, and not just for the conflict that took place there.

What is clear from the speeches that we have heard is that, across the chamber, we are unanimous in recognising the bravery and heroism of all the individuals who set sail to free the islands.

I was interested in Murdo Fraser's speech, in particular, because he talked about a young man who died on 12 June on HMS Glamorgan. As it happens, it was the night between 11 and 12 June when my unit, which is pronounced "four-five Commando" rather than "forty-five Commando"—there is no explanation; that is just what it is known as—conducted an attack. The person next to me directed fire from HMS Glamorgan from our position. That scared me endlessly; I thought that it required an act of faith for somebody to know exactly how far we were advancing and be able to direct fire with that kind of accuracy. It just shows how skilful and brave the people on the Glamorgan were. I send my full condolences to the surviving family of the young man whom Murdo Fraser mentioned.

As we near the 40th anniversary, there are a number of upcoming events and activities that will provide us all with a chance to consider the lasting impact of the conflict.

I am glad that a number of members have mentioned the Argentinians who were involved. It has been said that many of them were not there by choice. The ones whom I met were young men. One had a suitcase. Why would someone take a suitcase to war? He did so because he had no way of carrying proper equipment, so he took civilian clothes. He seemed to me to be younger even than we were. They were hopelessly ill-prepared, and they were hungry and cold. The one prisoner whom I took back to our headquarters was absolutely petrified.

Also, I have to say that one of the major achievements of the Falklands war—for me, at least—was that I saw no ill treatment whatsoever of any Argentinian prisoners of war. In my experience, they were treated exceptionally well, which is a mark of a very professional force, in my view.

I will be delighted to attend the Scottish national event in Edinburgh on 18 June, which is being delivered by the Scottish Government in partnership with Legion Scotland and Poppyscotland. It will provide the people of Scotland with an opportunity to commemorate an important and poignant anniversary. I encourage MSPs of all parties to come, if they can, and in turn to encourage others to come along on that day.

To coincide with that event, Poppyscotland—this relates to Sarah Boyack's point—is delivering a wider learning programme and package of resources to schools across the country to allow young people to learn more about the conflict. It will also highlight the role of the armed forces, including the role that they play today and how we can support service members and their families.

It is interesting to think that, back in 1982, we were closer to the end of the second world war than we are today to the Falklands conflict. Speaking for myself, in 1982 I thought that world war two was ancient history, so you can imagine how it feels now to be thinking back to the Falklands.

I also look forward to attending the Royal British Legion's national event at the National Memorial Arboretum to mark the official anniversary.

I would like to take a moment to highlight the work by Andrew Cave to ensure that the efforts of dockyard workers, who worked skilfully and tirelessly to ensure that our personnel and fleet were ready to sail to the Falklands, were properly recognised and commemorated, with plaques being placed in current and former naval dockyards around the world, including just across the Forth River, in Rosyth. It is only right that we pay tribute to those often-forgotten individuals, along with everyone else who made a contribution during the conflict—from the serving personnel to their families and their wider communities. I was scheduled to go to an event at Rosyth when the plaque commemorating those workers and the work of Andrew Cave would be unveiled but, unfortunately, I contracted Covid earlier that week.

We should also take a moment to recognise and appreciate something that we heard last week, which Sharon Dowe will remember, about the strong cultural links that Scotland shares with the Falkland Islands communities to this day. Many people in the islands' population are descended from Scottish and Welsh immigrants who settled in the territory after 1833. Many individuals from the Shetland and Orkney islands emigrated to the Falkland Islands in the second half of the 19th century, during the development of its sheep-breeding industry.

To turn back briefly to the war and its lasting impact, I note that the war involved all elements of the armed forces and lasted just 74 days. As we have heard, it claimed the lives of hundreds of servicemen and had a lasting impact on thousands more, as well as on their families. Many veterans still struggle with physical and mental scars or have faced hardships in the years afterwards.

I will briefly mention the four men in my troop who were killed: Pete Fitton, Andy Uren, Bob Leeming and Keith Phillips. As I mentioned last week, Bob Leeming was a sergeant with a wife and a family; he had children at home. Keith Phillips, who was the same age as me, and had the same first name, was killed just before the attack on Two Sisters. For him, life was finished there. When we went down to the Falklands in 2012, Murdo Fraser made a call to ensure that as much assistance as possible would be given to their families to allow them to go there. Some family members do not realise that they are entitled to a medal on behalf of their son, brother or father.

So, while we reflect on the events of the Falklands conflict and our ties with the communities there, we have to take a moment to recognise and remember all those who lost their lives or were otherwise impacted by the war and the occupation of the islands. Quite recently there was a council leader in the Highlands who was resident in the Falklands during the conflict, which goes to show the links between our two countries.

It is also important that we acknowledge the lasting impact that can be experienced by some members of the armed forces community. We continue to work to seek to address that. I will finish by expressing my gratitude to our close-knit charity sector, here in Scotland. I am sure that I speak for everyone here when I say that I am continually impressed by the level and quality of support that they provide to our former service personnel and their families. I extend my heartfelt thanks to everyone who supports those charities in whatever way they can.

Finally, we will not forget the brave souls who paid the ultimate price to ensure that the Falklands Islands could exercise their right to self-determination. That is the crucial point.

As for the exchange between Christine Grahame and Murdo Fraser, Sarah Boyack is quite right to say that this is the stuff of democracy. We do not have to agree on these things; indeed, people sometimes think that all members of the armed forces or veterans have the same view on such matters. The wars that we have fought in the past have usually been to protect democratic freedoms, one of which is the freedom to disagree.

I have to say that the way in which the war was conducted—and, indeed, much that I have learned about it—gives me a certain degree of anguish that things could have been conducted differently, but that would probably be true of any conflict. However, I have no trouble with the view that, once Argentinian forces representing a fascist regime were on the islands, it was necessary to eject them forcibly. I think that that was right. For me, this is about the principle of self-determination. We were not reclaiming the Falklands for the UK, but for the Falkland Islanders, so that they could choose to make their own decision, as they subsequently did in a referendum. I hate to say that everyone has the same view of these things, but I would imagine that, when the people involved look back, they will think that that was what they were fighting for. In truth, however, most people in the armed forces will say that they fight for the person next to them and the unit that they belong to, as much as for anything else.

I thank everyone who has spoken in the debate, and I again thank Sharon Dowey for ensuring that the issue is not forgotten and that we continue to remember those who served in the Falklands.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): Thank you very much indeed, cabinet secretary. That concludes the debate. I suspend the meeting until 2 pm.

13:26

Meeting suspended.

14:00

On resuming—

Portfolio Question Time

Constitution, External Affairs and Culture

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): Good afternoon. The next item of business is portfolio question time and the portfolio is constitution, external affairs and culture. If a member wishes to ask a supplementary question, they should press their request-to-speak button or enter the letter R in the chat function during the relevant question. I again call for succinct questions, and answers to match, so that we can get in as many members as possible.

Scotland's Census 2022

1. **Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on Scotland's census 2022. (S6O-01134)

The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): As of this morning, the return rate stands at 85.7 per cent, with the enumeration of 2,238,784 households. That is an increase of 6.5 percentage points since the start of the extension period, on 1 May, and it amounts to 144,431 extra households being enumerated. The geographical return rate is also encouraging, with 25 of Scotland's 32 local authorities passing the 85 per cent milestone, and a further five passing 80 per cent.

Field Force enumerators continue to visit households that are yet to complete the 2022 census. So far, 1.59 million households have been visited and offered help to complete the census, either online or with a paper copy. That work continues.

The number of households yet to return their census form stands at 373,701. All have been written to a number of times, and the majority have had a visit from enumerators. In recent days, a final reminder communication has been sent to all those households.

Donald Cameron: It is evident that the census will not achieve the uptake levels that are necessary for it to be successful. Before the census, National Records of Scotland said that there must be a person response rate of at least 94 per cent, and it is clear that that will not now be achieved. Especially worrying is the situation in Glasgow, our largest city. Why has the Scottish National Party Government got this so badly

wrong? Does the cabinet secretary see merit in an independent inquiry into this shambles?

Angus Robertson: I am delighted to be able to confirm to Donald Cameron that the most significant increase in response during the census extension period has been in the city of Glasgow, and more work is under way.

I encourage Donald Cameron and all other members, now that they have the opportunity and the public's ear, to encourage everybody to take part. Householders have until the end of May to submit their census return. Our absolute priority is to support and enable those who have not yet done so to complete their census return, adding to the more than 2.2 million households across Scotland that have already done so. For those who have yet to complete their census return, help and support is available via the website, census.gov.scot, or by calling the free helpline on 0800 030 8308. The field teams, who have carried out more than 1.5 million doorstep visits, will continue to support people to complete their census returns.

Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP): I will not be alone in having been impressed with the extent of the promotional campaign for the census in the preceding months. What further targeted campaigning has taken place since the strategic decision was made to extend the census deadline to the end of May?

Angus Robertson: Throughout the census collection extension period, a range of work has been undertaken to increase the return rate. The marketing campaign was extended, with updated messaging informing people about the extension and reminding them of the legal requirement to fill in the census. That updated messaging was featured across television, radio and the press. Updated digital and outdoor adverts were targeted at local authorities with lower return rates to encourage completion, while media partnerships have been created to increase return rates among young people who live away from home. Field events have taken place across the country to support people to complete their census return, with events being held at places of worship, universities, colleges, supermarkets, libraries and leisure centres. Those events will continue this week and into the weekend.

In addition, a quarter of a million postcards and more than 400,000 reminder letters have been sent to households that have not yet completed their census return.

Listed Buildings (Consultation)

2. Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government how Historic Environment Scotland ensures that communities

are adequately consulted when considering whether a building should be listed. (S6O-01135)

The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development and Minister with special responsibility for Refugees from Ukraine (Neil Gray): Questions regarding day-to-day operational matters relating to Historic Environment Scotland's designation process are best answered directly by Historic Environment Scotland. However, I can confirm that, when HES assesses applications for designations, community engagement is a key part of the assessment. It does not make such decisions behind closed doors. It consults parties that are directly affected, including owners, occupiers and local planning authorities, and it welcomes views from members of the public through its historic environment portal.

Gillian Mackay: A number of constituents have contacted me in despair at the news that Historic Environment Scotland is currently considering whether Cumbernauld town centre should be a listed building. Just when it looked as though plans to redevelop the site were progressing and there was an opportunity to replace the current town centre with something fit for a town the size of Cumbernauld, the HES proposal threatens those plans.

Can the minister assure me and my constituents that Historic Environment Scotland will not approve a proposal to list such an awful building if that will put at risk plans to develop a modern and accessible town centre?

Neil Gray: I thank Gillian Mackay for her and her constituents' interest, and for bringing the issue to the chamber's attention. I note that our colleague Jamie Hepburn has similarly had a lot of correspondence on the issue and is as engaged with it as Gillian Mackay is.

I understand the strength of feeling that exists in Cumbernauld and the way in which Gillian Mackay has articulated the situation. However, the Historic Environment Scotland Act 2014 delegated the responsibility for compiling or approving lists of buildings of special architectural or historical interest to Historic Environment Scotland, and appeals against decisions by HES to list buildings are made to the Scottish ministers. As ministers may have a future role in the decision-making process, it would not be appropriate for me to comment on the merits of any proposed listing.

That said, I ask Gillian Mackay to note that a building's being listed does not necessarily prevent development or alteration. I encourage Gillian Mackay, colleagues and constituents to engage with Historic Environment Scotland in the process.

Sharon Dowe (South Scotland) (Con): When I met Historic Environment Scotland in March, it informed me that 200 sites across Scotland are shut or have restricted access. How does HES intend to fund any reconstruction work on sites that require further intervention?

Neil Gray: I have regularly engaged with the management of Historic Environment Scotland on the high-level masonry issues that there are at sites across Scotland. The issue that Sharon Dowe raises is slightly tangential to the subject of the listing process but, as part of my regular engagement with HES, I have visited Linlithgow palace, Dumbarton castle and Arbroath abbey in order to see for myself the work that is already being done. I am hopeful that the process of assessment can be carried out as quickly as possible, so that visitors to Historic Environment Scotland sites, along with staff, can enjoy those sites safely, as we would all expect them to be able to do.

Northern Ireland Protocol

3. Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with the United Kingdom Government regarding the potential impact on Scotland of the UK Government's reported plans to unilaterally change the Northern Ireland protocol. (S6O-01136)

The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): The Scottish Government has made its views clear to the UK Government. We are deeply concerned about the UK Government's plans to override the protocol unilaterally and the catastrophic damage that that could cause to Scotland. Kate Forbes and I have written to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Foreign Secretary, respectively, calling on the UK Government to re-engage constructively with our European Union partners. We have received no reply, and we have had no meaningful discussions with the UK Government on the matter.

The UK Government's threats to breach an international treaty that was signed in good faith just two years ago could spark a trade war that would have disastrous economic consequences for Scotland and for all parts of the UK. For the UK Government to even contemplate such reckless action in the midst of a cost of living crisis is unthinkable and indefensible.

Emma Roddick: If the UK Government will not listen to the Scottish Government, the Irish Government, the First Minister designate of Northern Ireland, the European Commission and many, many more who would suffer in a Tory-made UK-EU war, does the cabinet secretary believe that the UK Government might instead

listen to the US House of Representatives, which, in a joint statement with the European Parliament last weekend, concluded that

"renegotiating the Protocol is not an option. Only joint solutions will work."?

Angus Robertson: The deterioration of the dispute over the Northern Ireland protocol, such that it necessitates intervention by Nancy Pelosi, the Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, and Richard Neal, the leader of the US congressional delegation visiting Europe this week, is a grave cause for concern. The prospect of a trade deal between the UK and the United States will recede rapidly if the UK Government maintains its reckless attitude to negotiation with the European Union.

Far from identifying the benefits of Brexit, the UK Government seems determined to seize upon every imaginable harm that can be extracted from Brexit. We can only hope that the UK Government will, indeed, listen to our US partners, pull back from its irresponsible threats and focus instead on dialogue with our EU partners and on finding a durable agreed solution.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): Last April, the First Minister claimed that the Northern Ireland protocol was a template for an independent Scotland in the EU; last week, she warned that it could trigger a trade war with the EU and tip the UK into recession. What is the Government's view this week?

Angus Robertson: I do not think that Willie Rennie understands what the Northern Ireland protocol is. We are talking about the UK Government breaching the Northern Ireland protocol. Having said that the deal was "oven-ready" and that it was a fantastic deal, the UK Government is unilaterally threatening to break international law. I am surprised that Willie Rennie does not know that—he should know it. There is a world of difference between that and a Northern Ireland protocol that was agreed by both sides and could be workable if the UK Government was prepared to live up to its international treaty obligations.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 4 was not lodged.

Ukrainian Refugees (Settlement)

5. Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government how its supersponsor scheme takes account of the preferences of Ukrainian refugees regarding settlement locations within Scotland. (S6O-01138)

The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development and Minister with special responsibility for Refugees from

Ukraine (Neil Gray): The supersponsor scheme is designed to provide a quick and safe route to enable people displaced from Ukraine to come to a place of sanctuary by removing the need for applicants to be matched to an individual sponsor prior to being given permission to travel to the United Kingdom.

Once people have arrived, a national matching service, delivered by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, will match those settling here with longer-term accommodation across Scotland. Displaced people from Ukraine are asked to complete a short questionnaire that captures key information and preferences. That information is then used to find suitable longer-term accommodation, which will be offered as a choice.

All 32 of our local authorities are taking part in the programme and hosts have offered up their homes right across the country. The national matching service will ensure that people are offered settlement opportunities across Scotland, recognising that people will have different preferences and that available housing is limited in some authorities.

Miles Briggs: There is growing concern that what seems to be an overly bureaucratic system has been put in place. It seems that the Syria and Afghanistan resettlement scheme that was adopted in the 32 local council areas is now being administered to Ukrainian refugees. I understand that 1,000 Ukrainians are currently living in hotels and have had no clarification of the matching process for the scheme. What consideration is being given to a single scheme that can be delivered without councils having to decide? What advice is being given to councils to ensure that the scheme is speeded up?

Neil Gray: I absolutely agree with Miles Briggs's last point. We need a process that moves as quickly as possible. I am working with officials and local authority partners to ensure that people are allocated and matched to longer term accommodation and that the necessary safeguarding checks are carried out as quickly as possible—that applies to both the properties on offer and the individuals offering them, as I am sure that Miles Briggs would expect.

I do not recognise the numbers that Miles Briggs has quoted, but I would be happy to meet him to discuss the matching process to ensure that we are able to offer people sustainable long-term accommodation as quickly as possible. That will relieve the undoubted pressures that exist in places such as Edinburgh, which Miles Briggs represents and which has become a national hub for arrivals, so that the system flows well.

Ukrainian Refugees (Services)

6. **Joe FitzPatrick:** To ask the Scottish Government what services the £10,500 tariff provided by the United Kingdom Government for local authorities to support displaced Ukrainians arriving in Scotland is expected to cover. (S6O-01139)

The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development and Minister with special responsibility for Refugees from Ukraine (Neil Gray): The £10,500 tariff is designed to support local authorities to meet all their associated costs, including those for providing education; advice and referrals to specialist public health services, including mental health services and adult social care; support to access employability support and social security; homelessness assistance; and community integration through the provision of translation services, community events and signposting to further support.

The tariff is paid per person but only for those who have settled under the homes for Ukraine scheme, which includes the supersponsor scheme, not for those under the family sponsorship scheme. The £200 emergency payment for guests is also paid from that one payment.

Joe FitzPatrick: In addition to the costs that the minister mentioned, there are health costs, which do not appear to be covered. The tariff does not seem enough to cover what services will be required to spend and it is ridiculous to hear from the minister that no money is made available for people who are settling in Scotland under the family sponsorship scheme. Does he agree that the tariff is not adequate, that the United Kingdom Government should increase it so that local authorities are suitably reimbursed and that it should be for all displaced Ukrainians, no matter what scheme they arrive through?

Neil Gray: I absolutely agree. The tariff is not adequate for the support that our public services will provide as we support displaced people from Ukraine, nor is there specific additional funding for national health service services—a point that I have repeatedly made to UK ministers.

There is no funding at all for people who arrive under the family sponsorship scheme, which is clearly not acceptable. Our local authorities and public services will support people regardless of the route by which they arrive and funding must be provided for them to do that, which is a point that I will raise with UK ministers again, with the support of Welsh colleagues, in trilateral meetings this afternoon.

I have repeatedly called for the UK Government to provide parity of funding, to consider the

resources that are needed to fund public services and to provide clarity on how long they will be available for. In the meantime, the Scottish Government has provided local authorities with significant funding support in addition to the UK Government funding to allow them to quickly make accommodation available for people who require longer-term support.

Siobhian Brown (Ayr) (SNP): Is the Scottish Government giving specialised support and aid to disabled Ukrainians, similar to that which is being given in Northern Ireland?

Neil Gray: All people arriving from Ukraine will have full access to NHS services and social security on the same basis as people who ordinarily live in Scotland. That means that people fleeing the war in Ukraine will have access to any support that they need in our health service as well as immediate access to social security benefits such as the child and adult disability payments. In addition, a public protection response has been adopted across Scotland to ensure that vulnerable people who are displaced from Ukraine are protected and have access to the same support and safeguards as any other vulnerable person under Scottish jurisdiction.

Ukrainian Refugees (Welcome Hubs)

7. Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the work of Scotland's welcome hubs for Ukrainian refugees. (S6O-01140)

The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development and Minister with special responsibility for Refugees from Ukraine (Neil Gray): Welcome hubs have been established at key entry points: Edinburgh airport, Glasgow city and airport and Cairnryan port. They continue to provide support from healthcare to translation services, clothes and food to temporary accommodation, and trauma support. Multi-agency teams at our welcome hubs have triaged more than 1,500 people to date and are assessing people's needs on arrival. They are a single point where we can triage and support people.

We are continually working with our national and local partners, including local government and the Scottish Refugee Council, to improve and streamline our approach. I thank everyone involved in our welcome hubs for the incredible work that they do.

Alexander Stewart: Not all arrivals pass through the welcome hubs, which are the point of contact for arrivals and offer them support such as language support, healthcare, food and clothing. What steps are being taken to ensure that new arrivals who do not use the welcome hubs are not

neglected and are supported in the way that those who go through the hubs are?

Neil Gray: I thank Alexander Stewart for the important point that he made. It is absolutely the case that the Scottish Government is working with our local authority partners to provide support and services for all arrivals from Ukraine. Multi-agency teams working in the hubs are ready to provide support from healthcare to translation, as I set out. We remain focused on providing a safe and secure place to address any immediate wellbeing and safeguarding needs for displaced persons and will continue to do so.

If there are particular issues from the region that he represents regarding making sure that proper contact is made, I would be happy to ensure that they are taken up with the local authorities.

Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Staff at Scotland's welcome hubs are becoming more experienced by the day as they assist in triaging displaced people from Ukraine. Will the minister assure the Parliament that those hubs will continue to be supported in that triaging role, allowing a warm Scots welcome to be afforded to all displaced Ukrainians who arrive in Scotland?

Neil Gray: Yes, absolutely, and I thank Alasdair Allan for giving me the opportunity to thank the teams in our welcome hubs. They have moved at pace and have needed to work on an increasing scale in order to meet the needs of those who arrive from Ukraine. That is very much appreciated by the Scottish Government, the people of Scotland and the people who have arrived from Ukraine.

It has been fed back to me that having that warm Scottish welcome has been very much appreciated, and we will continue to support that approach so that the people who arrive get the sanctuary and support that they need and deserve.

Ukrainian Refugees (Risk to Female Refugees)

8. Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what analysis it has carried out of the specific risk to female refugees who are fleeing Ukraine to resettle in Scotland. (S6O-01141)

The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development and Minister with special responsibility for Refugees from Ukraine (Neil Gray): Anyone who meets the United Kingdom Government eligibility criteria can apply to sponsor a displaced person through the homes for Ukraine scheme. That means that safeguarding risks are inherent in the system, as I and the Welsh Government have raised on a number of occasions with UK ministers, whom I

have urged to replicate the supersponsor schemes of our Governments.

The supersponsor scheme means that disclosure checks are done in advance of guests being placed with hosts. We also have guidance that supports all the operational partners that are involved in safeguarding to identify and respond to the risks to and needs of displaced people from Ukraine.

Ruth Maguire: Active safeguarding is extremely important, and I understand that the Trafficking Awareness Raising Alliance and JustRight Scotland have produced a leaflet in Ukrainian and Russian to explain to women the risks of trafficking. In recognition of the fact that vulnerability can increase over time, will the Scottish Government consider including violence against women and girls partnerships and services in the response at both strategic and operational levels, and commit to carrying out gender-specific risk and safety planning, not just at entry but in the medium and long term?

Neil Gray: I thank Ruth Maguire, particularly in her role as co-convenor of the cross-party group on commercial sexual exploitation, for her question, and I will happily consider the suggestions that she has made.

The safeguarding measures that we have put in place are imperative to ensuring that we are able to provide the necessary protection that would be expected. We must ensure that Scotland provides a place of safety and sanctuary.

The guidance that I mentioned has been developed with expert partners and draws on intelligence regarding the vulnerabilities of certain groups, including women and girls, as identified by the United Nations refugee agency, the Scottish Refugee Council and Zero Tolerance.

The biggest risk factor is the fact that there is still a need in some areas for private matching. On-going informal social media private matching presents the biggest risk. The easiest way to stop that is to have in place a statutory matching service such as we have in the Scottish and Welsh supersponsor schemes, and I encourage the UK Government to follow that lead.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions on the constitution, external affairs and culture. There will be a brief pause to allow front-bench teams to change position, if they so wish.

Drug Deaths

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a statement by Angela Constance on accountability for delivering the national mission to reduce drug deaths and improve lives. The minister will take questions at the end of her statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:24

The Minister for Drugs Policy (Angela Constance): The loss of life in Scotland from drug-related deaths is as heartbreaking as it is unacceptable. Every drug death is a tragedy that leaves families, friends and loved ones looking for answers and support. I offer my condolences to everyone who has been affected by a drug death, and I reaffirm my commitment to work across Government and Parliament, and beyond, to deliver the national mission to save and improve lives.

The impact of problematic drug use is far reaching and can cause harm in every aspect of life, which is why our national mission needs to be far reaching through an all-Government, all-Scotland approach, with shared accountability at all levels.

People who have drug problems often experience complex needs and require support from more than one service. Consequently, the lines of accountability can be complex. Over the lifetime of this session of Parliament, we will ensure that effective accountability is in place through the establishment of the national care service, which will have responsibility for alcohol and drug services. It will provide a single structure for accountability and better oversight of delivery, and the further integration of community health and social care will provide better joined-up and person-centred services. However, we cannot wait until the national care service is fully established, and we are taking action now to improve accountability at all levels.

The national mission is backed by an additional investment of £50 million a year, which is a 67 per cent increase in funding since 2014-15, and we are now investing more than £140 million in drug and alcohol services. Of that additional £50 million, more than £20 million is invested through integration authorities for health and social care, with an additional £10 million to support the implementation of medication-assisted treatment—MAT—standards. Transparency and reporting remain key to the success of the national mission, and I am asking integration authorities to account for those funds more thoroughly by

increasing the frequency of their reporting from annually to quarterly.

In May 2021, we opened four new funds to invest in recovery, local support, families and children, and other service improvement. We have committed up to £18 million a year on a multiyear basis, which provides security for third sector, grass-roots and advocacy organisations, which are often at the forefront of saving lives. That approach enables me to account for that investment and ensure that it is made in ways that will deliver the national mission.

Although accountability to Government and Parliament is essential, I have also been working with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to support local areas to improve the accountability within alcohol and drug partnerships. We have agreed eight recommendations with COSLA to improve strategic planning and are testing new tools to enable local areas to review and improve accountability with appropriate external validation. Let me be clear: local lived experience panels are also core and central to the planning and development of local services.

We are working with Public Health Scotland to improve the use of local evidence through datasets such as the drug and alcohol information system, or DAISy. We are also developing a local performance framework, which will set out clear expectations across the national mission, provide transparency and enable us to measure progress at a local level.

Earlier this year, I announced phase 1 of the new treatment target to ensure that more people with problematic opiate use are accessing life-saving community treatment, and Public Health Scotland will publish quarterly data on progress. To ensure that people receive the protection of treatment or recovery that is right for them, we have set integration authorities the ambitious target of embedding the medication-assisted treatment targets by April.

Local progress from each health and social care partnership is being evaluated by the MAT support team, and a report will be published in June to coincide with my update to Parliament. The report will be a collation of operational procedures, data and, crucially, lived experience evaluation that will be undertaken by peer researchers.

Last November, I set out my expectation that we would increase the number of people who access residential rehab. I have responded to calls for more transparency and accountability by working with Public Health Scotland to track the number of placements. That gives me a clear line of sight on how the residential rehab money is being spent. I am committed to increasing the number of publicly

funded placements by more than 300 per cent so that, by 2026, at least 1,000 people every year are publicly funded for their rehab placement.

Alongside that, we have published good practice on the pathways that are needed to ensure that people are prepared for rehab and receive the support that they need after their treatment in rehab is complete. As a result, my expectations could not be clearer.

In the first nine months of the most recent financial year, alcohol and drug partnerships funded 326 placements with an investment of around £2.2 million from the £5 million allocated to them to fund placements and aftercare. I am heartened by that progress, and I expect those numbers to continue to improve as we work with areas where the data shows—to us in Government and to local populations—that access is most challenging.

Our priority must always be preventing the tragedy of drug deaths, and each and every death is one too many. Each one devastates families and communities. I am determined that we will learn every lesson from every death, so that services are improved to better meet the needs of our citizens who are at risk of dying.

When a child or vulnerable adult dies, chief officers for public protection play a key role in ensuring that we learn vital lessons from those tragic events. I intend to do what is necessary to ensure that those same chief officers take on new accountability to ensure that lessons are learned and changes made as a result of reviews of all drug-related deaths. Therefore, I will be setting out clear expectations to ensure consistency in how those reviews are carried out, as well as issuing guidance and training for all those involved. The Scottish Drug Deaths Taskforce has a strong interest in that area of work and may make further recommendations in its forthcoming report this summer.

We already publish quarterly suspected drug death management information from Police Scotland, in addition to the annual national statistics report from the National Records of Scotland, and we are investing a further £592,000 to improve the national drug-related death database. The leadership that is provided by directors of public health will enable us to use that unparalleled amount of information to best effect and to deliver meaningful change.

I have taken action to improve the accountability of the national mission at a Scotland level. I have provided a renewed focus for the national drugs mission implementation group to provide scrutiny, challenge and advice to the Scottish Government and the wider sector. That includes advice from international experts. The second year of the

national mission is focused on delivery on the ground—where it matters most—and I need the group to provide robust scrutiny and advice to ensure that we are delivering for those who need it most.

I will also publish a national mission plan in summer, setting out plans for implementing the mission during its remaining four years. The plan will include an outcomes framework that will enable us to better monitor our impact on prevention and early intervention; the reorientation of a system of care that is treatment, recovery and trauma informed; and support for families and communities.

Professor Alan Miller, as chair of the national collaborative for people with lived and living experience, will bring forward the vision for integrating human rights into national policy making and local service design and delivery. The collaborative will contribute to developing monitoring and accountability mechanisms based on the internationally recognised human rights that will be included in the forthcoming human rights bill.

The human rights approach and the national collaborative provide a way of holding the national Government and local government to account, of making sure that people who use drugs can participate in decision making that affects them, of exposing stigma and discrimination and of asking tough questions and demanding clear answers.

More than ever before, we are reforming services, providing practical as well as financial support, and gathering and publishing more information so that we can challenge ourselves and each other, at all levels, to foster responsibility for and accountability to people with drug and alcohol difficulties, who—like you and me—are entitled to services that meet their needs. That is a key part of getting it right for everyone.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The minister will now take questions on the issues that were raised in her statement. I intend to allow 20 minutes for questions, after which we will move on to the next item of business.

Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con): We welcome the statement, which has provided some clarity on the Scottish Government's approach to tackling this national shame. With 1,339 drug-related deaths in Scotland in 2020, it is clear that the national mission that has been set by the Government desperately needs to succeed.

I am glad that there is more detail on spending and accountability, and I thank the minister for looking at how accountability can be improved at all levels. Accountability is key to making real progress on the ground, but more clarification is needed on who is ultimately responsible for

ensuring consistent implementation of the MAT standards. There are the First Minister, the Minister for Drugs Policy, the drug deaths task force, alcohol and drug partnerships and now the national mission implementation group. I have a straightforward question: who is ultimately accountable for delivering the national mission, and how are all those groups working together to tackle our national shame?

More specifically, time and again, I speak to people who have been on methadone for over two decades. They are desperate to come off it and on to a more modern and safe opiate replacement. MAT standard 2 states:

“All people”

should be

“supported to make an informed choice on what medication to use for MAT, and the appropriate dose.”

I know that I have asked this before, but what can the Scottish Government do to accelerate and facilitate movement of those people to safer replacement therapies, such as Buprenorphine?

Angela Constance: I appreciate Ms Webber's comments. Improving clarity and providing more detail about accountability and the investments that we are implementing to provide change on the ground are of crucial importance.

Of course the whole *raison d'être* of today's statement was to demonstrate how, across the piece, we are improving accountability at national and local levels. The purpose of the national mission implementation group is to give oversight and advice, as opposed to taking responsibility. Responsibility will, of course, always rest with the Government, including me. It is important to stress that the integration authorities have a legal responsibility to plan and deliver treatment and recovery services, but we all have to recognise that they cannot do that alone and that they must work with others. They must provide adequate support to alcohol and drug partnerships, and alcohol and drug partnerships must, of course, engage and work with lived and living experience in the community and voluntary organisations.

Ultimately, I would never for a minute demur from my or the Government's responsibilities, but accountability is shared. We are accountable to ourselves and to one another, and we all have a responsibility to hold ourselves and one another to account.

On Ms Webber's final point, it is important to recognise that methadone is an internationally recognised treatment and should not be stigmatised. It should also never be our only offer. By and large, people need a holistic range of care and treatments. Buprenorphine has been shown to have much success, of course. It was first implemented

in our prisons in Scotland during the pandemic, after trailblazing work in Wales was looked at. Buvidal does not suit everyone, but it offers huge opportunities to release people from making a daily trip to the chemist and to allow them to get on with their daily lives.

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I thank the minister for advance sight of her statement.

We agree that accountability is crucial and that the Government must face scrutiny of its progress in tackling Scotland's appalling record on drug fatalities. The minister is on record stating that the MAT standards would be implemented—not just embedded, but implemented—in a year. It gives me no satisfaction to say that that commitment is heading for failure. Rather than provide generalised statements, will the minister commit to publishing progress standard by standard and ADP by ADP, in order to allow proper scrutiny and accountability?

The minister stressed in her statement the importance of transparency. Will she ensure that a full and detailed breakdown of spending on drug and alcohol services will be published in one place and made easily accessible, as was recommended by Audit Scotland, which described the current information as “incomplete, disparate” and inconsistent?

Audit Scotland has recommended that the national drug and alcohol waiting time target of 28 days is too long. Will the minister commit to action to amend that?

Angela Constance: The medication assisted treatment standards are a significant undertaking; they are not a tick-box exercise. That is why I did, indeed, commit to embedding or implementing them by April this year, but that will have to be followed up not only by sustaining but by improving the standards.

This is not a tick-box exercise; I want far more evidence to be collected, beyond people showing me their operational procedures. That is why we are evaluating local progress from each health and social care partnership. That evaluation involves, of course, looking at their operational standards and their policies and procedures. Crucially, it also involves looking at data.

The third strand of our accountability and evaluation of progress at local level is the work that is being done with the peer researchers, because the work must always involve testing how services are delivered and received by those who need them and by those whom the services are meant to serve.

I am conscious of the time, Presiding Officer. I have already answered written parliamentary

questions in detail, outlining that I will, as per my commitment to six-monthly reporting, be back on my feet in the chamber in June with a report that will not only look at the national picture but will cover progress area by area. We will be able to report on progress on each standard. That will be followed by a more in-depth report in the summer, which will look not just at whether a standard has been met area by area, but at the criteria for meeting each of the standards, area by area.

I reassure Ms Baker that a substantial amount of work is going on right now to gather up-to-date evidence on the progress that is being made and on the further work that we will have to pursue over the lifetime of the national mission.

I agree with the point about Audit Scotland and publishing information on spending in one place. The whole reason for moving to MAT standards is recognition that waiting time treatment targets are not the best measurement.

Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP): I very much welcome the content of today's statement and thank the minister for advance sight of it.

Can the minister outline how the Scottish Government is working with stakeholders including local authorities, ADPs and the third sector, to improve local governance of services? Can she also confirm how best practice from across the country will be used to drive improvements in the service?

Angela Constance: As I intimated in my statement, we have agreed on eight recommendations with COSLA. Essentially, that is about improving the work of alcohol and drug partnerships, but it is also about including health boards, local authorities, police and third sector partners. There is a need for all those partners to work together and to ensure that health boards are taking on their responsibilities to give appropriate support to integration authorities—and, subsequently, to ADPs.

As I also mentioned, we are currently testing some self-assessment tools. Again, that is all about governance, strategic planning, quality improvement and financial planning as well as accountability. That should be rolled out next month.

It is important to say that, as well as peer review and the new liaison structures between my officials and ADPs, there is scope for external validation to ensure that the right actions are being taken to improve local governance. Public Health Scotland is doing a range of work in that area. We are mapping the contributions, including investments, of partners to that work.

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

On Monday, I will publish a right to addiction recovery bill, which I will take through Parliament. The minister will be aware that 77 per cent of respondents to the consultation on the proposed bill were in support of it. Will the Scottish Government give its support to the proposed bill, which has been drafted by front-line experts and people with lived experience, who know what is needed to tackle Scotland's drug deaths?

Angela Constance: I have said to Mr Ross on a number of occasions that his bill, when he introduces it and we see the detail of it, will absolutely be given a fair and sympathetic hearing. I know that a range of views have been expressed on the bill. I am not going to jump in and either give a blank cheque and a rosy endorsement or unfairly criticise something that I have not seen, but I look forward to seeing the detail. I have met Mr Ross to discuss his bill and to candidly discuss some of the issues that I hoped to see reflected in it when he introduces it. It will be given a fair and sympathetic hearing by this Government.

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): The minister mentioned health and social care partnerships. I anticipate that Glasgow's partnership will have a key role, should NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde finally be able to proceed with the safe consumption facility that it planned in 2016. I pay tribute to Paul Sweeney for his consultation on a proposed bill on an associated matter.

Was the minister able to raise resolution of the legal uncertainty over safe consumption facilities when she attended the United Kingdom Government's national drugs summit last week? What other matters were discussed?

Angela Constance: I did, indeed, attend the UK Government drugs summit last week. I was invited; I think that I was the only representative there from a devolved nation. I am of the view that it is important to engage and discuss matters even with people with whom we have quite fundamental disagreements. The issues that I raised directly with the UK Government were issues that I have raised in the past in relation to the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. I would like that act to be reformed, but if the UK Government will not reform it, I want the powers to be devolved.

We discussed once again matters including safe drug consumption. Members will be aware that, as a Government, we are also pursuing our own activities and actions within what we can do under our legal powers. We also discussed issues around pill-press regulation. I met the National Crime Agency recently and am pushing the UK Government to make progress on that matter. I

think that it is willing; I am just keen for it to go a wee bit faster.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): I thank the minister for her statement, but it has left me rather underwhelmed. She has said repeatedly that establishing overdose prevention centres in Scotland is a priority and that they are an essential tool for tackling the drug deaths crisis in our midst; yet, in today's set-piece statement on drug deaths, there was not a single mention of the Government's work so far on delivering overdose prevention centres in Scotland. The minister will know that, yesterday, I launched my consultation on my proposed member's bill to establish OPCs in Scotland, but I must ask why it has been left to Opposition members to drive the pace of reform when we agree on the need for them. When are we likely to see genuine, tangible updates and progress from the Government on the delivery of overdose prevention sites within its competence?

Angela Constance: I made a commitment to the Parliament about improving accountability and governance. Although issues in and around governance might not excite everyone, they are crucially important. This is a shared agenda. We all have our individual responsibilities and our part to play, and I consider it a crucial part of the national mission that we hold ourselves and each other to account both locally and nationally.

Mr Sweeney is right: there is strong support right across Parliament for safer consumption rooms. In my view, as in his, the evidence is clear and compelling. The only debate now is about how they will actually be delivered. I am sure that Mr Sweeney is aware that the Scottish Government is leaving no stone unturned to deliver clinically and legally safe consumption facilities within our powers, and I will continue to pursue that activity.

At the end of the day, I do not want to be asking the UK Government for permission, because it is quite clear to me that it will not reform the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 and that, certainly in the short to medium term, we are not going to come to an agreement with the UK Government on safer consumption facilities. That is a matter of regret when even Mr Ross is of the view that the Conservatives should not stand in the way of a pilot.

The consensus in Scotland is strong. We are engaged with our partners, and we will leave no stone that is within our powers unturned. That is the route that I am following. I appreciate that Mr Sweeney has an alternative proposal, and, as with other legislative proposals, it will be given a fair and sympathetic hearing.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I point out that there are six more members whom I hope to call. The position with time is not as it was 10 minutes

ago, so I make a plea for succinct questions and answers. I appreciate that there is a lot of ground to cover, but let us see whether we can fit everybody in.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): I will ask the minister about drug-testing schemes whereby drugs can be tested for rogue ingredients that could lead to extreme harm or even death. It is my understanding that licences to facilitate such schemes can be given by the UK Government—indeed, one was given to the Loop scheme in Bristol in conjunction with Bristol City Council. What is the minister's position on the matter?

Angela Constance: As I have stated to Parliament before, I am fully supportive of the work that is being done to implement drug-checking facilities in Scotland. The task force funded some initial research projects by the University of Stirling on the development of a drug-checking programme, and I am pleased that the first application for the three prospective sites will be submitted to the Home Office in the next month. It is encouraging that the project in Bristol has received a licence, and I very much hope that the Home Office will see the benefits of the introduction of such facilities in Scotland. I made that point to Mr Malthouse when I met him last week.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): The minister knows that the Liberal Democrats want her to succeed on this issue and, to that end, she has our good wishes.

In the statement, it is encouraging to see a direction of travel towards rehab, but the services need to be sustainable even when occupancy drifts below 50 per cent. Before people can access rehab, they need to be stabilised first. The minister and I have discussed many times the need to address the gap in stabilisation services. That issue did not feature in today's statement, so will she update members on where we are on stabilisation?

Angela Constance: Mr Cole-Hamilton will appreciate that the statement was about governance and accountability and some of the nuts and bolts around them. Like him, I am a supporter of stabilisation services, although they are not necessarily easy to run, and they are expensive. They are separate from residential rehabilitation and the abstinence-based programmes, but there must be links between relevant services.

Some of our work on regional and national commissioning in the residential rehabilitation sector is quite germane in that the work that we are doing through Scotland Excel will help to establish the level of need in different

geographical areas across the country. We are very focused on that issue.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Stuart McMillan joins us remotely.

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): I remind members that I am a board member of Moving On Inverclyde, a local addiction service.

Will the minister provide an update on how she is going to ensure that the views of recovering users, their families and associated charities continue to be taken on board?

Angela Constance: Yes, absolutely. Governance and accountability are not only about data, policies and procedures, important as they are. All those activities need to be informed centrally and consistently by the views of people with lived and living experience. Much of the work that we have done around accountability has been in response to what we have heard from people with drug and alcohol problems, their families and the organisations and advocates that represent them.

We continue to report quarterly on our investments in residential rehab, we have committed to six-monthly reporting on MAT standards, and we are increasing financial security. There is also the treatment target and our work to improve governance and accountability at both national and local levels.

Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): Drug deaths are our national shame. I welcome what the minister said about data and accountability, with each drug death now being investigated. However, I am upset that that information is not already available, because it is so vital. Once the investigation into a drug death has been concluded, what is the mechanism that will allow the lessons learned to be translated into action to save lives in the future?

Angela Constance: There is part of this that I feel very strongly about and always struggle with. When we talk about learning the lessons, that trips off the tongue very easily, but it can sound really trite. I know from my background as a professional social worker and from holding other Government portfolios that there is guidance that sets clear parameters for when the death of a child or, indeed, a vulnerable adult should be investigated. There is guidance on how that should be done and on how information should be shared. As a minimum, we should have the same for the reporting of reviews into drug-related deaths. We will be doing some further work and consultation on that, and I am keen that we get it absolutely right. I am also very conscious that the reviews can be really important for families who are seeking answers.

I feel very strongly about this issue. Although we, as politicians, can sound a bit trite when speaking about it, I want to ensure that we make a difference on it.

Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): I thank the minister for advance sight of her statement, and I welcome her commitment to improving consistency in drug death reviews. As she said, that will improve data collection and will allow national trends to be established. Most importantly, it will give families answers and will ensure that they have certainty in the process. Will the minister commit to taking any necessary action to ensure that there is consistency across Scotland in how drug death reviews are carried out and that they are carried out in as many cases as possible?

Angela Constance: Yes. Following on from my answer to Sandesh Gulhane, Ms Mackay makes an important point about consistency. Although reviews of drug deaths are carried out in most areas, they are all done in a different fashion and there is not always visibility in the review process or of the outcomes at either a local or a national level.

I have an open mind. As a minimum, the new procedures that we put in place should at least reflect what is in place for child deaths or under procedures for vulnerable adults. If Ms Mackay has further suggestions about how we can strengthen our resolve and approach in this area, she is very welcome to share them.

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): I welcome the minister's statement and the clarity on accountability. As part of that important accountability, how can we ensure that services are flexible enough to meet people where they are and to enable them to participate fully in the decision making that affects them?

Angela Constance: As I intimated earlier, the integration authorities have clear legal responsibilities to plan and provide services. It is clear, however, that they cannot do that alone. We also need greater clarity and support around the role and function of alcohol and drug partnerships, and a range of partners need to be involved, including voluntary organisations. We need more meaningful partnership with voluntary organisations at a local level.

The MAT standards provide another vehicle by which improved partnership working will be driven. Another aspect of MAT standards that I know Ms Maguire will be interested in is how they help us to make systemic changes to prevent people from being bounced around between addiction, homelessness and mental health services. We are embarking on that work right now, as we are

investing in and reforming drug and alcohol services like never before.

Our longer-term vision is to introduce a national care service, which will provide a single structure for accountability. With the further integration of community health and social care, we will be able to provide better joined-up and person-centred services.

Social Security Benefits

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-04621, in the name of Ben Macpherson, on an update on social security benefits. Members who wish to speak in the debate should press their request-to-speak buttons now.

15:01

The Minister for Social Security and Local Government (Ben Macpherson): Social security is an important human right. It is a shared investment in building a fairer and better society. None of us knows when we might need it or whether someone close to us might need it, which is why, collectively, and especially in these serious and challenging times, we—Scotland's politicians—must work together to continue to successfully deliver and develop our devolved social security system, which is based on our shared principles of dignity, fairness and respect.

I wish to update Parliament on the progress that we have made, particularly during the pandemic, and on how we will build on that strong foundation to safely and securely deliver the remaining devolved benefits. The debate is a chance for us to reflect on the remarkable progress that has been made since Parliament unanimously passed the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018, and to look forward to what further change and assistance the Scottish Government will deliver for the people whom we serve.

We have used, are using and will continue to use our devolved powers proactively, purposefully and passionately to strengthen and develop our still fairly new public service and to deliver significant extra financial support to people in our communities who need it most. The Scottish Government has now introduced 12 benefits, seven of which are brand-new forms of support that are only available in Scotland. In this financial year, through record investment of £3.9 billion in benefit expenditure, we will provide support to more than 1 million people.

In this financial year, we have chosen to invest more than the money that is being transferred to us by the United Kingdom Government, by around £360 million. As a Government, we have taken that decision on how we allocate our limited resources and use our limited powers to introduce new forms of support to tackle child poverty, promote equality and mitigate cost of living pressures.

We are taking a range of actions. For example, by the end of 2022 we will extend the Scottish child payment to under-16s and increase it to £25 per week per child. By that point, around 430,000

children who are living in low-income households could be eligible—a fourfold increase on the 104,000 children we are already helping.

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab):

Various briefings have come in ahead of the debate, as we will all know, and all of them have pointed to the fact that children are still living in poverty today. They cannot wait until the end of year, particularly children whose families receive bridging payments. Will the Government therefore commit to doubling the bridging payments?

Ben Macpherson: We have answered Pam Duncan-Glancy on that point several times. As she knows, the reason why we cannot extend the Scottish child payment until the end of the year is that we have to go through a process with the Department for Work and Pensions to access the data and implement the change systematically. We have provided bridging payments in the meantime, in order to provide that extra assistance.

That support has been welcomed by families across Scotland, as has our package of five family payments for low-income families, which will be worth more than £10,000 by the time a family's first child turns six, and £9,700 for subsequent children. That compares with less than £1,800 for an eligible family's first child in England and Wales—a difference of more than £8,200 for every eligible child born in Scotland and proof that, using our powers, we are delivering for the households who need it most.

We reacted to the cost of living crisis by increasing eight Scottish benefits by 6 per cent, which is closer to the rate of inflation than previous plans, which were based on the CPI of 3.1 per cent.

We delivered and introduced several of our new benefits during the pandemic, including the Scottish child payment and our complex disability benefits. Last week, Audit Scotland said that that was “a significant achievement”.

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): I am grateful to the minister for taking an intervention. Audit Scotland also stated that the implementation costs of new devolved benefits are “not routinely reported on” in the public domain, which inevitably makes it

“difficult for those in scrutiny roles to track and compare over time.”

What assessment of those comments has the minister made?

Ben Macpherson: We welcome all the recommendations in the Audit Scotland report and will work to implement them, and we will work with the auditors, as we have throughout the process.

With regard to progress during the pandemic, our delivery partners at the Department for Work and Pensions also had to reprioritise their programme of work. We are now working with them to plan our timetable for delivery of the remaining devolved benefits and the transfer of around 700,000 cases from the DWP to Social Security Scotland.

I take this opportunity to thank all those who are involved in the delivery of our devolved social security benefits, including all my officials in the Scottish Government; the UK ministers and civil servants who have been involved; everyone at Social Security Scotland; our experience panels; the Scottish Commission on Social Security; the disability and carer benefits expert advisory group; and every stakeholder and individual who has contributed to the development of our 12 benefits and those that we are currently preparing to introduce.

On that note, I move on to a new benefit that will directly support around 400,000 low-income households with their energy costs. Beginning in winter 2022-23, we will introduce our low-income winter heating assistance. The new benefit will replace the DWP's cold weather payments and will guarantee an annual £50 payment to around 400,000 low-income households each winter, which is an investment of around £20 million a year.

The current £25 cold weather payment is paid only if the weather gets cold enough and for a sustained period of time. In contrast, our replacement winter heating benefit will provide a guaranteed £50 payment, which ensures that it provides targeted, stable, reliable financial support to those who need it most. It will deliver certainty and will no longer be tied to temperatures recorded at weather stations that are often miles from people's homes. It represents an investment of around £20 million each year.

Since 2014-15, there have been only two years in which spend on cold weather payments in Scotland has been above £20 million—only £325,000 was paid to just 11,000 households in the winter that we just had. There is no doubt that the new Scottish benefit will be of huge help to people in the coming winter. It is another way in which the Government is supporting people and mitigating the cost of living crisis.

The next benefit that we will introduce is Scottish carers assistance, which is our replacement for carers allowance. I am pleased to announce that we will begin to roll out Scottish carers assistance by the end of 2023, with full national introduction in spring 2024. The final dates will be agreed following our on-going work with the UK Government, but this is a key milestone for our new benefit.

Our consultation on Scottish carers assistance and our plans for future improvements to increase the support available to carers has just ended. Those plans include an additional payment for those caring for more than one disabled person, and proposals to remove full-time education restrictions and increase the earnings limit, so that carers can earn more and still get financial support. We will consider the responses to the consultation and, later this year, we will confirm the improvements that we will make and when we will be able to make them.

In the meantime, we will continue to pay the carers allowance supplement, which provides real, tangible support to around 90,000 carers. We have now delivered £188 million-worth of carers allowance supplement support since the benefit was introduced, in 2018—including two additional payments that were paid in 2020 and 2021 in response to the pandemic.

We are also delivering significant changes this year with our new disability benefits. After we successfully rolled it out last winter, child disability payment has already helped more than an estimated 3,000 children.

I am proud that, just a few months ago, we successfully introduced the adult disability payment, which is our replacement for the UK personal independence payment. On 21 March, we launched it in three council areas and it will be phased in across 10 more areas in the coming months, ahead of full national introduction at the end of August.

The adult disability payment is delivering significant improvements, which range from never using the private sector to carry out health assessments to providing an independent advocacy service and short-term assistance if people challenge a review decision.

Further evidence of our human rights-based approach in action is our introduction of indefinite awards for people on the highest level of adult disability payment whose needs are highly unlikely to change, which will provide the most severely disabled people with long-term financial security. In addition, we have moved away from the DWP's definition of terminal illness to one that is based on clinical judgment instead of life expectancy. Importantly, benefit applications from people with a terminal illness will be fast-tracked and paid at the maximum rate.

The adult disability payment is, without doubt, the most complex benefit that we have introduced, and the seamless, safe and secure transfer of hundreds of thousands of people's payments from the DWP is not a simple administrative process. From the middle of next month, we will start to move personal independence payment awards

and, from the end of August, we will start to move working-age disability living allowance awards for individuals who would otherwise need to undergo an assessment or reassessment with the DWP. People in Scotland whose cases will be transferred do not need to do anything; we will do it, and we will do it seamlessly. We will keep them informed throughout the process.

There is a lot more that I could say about the remarkable progress that we have made since the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018 was passed just four years ago. In that time, we have created a new public service for Scotland, delivered new and replacement benefits and positively impacted thousands of lives. This afternoon, I look forward to hearing from colleagues about how, together, we can make an even bigger difference.

We have ambitions to help more people as we use our powers to create a modern, future-proof social security system—a system that can serve the people of Scotland well and effectively for decades to come, and one that embodies one of the four key words that is written on the mace that lies before us: compassion.

To do that, we will have to be ambitious but appropriately realistic. We will have to move forward purposefully but be responsible. We will have to put people first, not party politics. We will need to work together to encourage benefit take-up and remove the stigma around social security that, unfortunately, has built up in previous years.

The months and years ahead are, arguably, the most significant for the new system that we have created and for those of us who serve in communities across Scotland. In these serious times, I encourage my fellow MSPs to play their part in supporting our constituents to access any available support to which they are entitled, and I encourage colleagues to be constructive in the next, really important phase of delivering social security benefits in Scotland.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that social security is a human right and an investment in people; welcomes the introduction and delivery of 12 Scottish social security benefits in total, seven of which are new forms of support only available in Scotland, including most recently the Scottish Child Payment, Child Disability Payment and Adult Disability Payment; notes the more humane and compassionate process for applying for the Adult Disability Payment, which contrasts with the intrusive assessments often required to receive Personal Independence Payment from the UK Government; further notes the implementation of a clinically determined definition of “terminal illness” and fast-tracking of these applications for support; welcomes the introduction of indefinite awards within Scottish disability assistance, which provides the most severely disabled people with long-term financial security; looks forward to the introduction of new benefits, including Low Income Winter Heating Assistance and Scottish Carer’s Assistance; notes that social security is one of the three

key pillars in the national mission to tackle child poverty, and commends the extension of the Scottish Child Payment to under-16s and plans to increase it to £25 per week per child by the end of the year; welcomes the substantial financial support that these benefits provide to people, which is important at all times and particularly so now as people are impacted by the cost of living crisis in the UK, and acknowledges the Scottish Government’s record investment of £3.9 billion in benefit expenditure in 2022-23, which is £360 million above that received by the UK Government, all of which will provide meaningful social security support to over one million people, including low-income families and households, disabled people and carers.

The Presiding Officer: Members might wish to know that we have some time available to give back for interventions.

15:13

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): Following the sweeping devolution that was delivered through the Scotland Act 2016, the Scottish Parliament now has unprecedented powers and influence over social security in Scotland. That goes to the heart of the devolution settlement following the 2014 independence referendum, whereby the Parliament is responsible for taking a greater number of decisions for the people of Scotland. Not only is the Scottish Government of the day able to top up UK-wide reserved benefits, it has full control over 11 benefits that were previously administered by the UK Government, including child disability payments.

If the pandemic has demonstrated anything, it is the benefit of the broad shoulders of the UK which, through assistance from the furlough scheme to the unprecedented support that was provided to families and businesses the length and breadth of the country, helped to protect and support us through the pandemic. We saw more of that support today in the chancellor’s statement.

I start today with where I agree with the Government, which was in the final point that the minister made. The implementation of a clinically determined definition of terminal illness and the fast-tracking of applications for support from people with a terminal illness is a welcome step forward, as is the introduction of indefinite awards for Scottish disability assistance. Many members from across the Parliament, including the Presiding Officer, have campaigned for that. It is welcome that, today, we see that finally being taken forward.

Despite the Scottish National Party-Green Government motion, it must be said that the establishment and transition to date of Social Security Scotland has not been all plain sailing. We are acutely aware of how ministers had to hand back administrative powers over the severe disability allowance, for example, to the

Department for Work and Pensions. Moreover, despite recent welcome progress, the transition has been far too slow. It is worth reflecting on the fact that it will be nearly a decade since ministers received powers over devolved benefits before all cases are transferred from the DWP to Social Security Scotland.

Ben Macpherson: Could Mr Briggs make any practical and realistic suggestions about how we could have gone more quickly? We have introduced new benefits, such as the Scottish child payment, which the Conservatives welcomed and campaigned to be doubled during the last election campaign. It is easy to say that things should have been done more quickly, but how would the member have done it more quickly?

Miles Briggs: We are talking about holding the Government to account and ministers made the specific promise that the new system would be fully in place before the 2021 election. Indeed, only last week, Audit Scotland warned that the timescales for the delivery of the new benefits are also challenging. As I have said in previous debates, it is in all our interests that Social Security Scotland should succeed. We all want that, but the organisation must deliver efficient and cost-effective assessments and payments, and we will continue to hold the Government to account on that.

As is the case with any Government body or quango, the Scottish people rightly expect its resources to be managed effectively and efficiently, and that they will deliver value for money. As the Social Justice and Social Security Committee has recently heard, projections around spend on devolved benefits estimate that there will be a gap of at least £0.75 billion by the end of the current parliamentary session. As my colleague Jeremy Balfour has previously said, SNP-Green ministers have also not outlined where we are seeing costs for rebranding around the personal independence payment, for example, which is ostensibly just a repeat of the same system. Ministers have not set out any changes that will be made to that payment, and that is something that the committee and members across Parliament want to see.

Ben Macpherson: Mr Briggs has just pointed out a difference in the definition of terminal illness, and, in my opening remarks, I talked about a difference in indefinite awards, as well as in the way in which people will access benefits. Let us be serious here.

Miles Briggs: My point was about the specific criteria for PIP and what seems to be a rebranding of that payment. We need to see where those changes will be, and the minister did not outline any of them at committee either.

We also know that the cost to Social Security Scotland of delivering benefits stands at around 10 per cent of total resources compared to 6 per cent for the DWP. Yes, it is a new organisation but, last year alone, Social Security Scotland's overspend costs were approximately £44 million. The Parliament and members of the committees that are looking at the issue would like further clarity from the Government about how projected future expenditure will be controlled and what its plans are to plug some of the funding gaps.

It is concerning that the costs of setting up Social Security Scotland were more than triple what SNP ministers estimated, and we still have not heard any clear answers on that.

Today's debate is also an important opportunity to highlight the need for more transparency from ministers.

Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP): Did Miles Briggs agree with the UK Government's decision to cut the £20 universal credit uplift?

Miles Briggs: That is not the point that we are debating today. That was a welcome additional resource that was provided at the start of the pandemic, but we need to concentrate on what we are responsible for and we should certainly be able to discuss the £44 million overspend.

Audit Scotland clearly says that the Scottish Government is making it difficult for those of us who are responsible for it to scrutinise the costs and track them over time. The minister said that he accepts Audit Scotland's recommendations, and I welcome that and hope that we will see action on that soon. Because of that lack of transparency, Audit Scotland is urging the Scottish Government to make those important changes now, including by publishing a new programme for the business case so that Scots can see exactly how the money is being spent. The future financial sustainability of our welfare system is vitally important, and additional costs and duplications in the system need to be fully considered as we move forward.

We all agree that, in the spirit of the Scotland Act 2016, Scotland should be able to have a unique approach to social security and one that is distinctive from the approach that is taken elsewhere in the UK. Scottish Conservatives have outlined our priorities for reform, which include the extension of bereavement support for carers and a new top-up benefit for veterans, the need for which the minister has acknowledged in committee, and I hope that the minister will engage on those.

However, there are serious budgetary concerns, and the Scottish Government needs to be clearer about its long-term vision for Social Security

Scotland and the spend that that will involve, and to lay out the practical steps that it will take to make the body more transparent and accessible to the public.

I move amendment S6M-04621.1, to leave out from “notes the more” to end and insert:

“notes the implementation of a clinically determined definition of ‘terminal illness’ and fast-tracking of these applications for support; welcomes the introduction of indefinite awards within Scottish disability assistance, which provides the most severely disabled people with long-term financial security; looks forward to the introduction of new benefits, including Low Income Winter Heating Assistance and Scottish Carer’s Assistance; notes that social security is one of the three key pillars in the national mission to tackle child poverty, and commends the extension of the Scottish Child Payment to under-16s and plans to increase it to £25 per week per child by the end of the year; welcomes the substantial financial support that these benefits provide to people, which is important at all times and particularly so now as people are impacted by the cost of living crisis in the UK, and acknowledges the Scottish Government’s record investment of £3.9 billion in benefit expenditure in 2022-23, which is £360 million above that received by the UK Government, all of which will provide meaningful social security support to over one million people, including low-income families and households, disabled people and carers; is concerned that the £251 million cut to local government funding will have a knock-on effect on debt advice services, which will have a detrimental impact on low-income families and households; notes further concern at the published processing times at Social Security Scotland showing record highs, with many applications taking 30 days to process, almost double the average processing time of September 2021, which raises further concerns about how Social Security Scotland will be able to cope with the additional caseload, given that Audit Scotland forecasts that the Adult Disability Payment caseload will increase from 20,000 cases in 2022-23 to 475,000 cases by 2026-27; seeks clarification on how the Scottish Government plans to finance increased social security expenditure, with a projected extra £760 million needed by 2026; thanks the Department for Work and Pensions for its continued support in helping to deliver these benefits through agency agreements when Social Security Scotland was unable to meet its proposed timescales for delivery, and looks forward to finally having full case transfer, as agreed, by 2025.”

15:20

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): The devolution of social security was a key moment. It was a chance to be radical, to create a new system and to remove the most undignified and unjust policies of the past. However, the SNP has failed to seize that moment. It had warm words but, as is too often the case, it has failed to turn them into action. It has failed to deliver on promises, even when those promises have been its flagship policies.

Four years on from the passing of the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018, the Scottish Government still regularly announces delays and opts to leave powers in the hands of the Tories,

handing the DWP more than a third of its budget in the process.

Ben Macpherson: I pose to Pam Duncan-Glancy the same question that I posed to Miles Briggs. It is very easy for people to say that things should have gone faster and that they want to move more quickly. Everyone in the Parliament wants to move more quickly, but the issue is how we do that. Looking back on the trajectory from 2018 to now, given the circumstances that we have faced, I cannot see how we could have done things any more quickly, considering that we introduced new benefits such as the Scottish child payment, which I know that Pam Duncan-Glancy strongly supports.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: It is true that I strongly support the Scottish child payment.

There are a number of things that I think could have been done much more quickly. One of the most important of those is that the Government should have been in a position to ask the UK Government for the information that it needed well ahead of announcing policy on it. When the UK minister appeared before the Social Justice and Social Security Committee and we asked them why the data from the DWP—in particular, the data that was needed for the Scottish child payment—was not available, they said that the Scottish Government had not asked them for it in advance. Therefore, I strongly urge the Scottish Government to ensure that it engages at as early a point as possible with the public and with the UK Government on such matters.

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government (Shona Robison): I think that the point that the UK minister was making was that, somehow, we should have asked the UK Government’s permission in advance of making increases to the Scottish child payment. I do not think that that is right. The DWP had a lot of lead-in time from when the Scottish child payment was first announced. Pam Duncan-Glancy calls for things to be changed and increased all the time, but surely she recognises that decisions about the level should lie with us. The DWP and the UK minister had plenty of lead-in time to get the data issues resolved. The issue was that there was a disagreement on how the data issues should be resolved.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: If the cabinet secretary looks at the *Official Report* of the committee meeting in question, she will see that the DWP representatives specifically said that they had not been given enough notice ahead of policy changes. If any policy change is intended in relation to the adult disability payment review, it will be key that that information is available as soon as possible, because people need to know

that the systems are in place to deliver the changes that they so desperately need and want.

Meanwhile, poverty is rife, debt is racking up and people are struggling to make ends meet. The key workers in the pandemic—those who put their lives on the line to protect ours by performing roles with high exposure to Covid in social care and education—were predominantly women. With the powers that we have here, more support could have been made available to them, in recognition of the roles that they played, including as unpaid carers, stepping in when the state pulled out. Instead, the uplift to the carers supplement was cut.

Many disabled people in Scotland are living in poverty. The Scottish Government is finally in the process of rolling out the adult disability payment, but all that it has done is tinker at the edges. I welcome the improvements to the application process, but that was not a high bar. The SNP could have made real changes by removing the 20m rule and the 50 per cent rule, in recognition of the fact that those arbitrary numbers allow for no recognition of fluctuating conditions, including long Covid and MS, but it has not done so. It has said that, first, it must prioritise safe and secure transfer.

Ben Macpherson: Will the member give way on that point?

Pam Duncan-Glancy: I will. Can I get the time back, please, Presiding Officer?

The Presiding Officer: You can indeed.

Ben Macpherson: Is Pam Duncan-Glancy suggesting that we should have a two-tier system as we undertake case transfer? That would be the reality if we made changes to the eligibility criteria before undertaking case transfer.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: That is not what I am suggesting. However, as the committee heard this morning, there will be a two-tier system, particularly for the 38,000 people who are currently on disability living allowance and will be moving to adult disability payment.

It is possible, where there is the will, for the Government to find solutions to those problems. What matters more than anything is that people are not facing DWP systems that do not give them adequate money to live on and that rule people out of access to support because of arbitrary figures such as the 50 per cent rule and the 20m rule. The sooner that we, in Scotland, can do away with that, the better.

At this rate, any substantial changes to eligibility for and the adequacy of adult disability payment will not be in place during this session of Parliament, despite both financial and legal

competence having been entirely devolved for years.

The system does not meet children's needs either. Child poverty remains at shamefully high levels. I engage with third sector organisations, as, I know, the cabinet secretary and the minister do. They have shared stories about families sharing blankets and children sharing their free school meals. People are coming together to support each other while Governments fail to step in. Last week, Aberlour told the Social Justice and Social Security Committee that it sees not relative but absolute child poverty—complete destitution.

The tackling child poverty delivery plan 2022 to 2026 concluded that, with a fair wind and on a good day, we might scrape through the relative poverty target next year. I hope that we do, but the plan also admitted that, even with the same optimistic outlook, the absolute child poverty target for 2023-24 will be missed and 16 per cent of children will remain in destitution.

The Scottish child payment is welcome, as I have said before, but, at its current rate and in its current unfinished state, it does not do enough. Three out of four children living in poverty are not receiving the money that they should be getting from that payment. The clumsiness of the roll-out is costing the poorest children upwards of £5 million a week. The Government blames the DWP but, as I said, the committee has heard that the Government has not asked quickly enough for the information. The SNP made yet another headline-grabbing announcement but has not had the plans to back it up. People deserve and expect better than that.

Then we come to bills. A quarter of people in Scotland are in fuel poverty—a figure that is only going to get worse after Tuesday's announcements about the fuel price cap. Neither Government is doing enough to address that. Fuel poverty is another example of the Government failing to live up to its rhetoric. The fuel strategy rightly recognises that disabled people of all ages have a higher cost of living as a result of fuel costs, yet, when the Government had the opportunity to extend child winter heating assistance to all disabled people, regardless of age, it did not do that. It had the power but did not use it.

Fuel poverty already affects 619,000 households in Scotland, a number that will increase. People who were already struggling are finding that they cannot make ends meet and cannot pay their bills. Of those households, 218,000 have older people in them. That is why we proposed fully costed plans that would have given people on pension credit £400 to mitigate some of the rises in energy bills. We would have given the same amount to people on carers

allowance supplement, child winter heating assistance and council tax reduction.

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

Pam Duncan-Glancy: We would have put money in the welfare fund so that people could get the help that they need.

The Tory Government in Westminster has always let us down. In Scotland, where we should be using our powers, the SNP has failed us, too. It is time to stop messing about and put the necessary staff in place, sort the information technology, move payments over at pace and deliver the promised new radical social security system that people in Scotland so desperately need.

I move amendment S6M-04621.2, to leave out from “; welcomes the introduction and delivery” to end and insert:

“but notes with concern that, in the face of a cost of living crisis, the Scottish Government has taken little action to deliver a social security system that adequately insulates the poorest in society from financial shocks, and protects more and more people from being driven into poverty; acknowledges the ambitious statements previously made by the Scottish Government on the opportunities given by the devolution of social security; is disappointed by the lack of progress made by the Scottish Government since; draws attention to the fact that over three quarters of devolved social security spending is still administrated by the Department for Work and Pensions, three out of four children who should be eligible for the Scottish Child Payment do not receive it, and no changes have been made at all to eligibility criteria for disability payments; considers that, despite the rhetoric indulged in by the Scottish Government boasting of transformational changes to benefits in Scotland, examination of the policy detail betrays the reality that very little radical change is taking place, and concludes that it is imperative that the Scottish Government takes on board the warnings of Audit Scotland that financial and staffing plans must be set out in order for Scotland to have any reassurance that its social security system will be fit to deal with the challenges that lie ahead.”

15:28

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I know that the minister probably finds me rather curmudgeonly on occasion and a tad critical of the Government’s management of its responsibilities. That is because I am usually right: the Government’s record is pretty terrible in many areas.

I plan to tread new territory, however, and to compliment those responsible for the progress so far in Social Security Scotland. *[Interruption.]* Jim Fairlie should not get too carried away: my compliments will be limited and will not go too far. I praise those in Dundee and elsewhere who have been working throughout. It is a big programme and has been delayed, but the progress must be recognised and ministers deserve some credit.

I find Ben Macpherson an open and approachable minister. He is also focused on and dedicated to his work—there is no doubt about that. Jeane Freeman probably also deserves some credit for setting up the implementation plan at the beginning.

That is enough of that. I am coming out in a rash now.

It is also important to recognise that there are warnings in the Audit Scotland report. There is still a huge amount to be done. For example, the case load for the adult disability payment, which we discussed yesterday, is forecast to go from a few thousand just now—20,000—up to almost 500,000 in only five years. We have only just started on that benefit, so we need to keep our feet on the ground. There is also the extension of the child payment to 200,000 older children—the six to 15-year-old range—by the end of this year. That is a big step as well. We know that there were problems with the child disability payment roll-out. That is not unreasonable—the pandemic created some of those issues—but it shows that the system is not as robust as the minister would like to think.

The people who are dependent on the adult disability payment and the Scottish child payment need the money and need it on time. They are cutting right to the edge every month and run out of money before the end of the week. They need the money without delays, so there is no slack and we need to make the system work because we know the consequences that it has for people’s lives if we do not get it right.

Yesterday, I asked the minister how confident he was of the timetable for delivering those benefits. He rightly talked about the system but did not express any confidence. Perhaps he can clear that up now.

Ben Macpherson: I am glad to have a second opportunity to emphasise that I am confident of the robustness of the processes. Recruitment, training and proper investment in our information technology systems have taken place, are taking place as we speak and will take place as we roll out the different phases of the adult disability payment and, crucially, undertake case transfer. Willie Rennie is right to raise those serious points, and I am confident that we will do it right and get people their money on time and when they expect it.

Willie Rennie: We will hold the minister to account on that because it is important. Not only I, but all the children and people with disabilities will hold him to account to ensure that that is fulfilled. I hope that he is right.

There also needs to be a focus on costs. Miles Briggs was right about that. The cost of the

benefits is an additional £760 million according to Audit Scotland. The implementation costs have doubled since 2017. The criteria have changed and the scope is different, but, nevertheless, it is quite an increase from what was originally planned.

I understand the purpose of having, and the need for, an agile system that has a focus on the needs of the user. However, it comes with costs to the system. We must recognise that money is not unlimited and ensure that the system is in balance. Perhaps the minister could tell us in his closing speech how he will keep control of those costs.

We have heard more today from the minister, but we need the full details of the replanning of several benefits that need to be rescheduled: the pension age disability payment, various carers payments and employment injury assistance. All of that needs to be set out in detail, because people are dependent on those benefits.

The cost of living crisis must be at the centre of everything that we think about in the Parliament. It will plunge huge numbers of people into poverty. We have met many people who are experiencing that already and it will only get worse. The package that the chancellor announced today will help with that to some degree but we must be ready to do more and the Parliament must do more.

The Child Poverty Action Group is calling for a number of steps to be taken, including the doubling of the bridging payments for the Scottish child payment. I hope that the minister will address that, too, and ensure that there is a commitment to it because children are desperate for that money right now. There are thousands of carers who get nowhere near any carers support and that needs to be addressed before long. Thousands and thousands of people who care for loved ones get no recognition for it.

Back in 2015, I asked our representatives on the Smith commission—Tavish Scott and Michael Moore—to make the case for the transfer of significant welfare powers, because I believed that the non-universal credit items should largely be devolved. I wanted greater synergy with the work of this Parliament. I thought that it was a substantial transfer of powers, but also that it was reasonable. It created a big, multibillion-pound budget. It was not everything that the SNP wanted, but it was significant.

A few months earlier—casting our minds back—the SNP was claiming that it would deliver independence within 16 months. Seven years later, we are not even near the end of the transfer of the benefits—

Ben Macpherson rose—

Willie Rennie: I am coming to my conclusion.

We are nowhere near the full delivery. That is all that I am pointing out. I understand what the minister said about timing—these things do take time to implement—but we were promised a grand new welfare and benefits system and we were promised that independence would be delivered in 16 months. Years later, that should be a sobering lesson to the SNP.

We have tried to work constructively with the Government throughout. We support dignity, fairness and respect. We think that, in the forging of a new welfare system, the country needs to come together to do its best to make sure that that works effectively. We will continue with that approach, as I hope I have shown the minister that we are determined to do.

The Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate.

15:36

Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): I rise to support the Scottish Government motion. It is extremely important that we take a moment to reflect on the fact that, in the four short years since the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018 was passed—including in the face of a pandemic, when priorities rightly shifted—our Government has taken on the major feat of disentangling a complex benefits system. We must remember that this is a system so complex that, only a fortnight ago, the UK chancellor advised us that “computer says no” to uprating benefits more than once a year, because the antiquated system was simply an insurmountable obstacle to doing it in any other way; and that, although today he has been dragged kicking and screaming to agree an inflationary uplift to benefits, that will not happen until—surprise, surprise—next year.

Not only have we disentangled a complex and onerous system that had bits of paper warehoused all across the UK; we now find that our new Social Security Scotland agency is delivering 12 benefits, of which seven are entirely new and available only in Scotland—a feat that Audit Scotland has rightly described as

“a significant achievement ... in challenging circumstances”.

Those new Scotland-only payments, including the game-changing Scottish child payment, are payments that third sector partners across the rest of the UK are desperate to see replicated in their own countries. Sadly, the political will at the UK level is more interested in capping benefits than in investing in its people, while our Government chooses to mitigate the hated benefit cap that plunges predominantly women and children into

abject poverty in ideological, austerity-created welfare warfare, which also involved women being told that a third child would be supported only if conceived as a result of rape.

UK-wide, that system plunged 400,000 children into poverty overnight, by removing the £20 universal credit uplift. That is shameful. I wonder whether any member on the Tory benches has made representation to their UK Government colleagues to reverse those callous welfare cuts. Analyses show that doing so would lift an estimated 70,000 people in Scotland, including 30,000 children, out of poverty by 2024.

Contrast that with our approach in this place, which decided that our agency was to be built with fairness, dignity and respect at its heart, and core principles that include seeing social security as an investment in the people of Scotland and as a human right that is essential to the realisation of other human rights and will contribute to the reduction of poverty across our country.

Right back at the beginning of that first new public service to be created since devolution, I remember, as part of my work as the community wellbeing spokesperson of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, being moved to tears as I heard from those who were involved with the experience panels about how much trauma was invoked by a brown envelope through the door. As someone who was previously in receipt of the said brown envelopes and who also supported many folk to navigate the often complex and cruel world in which brown envelopes become the stuff of nightmares, I was relieved to see such a level of engagement with lived experience shaping the way in which our new agency operates.

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): We have a brand-new system, yet, early on, 2,000 people who receive the Scottish child disability payment had to wait four days—a whole weekend—to receive their money. Is the member surprised about that, and does she think that the system is working well?

Elena Whitham: We will always see some hiccups. I will point out to members that we are how many years down from the roll-out of PIP—we are 13 years in—yet it has still not been fully rolled out. That is why there are people on the disability living allowance and other legacy benefits. Also, as my colleagues are saying from sedentary positions, there is a five-week cruel wait before people get their first universal credit payment.

Our social security agency has been built for us all, and it was imperative that we took the time and made the effort to ensure that we did not replicate or bake in the shortcomings and inequity of the UK system. It is also incumbent on us all to work hard

to make sure that we maximise benefit uptake. We want to figure out how to get past the practical issues of data sharing to ensure that families get everything that they are entitled to. I will repeat the minister's call for members across the chamber to please get that information out on their social media channels and make sure that everyone knows what they are entitled to.

As Convener of the Social Justice and Social Security Committee, I recently travelled to Social Security Scotland in Dundee with my committee colleague Emma Roddick, to hear at first hand about how the transfer of the adult disability payment was progressing. I was struck by how impassioned the staff were and how they appreciated the time that was afforded to them with the phased roll-out, as that enables them to be fleet of foot in the face of challenges and respond accordingly. They spoke about culture and practice being developed, which gives me the confidence that our guiding principles are playing out in real time. That was confirmed by the recent study that showed that 90 per cent of Social Security Scotland's customers rated the service as good or very good.

It was the application form for ADP that resonated most with me on that day. That is not tinkering around the edges. That form could not be further removed from the application form for the personal independence payment: it has been crafted with lived and worked experience in mind and dignity at its heart. Both Emma Roddick and I were emotional, as we both know only too well the positive impact that it will have on those of us in Scotland who find ourselves eligible for such a payment. Indefinite awards and no dehumanising private sector assessments also signal a brand new approach.

So, despite the ludicrous Labour assertion that we are doing nothing with our powers, eligible families in Scotland will receive more than £10,000 by the time their first child turns six, and £9,700 for subsequent children. As the minister said, contrast that with only £1,800 in England and Wales, and only £1,300 for subsequent children. We are doing that with one hand tied behind our back. Just imagine what we could do with all the powers of a normal, everyday independent country.

15:42

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): It seems that every time that Scotland's social security benefits are debated in the chamber, the Scottish Government is able to report a small amount of progress on the issue, but that is never the amount of progress that it should be reporting. Despite the progress that we have seen over the past year, which I welcome, it remains the case that the Government will not

have finished taking control of all devolved benefits until nearly a decade after it first received some of those powers.

Ben Macpherson: For context, I wonder whether the member wishes to reflect on the roll-out of universal credit, which was legislated for in 2012, and is still being rolled out. Let us be reasonable here.

Alexander Stewart: The minister cannot mix and match the process, which is what he is trying to do.

Over the period, we have seen the estimated costs of Social Security Scotland more than triple compared to original estimates. Given that, it is disappointing, though perhaps not surprising, to read the Scottish Government's self-congratulatory motion, which ignores many of the delays since the devolution of some of those powers in the Scotland Act 2016. That follows last week's claim from the Government that it has been "ambitious" in its delivery timeline for those benefits. That claim is stretching the facts and is a little bit rich, to say the least.

As we have already heard, Audit Scotland's report on the Scottish Government's progress in delivering devolved benefits was helpful, and it highlighted some of the key developments over recent years. Although there have been some key developments, there have not been enough. For example, the report highlights the potential benefits that we will see from the Scottish child payment, the roll-out of which is now speeding up, but there have been many delays in that process.

It is welcome that preparation is under way for the expansion of the Scottish child payment. The report highlights the importance of meeting the proposed timescales but says that it will be extremely challenging to do so due to data sharing issues.

Elena Whitham: Will the member take an intervention?

Alexander Stewart: I would like to make some more progress.

I hope that engagement continues between Social Security Scotland and the DWP. It is vitally important that both of them can continue to provide support and ensure that there are no further delays to the roll-out, because, if there are no delays, the Scottish child payment will be game changing. We acknowledge that. We all want the benefits to be delivered to individuals, but the roll-out could be going faster. We have already talked about IT issues and offices in relation to the roll-out. All of that comes into the equation.

The Audit Scotland report talks about the launch of the child disability payment and the phased roll-out of the adult disability payment. The launch of

those benefits might have taken far longer than was originally hoped, but now we must ensure that the transfer of the 300,000 people who are currently in receipt of PIP goes smoothly.

One disappointing feature of the adult disability payment that has been highlighted is that the eligibility criteria will remain the same as those for the benefit that it replaces until at least 2025. The Scottish Conservatives are clear that the devolution of powers should have meant the beginning of a distinctly Scottish approach to social security. The opportunity should have been taken to use those powers to be much more flexible. The decision to keep the eligibility criteria for PIP and ADP the same for so long can hardly be said to be the Government making use of those powers.

I have raised concerns previously about the total removal of personal assessments as part of the application process for ADP. Although that decision might have noble policy intentions behind it, it remains the case that there will be unintended consequences. Certain individuals may struggle to provide sufficient medical data to support their applications, with the consequence that there may well be a risk regarding information. I hope that potential pitfalls such as those are considered in relation to cases transferring from PIP and that that continues in the coming years.

There is much more to be done in order to fully capitalise on Scotland's devolved social security powers. One group that is important in that regard, whom we have talked about in the past, is carers. The pandemic has presented an opportunity to view the needs of carers in a new light and consider how best they can be supported. Conservative members have long advocated for policies such as the extension of carers allowance payments for up to six months after bereavement, and we will continue to make the case for further support for carers. The introduction of the carers allowance supplement was an example of how devolved powers can be used to help carers, and I hope that the Scottish Government uses the powers that it has to support them.

Social security in Scotland is finally starting to approach the stage that it should be at, and we want to see it progress. In the years to come, we need to see far less delay and far more of the ambition that the Scottish Government talks about. This Parliament has received significant social security powers, and we welcome that, but it is now up to the Government to do more, to step up and to deliver on the massive potential that these powers will bring to support individuals the length and breadth of Scotland and secure their prosperity for the future.

I support the amendment in the name of Miles Briggs.

15:48

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): I start by highlighting my disgust at the hostile and cruel welfare system that is overseen by the Tories at Westminster. Their treatment of working people, their lack of compassion and help for those most in need and their intrusive and discriminatory assessments are representative of a Government that is not fit for office—a Government that is not fit to represent the people of this country.

I must say that the Scottish Conservatives, too, have responsibility for the actions of the UK Government in relation to welfare and social security. Their lack of opposition to—and, in some cases, their involvement in—a Government that has overseen brutal cuts to social security is shameful.

However, as colleagues have, I stress that we must work across this Parliament to tackle the impacts of the cost-of-living crisis, ensure that more people are not forced into poverty and alleviate the pressures faced by working families every day.

It is welcome that, after significant pressure from the Labour Party, the SNP finally showed some political will to introduce a windfall tax, and it is interesting that, after Labour pressure, a range of measures has been announced by the Treasury today to tackle the cost of living crisis. That was after weeks of indecision and inaction. However, we must not ignore the fact that those measures will come too late for many and will not be enough for others.

We should also not ignore the fact that the Scottish Parliament is a powerful Parliament. It has shown that it has the power to deliver a Scottish child payment, and it is in the Government's power to increase that further still by April next year. However, it remains clear that, despite increases in recent years, too many families that are eligible for the payment are not yet receiving it. I say to the minister that experts must be listened to. If the Scottish Government does not increase the speed at which eligible families are in receipt of the Scottish child payment, targets will be missed and more children will grow up in poverty.

Elena Whitham: Does Carol Mochan appreciate the fact that we know that about 77 per cent of eligible children—or maybe even more than that now—are in receipt of the Scottish child payment? Has Labour undertaken analysis of the fact that, if we further increase the Scottish child payment, at some point in time that will have a knock-on effect on eligibility for universal credit from the DWP? That is a worrying factor for families throughout the country.

Carol Mochan: I have shown that I support measures that the Scottish Government has implemented. However, we know that the child payment has helped just one in four children. We need to do more to ensure that we reach all children who live in poverty.

Child poverty is one of the biggest challenges that we face as a society. More than one in four children live in poverty. I accept that there is additional support for children and their families and, as I have said, I welcome the current increases, but this is not a time for self-congratulatory motions, which seem to come more and more from the Scottish Government. That is what it feels like. It is a time to keep moving forward, to keep making progress, to be more radical, and to end child poverty. That has to be the Parliament's aim. It is our job in opposition to hold the Government to account on that. That is what my job is, and that is why I speak to those motions.

Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): Carol Mochan is making a powerful speech, and all credit to her for the sentiments that she expressed at the beginning of it. However, one concern for me is that, consistently in the Parliament, people fail to appreciate or acknowledge the macroeconomic powers that reside at Westminster, where there is a clear correlation between the ability to borrow on the open markets, for example, and the ability to fund improvements. Will Carol Mochan reflect on that? If she agrees with me, what powers would she like to see directly in the control of the Scottish Parliament? Will she ask Westminster for them?

Carol Mochan: I do not want to get into that particular point. What I want to say is that, in my view, the Scottish Parliament is a powerful Parliament and, while we debate these points, we should be doing everything that we can to move things forward, particularly with regard to child poverty. We know what changes we can make if we act now. I want to talk about what we can do in the Scottish Parliament, and I have repeatedly said that. My colleague Pam Duncan-Glancy has also said that we want the Scottish Government to do what it can do and do it at pace. That is what we would like to see.

I want to talk a little about the carers allowance supplement uplift and the delivery of the Scottish carers assistance payment. The pandemic has only increased the difficulties for carers, and it is clear that we need to move forward with that benefit, which we know can be put in place. I ask the minister to give some feedback on what the Government intends to do for carers support, because we know that carers are struggling at this time. *[Interruption.]*

I know that my time is limited, so I will move on.

The Presiding Officer: Ms Mochan, we have time for interventions.

Carol Mochan: We acknowledge that the Government has said that the current carers allowance links closely to universal credit and income support payments and, as such, we understand that the introduction of the Scottish carers assistance payment will take time, but it is only right that, where possible, protection remains in place to support carers through this incredibly difficult and stressful time. As I have said, I hope that the minister will make some remarks about that so that we can offer support to carers.

I will be the first person to stand up and oppose the Tory UK Government's cuts to benefits and social security, but it is clear that, in Scotland, we can and must do more, and my party will call out any hypocrisy from the Scottish Government. We will also be relentless in our calls for it to do more and do it more radically, to go that step further and to put in place protections for the most vulnerable in our society.

I repeat: this is not a time for the Scottish Government to pat itself on the back. It is a time to get out of the blocks, get on the job, look to make sure that we eradicate child poverty in Scotland, protect unpaid carers when we can, and enhance the lives of some of the most vulnerable in our community.

15:56

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): There is one clear aspect of consensus in relation to the update on delivery of social security benefits in Scotland: we all agree that social security is a human right and that it is an investment in people. That is the only part of the Government motion that would not be deleted by Opposition parties in their amendments. There is, right at the heart of the matter, a principle that we can all agree on. We should always strive to find consensus where we can.

There is another key aspect of the Scottish Government motion on which I think we can find consensus. It is the key indicator of the priorities that have been set by the Scottish Government. The motion

"acknowledges the Scottish Government's record investment of £3.9 billion in benefit expenditure in 2022-23, which is £360 million above that received by the UK Government"—

something that the Conservatives also acknowledge. That investment provides

"meaningful social security support to over one million people, including low-income families and households, disabled people and carers."

That is a testament to the priorities of the Scottish Government and the consensus in this Parliament. In a mainly block-grant Parliament, that is a fundamental indicator of the priorities that have been set by our Scottish Government, which is seeking to protect the most vulnerable people in society. We have consensus on that.

It is clear to see where expenditure is being invested. We should remind ourselves that campaigners called for a Scottish child payment of £5 a week. The Scottish child payment is now £20 a week and is soon to be £25 a week. It is being rolled out to children in low-income households right across Scotland. This year alone, that is an investment of £225 million that is going to some of the poorest families right across this country. That is a testament to the priorities of the Scottish Government.

I was disappointed to see such a sweeping deletion of the Scottish Government motion in the Labour Party's amendment—in particular, because the amendment unfortunately seeks to remove reference to very strong cross-party success on delivery of disability benefits reform, which was led by our Scottish Government but moulded by the Parliament. I think that Miles Briggs reflected on that somewhat.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: I understand Bob Doris's disappointment at the deletion of substantial parts of the motion, but many, many disabled people and carers are still on inadequate benefits. The eligibility criteria have not been changed and do not address things such as the 50 per cent rule or the 20m rule. That is why we could not support the Government's motion.

Bob Doris: I will shortly say more about what we are doing for people who are living with disability, but Pam Duncan-Glancy mentioned carers. This Scottish Government has increased the carers allowance supplement by 13 per cent. That is a real commitment to carers; I think that it is reasonable to put that on the record.

Carol Mochan: Will the member take an intervention?

Bob Doris: I will not, at the moment.

The introduction of the child disability and adult disability payments to replace PIP is widely acknowledged to be more humane, compassionate and dignified in terms of the application and assessment process than the UK DWP regime.

In particular, our partnership approach in the Scottish Parliament around clinically determined definitions of terminal illness, fast-tracking of awards and the introduction of indefinite awards will dramatically change the lives of many of my constituents, and many of all members'

constituents, for the better. I know from my constituency case load the corrosive, destructive and devastating impact that the current process can have on individuals and families.

The changes, which were agreed by Parliament, will make a real difference. Our Parliament, led by the Scottish Government, should rightly be proud of them. Of course, we will have to evaluate their impact. We have our social security experience panels and I know that the Scottish Government wants to monitor the success of implementation of the new disability payments.

I absolutely get that Opposition parties will wish to push the Scottish Government further on the cost of living crisis, but saying, as some members have done, that the Scottish Government has done little for the poorest people in society bears no relation to the reality out there. We have the Scottish child payment, which I have spoken about, the mitigation of the bedroom tax, the mitigation of the benefits cap and the uprating of Scottish benefits by 6 per cent. In this year alone, that represents an additional £760 million in the system for the poorest people in society because of decisions that this Government has taken. That is not “little”; it is substantial—but, of course, we always want to seek to do more.

Carol Mochan: I thank Bob Doris for his last statement about wanting to do more. That is the point that we are trying to make. We are talking about the Scottish child payment and the carers payments because people with experience are telling us that not enough is being done. There are opportunities for this Parliament, with the powers that it has, to do more. As politicians, we need to stop patting ourselves on the back and instead ask what more we can do.

Bob Doris: I thank Carol Mochan for that intervention. To be fair, I point out that the tone of my speech is that we can thank Parliament, rather than the Scottish Government, for the progress that we have made. However, I do not think that it is good enough for Opposition politicians to rubbish the substantial progress that has been made in order to make a party-political point. It feels a little bit like that in relation to the Labour amendment. However, I acknowledge that we should always try to do more.

We have heard today about the low-income winter heating assistance that will be delivered later this year. The £20 million investment will provide £50 per household to 400,000 low-income households. I suspect that, later this year, there will be calls for that to be £100, £200 or £300. I get it—that is politics—but it would have to be paid for.

Likewise, on the carers allowance supplement, we have heard already—I put it on the record—about the 13 per cent increase that the Scottish

Government has provided, and we know that there have been two additional payments during the coronavirus pandemic. However, again there are demands to go further. I get that, but it would have to be paid for. It is not enough just to cost things; members have to say where the money will come from. The Opposition parties are singularly silent on that.

I will finish with two points, Presiding Officer, if I can have a little time, given the interventions that I have taken.

The first point is on staffing. I know from speaking to many people that one thing that is happening with staffing is that people who are sick and tired of the DWP system are making active choices to move from the DWP to Social Security Scotland. They are bringing their skill sets and releasing their energies to provide the type of social security system that we actually want. I say to those people that they are very welcome. They are gaining jobs with Social Security Scotland, not losing them under DWP reforms, including, in my constituency, in Springburn.

Finally, I say to the Labour Party that I do not know where the money for what it asks for would come from, but I am going to mention to the Scottish Government something that I would like to happen. As the cost of living crisis really squeezes the most vulnerable people, putting money into the pockets of those people as quickly as possible is the right thing to do.

There are lots of charities and third sector organisations across my constituency, and all members’ constituencies, that will be considering what support they can be provided with so that they can provide emergency food support, fuel support and wraparound support. Not everyone will access all the benefits that they are entitled to and, given such tight budgets, not everyone will budget accordingly to try to make ends meet—nor should they have to.

That immediate emergency support for trusted anchor organisations across our communities is vital. I do not know where the money will come from, but whether it is the Scottish Parliament or the UK Parliament, someone has to find it. We have to get the money out there and into our communities to help the most vulnerable people.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): I call Maggie Chapman. You have a generous six minutes.

16:04

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): Assuming control of a wide range of social security payments is one of the most challenging tasks that this Parliament has ever

undertaken. UK Governments have spent years trashing our social security safety net by cutting payments, attacking benefit claimants, putting hurdles in the way of being able to appeal, and making vulnerable people endure humiliating assessments. Those UK Government attacks on the system triggered a United Nations investigation, which concluded that changes

“since 2010 amount to retrogressive measures in clear violation of”

the UK’s

“human rights obligations.”

Therefore, rebuilding the social security system in Scotland with the powers that we have is a huge task, but it is one to which this Parliament must rise.

The biggest challenge is the introduction of new payments for disabled people. They account for about half of the expenditure for all the benefits that have been devolved, and they are claimed by as many as one in 10 Scots. They have also been some of the most brutally cut, with some people losing as much as £7,700 as they were moved over to PIP, with women being more likely than men to lose entitlement.

A better way of assessing applications is an important part of restoring fairness to the disability benefits system. Face-to-face assessments for PIP, which rarely proved to be necessary before PIP, were part of a deliberate and callous strategy to cut support for some of our most vulnerable people.

As a result of years of campaigning by disabled people, Scottish Greens won a change in the law in the previous session. Conducting face-to-face assessments is now prohibited if the necessary information already exists. The onus is on the Scottish Government to collect that information, and there is hope that where that is not possible, the new client consultations will be a less intrusive and more supportive way of assessing entitlement.

That will improve the experience of the new system, but it will also have a bearing on the amount of support that is paid out. The Scottish Fiscal Commission estimates that, by the end of this parliamentary session, £529 million more will have been paid out in adult disability payments than on PIP, with an additional £40 million knock-on impact for carers. The SFC attributes that to the changes that ADP has introduced, including changes to how it is assessed. We are now two months into the new system, and we should be seeing the early impacts of the changes. It would be helpful if the minister could update us, in closing, on what impacts he has seen so far.

However, it is simply not enough to change the way the payment is assessed. PIP did long-

standing damage to the rights of disabled people by removing the lower-rate care component and changing the mobility rule to 20m. In its report on the 20m rule, the MS Society reports that moving to PIP negatively impacted the mobility of 65 per cent of multiple sclerosis sufferers and the financial security of almost 80 per cent of them. That is what makes the Scottish Government’s review of disability benefits so important. Quite rightly, the mobility element of ADP must be prioritised as part of that.

The review will be independent, but it must also have the broadest possible terms of reference, and it must be that no positive changes to the criteria will be off the table. In its paper on the review, the Scottish Government says that getting ADP up and running

“isn’t the limit of our aspirations for improving disability assistance in Scotland.”

That is good to hear, so I hope that the Government works with disabled people to make those aspirations a reality.

Rolling out the new system will not be complete until everyone who is entitled to claim is able to do so. The UK Government passed on to the Scottish Government some payments that were being claimed by less than half of those who were eligible. Some, such as personal independence payments, did not even have published take-up statistics.

When it is increased to £25, the extra £1,200 per child that families will receive through the Scottish child payment will be key to achieving the child poverty reduction targets that this Parliament has set itself, but current projections are that too many families will miss out—as many as 23 per cent of eligible families, according to the Scottish Fiscal Commission.

The cost of living crisis makes it even more crucial that every penny is going where it should, but that is not an easy task. For years, successive UK Governments have taken every possible opportunity to stigmatise those who need the help of the social security system. The Scottish Government’s direction on this is encouraging—reframing of social security as an investment in society, not a drain on resources, is absolutely right.

The £10 million of investment in income maximisation services over this session of Parliament is also welcome, but I encourage the Scottish Government to see what more funding might be available, given that the return for every £1 that is invested in money advice can be as much as £20. It is good to see that progress is being made on benefits automation, with the best start school and nursery grants being paid

automatically to Scottish child payment recipients from later this year.

I was proud to work with the Scottish Government to ensure that more support is available to those who have been hit by the UK Government's cruel benefit cap. That work will start later this year; I would appreciate an update from the minister on what is being done to make people aware of the extra support and how we can get it to them.

Our social security system is the sign and signal of our care for one another. It should be, and is, based on welcome fundamental principles of social security being a human right and a collective investment. Are we there yet in fully realising those principles? No. Do we need to keep looking at options for increasing benefit eligibility? Yes. With an additional £760 million of expenditure over this session, an end to heartless face-to-face assessments and progress on automating benefits, we are definitely moving towards a more compassionate social security system, of which we should all be proud.

16:11

Natalie Don (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP): I am extremely proud of the route that Scotland is taking with our delivery of social security benefits. We have a compassionate and humane system that has dignity, fairness and respect at its core and that sees social security as a human right, not a burden. The minister laid out some detail of the 12 benefits that Scotland has power over, seven of which are brand new and unique to Scotland, such as the Scottish child payment, which is the most ambitious child poverty reduction measure in the whole of the UK.

As well as creating new benefits, we are delivering a new approach in which social security in Scotland is shaped by people with direct experience of the current UK benefit system, in an effort to ensure that people are at the heart of our approach. The very recent Audit Scotland report, which has been mentioned today, found that there has been a "conscious focus" on the needs of claimants and that people have been positive about their experience of engaging with Social Security Scotland.

For example, in commenting on the system, one claimant said:

"My overall experience, I would say, was compassionate".

Another said:

"No need for improvement as they are doing a 1st class service."

I have never in my life heard anyone describe the UK welfare state as a "1st class service"; it is more like a misery.

I have sat in this chamber for over a year and listened to the slurs from those on the Conservative benches, telling us that we need to do better and that we need to do more to alleviate poverty. How any Conservative MSP can have the brass neck to say that is beyond me. How long has the UK Government had to make life better for people in this country? How many times do Conservative members have to be told that the UK welfare system is inadequate and failing their constituents?

The Social Justice and Social Security Committee, in gathering evidence in its debt inquiry, has heard that universal credit waiting times are one of the biggest contributors to people falling into debt—universal credit being a policy that was written on the back of a fag packet by an out-of-touch minister in London. The UK welfare state used to give enough money so that people could just about scrape by; now, it does not even do that. The Conservative Party's response to the cost of living crisis has been deemed to be "woefully inadequate" by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, and that is putting it kindly.

Really, it is an absolute riot. For a start, the Prime Minister should resign. Perhaps my Conservative colleagues could grow a spine and stop supporting illegal parties, sleaze and corruption, and they could stop with the complete hypocrisy when it comes to the UK benefits system, as it fools no one.

I will touch briefly on the amendment from the Scottish Labour Party, which, in essence, says that we have not done enough to alleviate poverty. That is confusing, because we have already heard today about all the new measures that Scotland is taking to ensure a more positive and humane system.

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

Natalie Don: Not just now—I will finish this point.

That is what the Scottish Labour Party has become. Instead of lodging an amendment calling on the UK Government to devolve all social security powers to Holyrood, it seems that it would rather that those powers stayed with the Tories at Westminster while it tries in vain to attack the Scottish Government. It would rather that the powers on the six-week assessment period for universal credit and on the rape clause, and other powers that mean that children in this country have to use food banks, remained in the clutches of the Tories at Westminster.

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

Natalie Don: Not at the moment, thank you. I need to make progress.

The Scottish Labour Party has absolutely no credibility when it comes to social security. It is little surprise that it was once again rejected at the ballot box. Until its members realise that the only way to truly tackle poverty is for our Parliament to have all the powers of any other independent country, anything that they say in this place about how Scotland should tackle poverty is a token gesture at best.

I want to take a moment to highlight an issue regarding people who have to go for PIP assessments. The UK Government has created a system that makes people have to think of how they are on their worst day, because if they describe anything less than that their money is harshly and unjustifiably taken away from them. How warped is that? Anyone who has ever experienced that, or who has helped someone to fill in the forms or take the assessment, will know that it is a degrading and distressing process.

Scotland is taking a different approach. The roll-out of Scottish social security benefits is proving to be a success, but I remind members that that is despite our having limited powers and despite our having a Tory UK Government that has presided over a benefits system that punishes, degrades and damages those who need support the most. The UK benefits system is renowned for its harshness and degrading nature, and the UN has condemned its callous approach. People in poverty in the United Kingdom in the 21st century have died. That falls at the feet of the UK Government's welfare system and of an austerity agenda that targets people who are trapped in the cycle of poverty that the system has created.

Miles Briggs: Will the member take an intervention?

Natalie Don: Not just now. I really need to make progress. I am sorry.

The Scottish Government has achieved more with its social security system in four years than has been achieved in decades under Labour and Tory Governments down south, and—this bears repeating—we do not have all the powers. The concrete boots of the Westminster Government that we, in Scotland, currently wear must be taken into consideration when discussing our social security system. We are undertaking a complex process the like of which has never been seen before. It is true that there may be challenges and that some aspects can be improved, but we are just at the beginning of creating a wonderful system for all our constituents.

I am confident that the system will only continue to improve, but it is high time that the Scottish Conservatives, and members across the rest of the chamber, got real and addressed the elephant in the room: we will never be able to fully build the truly transformative system that we need in this country without all the powers of independence. If we had all the powers over social security, we would not have to worry about the UK Government undermining, at every step of the way, the good work that is going on in our country.

16:18

Foyso Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): The motion that is before us is, frankly, disappointing. The Scottish Government could have given us a measured assessment of its progress towards implementing devolved social security powers and an honest appraisal of the challenges that lie ahead in implementing those benefits. Instead, we have been presented with a torrent of self-congratulation for a job that is not even half done.

The Scottish Labour amendment notes the grand scale of the rhetoric on devolved benefits from the Scottish Government in years gone by. On reading the SNP's motion, we might think that the debate would involve a lap of victory by the Scottish Government rather than discussion of a report on its early progress. However, there is much more to be done, and many uncertainties will need addressing along the way.

The recent Audit Scotland report raises several notes of caution, including on staffing levels for adult disability payment. In stressing how many unknowns there are and how adaptable Social Security Scotland will have to be if it is to administer that benefit effectively, the report says:

"The resource implications of how Adult Disability Payment is administered will only become clear once it is fully rolled out with case transfers under way."

That is not a small consideration. Social Security Scotland will have to be able to respond extremely rapidly if cases exceed expectations or if other problems arise. Although we all hope that the process will be smooth, the challenge should not be underestimated, yet the motion before us makes no mention of that challenge.

On the extension of the Scottish child payment, the Audit Scotland report highlights "significant risks" in the Scottish Government's approach to bridging digital infrastructure gaps with the Department for Work and Pensions. Although the report acknowledges that efforts are under way to manage the risk, we can all think of examples of new government IT systems—at all levels of government—that had significant problems in their early days.

The Audit Scotland report also highlights the problem of a replacement being needed for the DWP payments platform after the Scottish Government's now-extended agreement to use it expires in 2024. The first thing that the Scottish Government did on getting this devolved service was to hand it back to Westminster to run, and we are supposed to believe in its capability to manage an independent Scotland. The report says:

"This is a critical aspect of Social Security Scotland's digital infrastructure, and a long-term solution will need to be put in place to provide suitable payments functionality for Social Security Scotland beyond this point."

It is another big project with another mysterious timescale and another unknown cost.

That leads me to my final point. As was mentioned by my colleague Pam Duncan-Glancy, by 2025, there will be a £760 million black hole in social security funding.

Ben Macpherson: Will the member take an intervention?

Foysoyl Choudhury: No. I am sorry, but I want to make progress.

The Audit Scotland report says:

"The Scottish Government needs to plan for how it manages the long-term sustainability of this expenditure and be clearer about how it will improve outcomes for Scottish people."

How often must we, in this place, hear that the Scottish Government needs to be clearer with Scottish people?

We must not underestimate the challenges that we face. These are difficult processes that can literally mean life and death to people who are affected by them. They must be given an honest and realistic appraisal. The Scottish Government is taking on a vitally important part of the state. It has made repeated claims that it can run the benefits better than Westminster, but it seems, from looking at the motion that is before us, that it risks complacency. We all know that the SNP can talk the talk but, on an issue as important as this, we need it to learn the lessons of its past failures. Cracks in a social security system cannot just be painted over like an unfinished ferry. We need the SNP to understand that, this time, the consequences for underdelivering could be truly catastrophic.

Unfortunately, the Scottish Government's motion shows little sign of its understanding the gravity of the situation, so I will support Scottish Labour's amendment.

16:23

Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I have heard the word "self-congratulatory"

thrown at the Scottish Government a few times this afternoon, as if it is an accusation of something horrific, and I want to take a moment to respond to that. It is perfectly normal to celebrate achievements, and I sincerely believe that the achievements of the minister are worth celebrating.

More importantly, there should surely be some recognition that this debate and motion do not serve the Scottish Government only by highlighting the progress that it is making; they tell the public that the benefits exist and that the Scottish Government wants people to claim them if they are eligible. The Government wants to help people to receive financial support. That is not a given; it is not the message that other Governments in this country have sent disabled people in the past. Today's motion is incredibly meaningful and goes beyond what Labour and Tory members have been trying to reduce it to.

This is personal to me: I am a disabled person, I am in receipt of PIP and I have been through the application process and helped countless others through it and with their appeals, often with plenty of tears.

As our committee convener, Elena Whitham, said in her speech, I visited Social Security Scotland in Dundee very recently. She was right: it was truly emotional for me to see just how differently things are already being done. Rather than disabled people feeling that the process is trying to catch us out, we will be faced with accessible language, illustrations and helpful prompts to ensure that we give assessors all the relevant information that they need. Instead of people having to seek out a citizens advice bureau advisor with a points cheat sheet, help is built into the application itself. Rather than a private contractor being encouraged to turn down requests for assistance, assessments—when needed—will be done in-house in a way that works for applicants.

There will be no more forcing people who have chronic pain and mobility issues to come in for an assessment just so that someone can peer through the window at them and make sure that they really are in agony. As someone who was dragged across town to be stared and sneered at and asked by an Atos Healthcare assessor why, if I felt suicidal and had been depressed for so long, I had not been successful in killing myself, I cannot overstate the difference that that will make to people's lives.

The word "trauma" has already been used a few times in the debate, and it is true that the DWP's approach has been traumatising. It has made people feel worse, and it has caused immeasurable pain and suffering. The changes that have already been made will have a huge

effect on the experience of claimants and, in particular, on those with mental health issues, chronic conditions or a terminal illness.

We have to be realistic and fair in the debate, and it is a shame that so many members have chosen not to be. Massive improvements have been made and huge strides have been taken in social security and social justice in Scotland thanks to the SNP Government's approach to implementing the new system. It is not a small thing that people are now being treated with respect rather than suspicion when they come forward for help. It is not a minor change that disabled people will no longer have to seek out a CAB advocate to tell them what they need to mention on their form. It is not nothing that we are building, at pace, a fairer system for Scotland.

However, it is an inescapable truth that much of our hard work and much of the impact of decisions to prioritise spending on social security in Scotland is reduced to mitigation, which is purely due to our being tied to a Conservative UK Government that wants to reduce, rather than increase, welfare spending. The Scottish Government gives money directly to families that are in poverty, trusting parents to spend the money where it is needed and tackle child poverty, while the UK Government sticks a cap on how many kids we can help to feed. The Scottish Government doubles the Scottish child payment, adding a tenner a week, and the UK Government takes £20 off the same families that receive it.

The Scottish Government mitigates and mitigates, spending millions of pounds ensuring that Scots are not affected by the hated bedroom tax, and pouring money into the Scottish welfare fund to give crisis funding to people who have been left behind by the UK Government. We have heard today that the Scottish Government is acting with one hand tied behind its back. It is acting while money is taken out of the pockets of the people it is fighting to pull out of poverty.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: When Rishi Sunak, much too late, gave people a very inadequate £150 for their council tax and that funding came to Scotland through Barnett consequentials, the Scottish Government made exactly the same choice. Will Emma Roddick explain why, when the Scottish Government had the same amount of money, it made the same decisions as the Tories instead of targeting the money at families who needed it the most?

Emma Roddick: That is one specific example. If that was the only thing that the Scottish Government was doing to help people in poverty, I might agree with Pam Duncan-Glancy. However, as I have just mentioned, plenty of other things are going on to help people, including the introduction of brand-new benefits, and plenty of those things

are targeted at families who are experiencing poverty and, more importantly, whose children are growing up in poverty.

When we tell the UK Government that, it says, "Well, you have the powers now." Sure, we have the powers, but the UK Government is keeping the money and it will not let us borrow our own or devolve more fiscal powers, which would make a world of difference when designing a new system.

My colleague Natalie Don put it well when she talked about powers and the UK undermining us every step of the way. The two-tier system does not work. It does not work to have separate Governments with conflicting ideologies dealing with two ends of one system. Social security makes the point more than anything else that this union does not work. For real change, and for the progressive, not conservative, policies that Scotland votes for, we need independence. We are swimming against the tide in trying to do what is right for the people of Scotland with limited fiscal powers. We might think that Labour would join us for a moment in trying to do that, but listening to Labour members today, we can hear that there is no difference between the direction it takes here and that taken by the Tories down south.

The difference is huge. When many disabled people and people living in poverty across the Highlands and Islands and the rest of Scotland get their Social Security Scotland letters, they will feel as emotional as I did when I was in Dundee.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: Will the member take another intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can give you the time back, Ms Roddick.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: My colleagues and I have said in our speeches that we welcome the change in direction in relation to assessment processes, although, as I said earlier, the bar was not high. The reality is that people in Scotland are still living in desperate states, so it is not the case that the impact on people will be different just because we take a different direction. That is why, in our amendment, we support doing things differently to put money in the pockets of the people who need it the most.

Emma Roddick: It is disingenuous to suggest that the changes in policy that the Scottish Government is making will not have an impact. It is easy for members to shout, "More, more, more" when they do not have to write the budget. Last year, Scottish Labour's manifesto contained a policy to double the Scottish child payment, and the Scottish Government has done what Scottish Labour said it would do if it were in the Government's position now. Reacting to a Government delivering again and again, as far as possible, on what the Labour Party wanted to

happen by taking issue with celebrating progress, or by describing it as little action, is contrary behaviour that my mum would have described as “thrown”.

Carol Mochan: Will the member take another intervention?

Emma Roddick: I think that I am done with interventions.

Our system is fit for the future and focused on delivering benefits to people, not on gatekeeping and trying to cheat folk out of what they are entitled to. It is worth all of us telling people how different things will be and how differently they will be treated. We all have a duty to get that message across and to be genuine, not to awfulise any creases that will be ironed out.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to closing speeches. I call Mark Griffin, who joins us online, for a generous six minutes.

16:32

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I am sorry that I cannot be in the chamber today, but I have a sick child at home. That means that I cannot take interventions, which might detract from the debate. I am also sorry because of the generous allocation of time that you have given me.

Today's debate has been somewhat familiar. The Government members have, as always, much to congratulate themselves on, while the rest of us are still waiting for the real delivery to happen. The Government rightly congratulates itself on banning private sector assessments, on introducing lifetime awards and on, I hope, moving towards—*[Inaudible.]* payments at some point. I have to reflect that a lot of those things came about because of Labour amendments to the original Social Security (Scotland) Bill and pressure from Opposition members.

Every year for half a decade, it has somehow seemed to be the biggest year for the new system, but I guarantee that what disabled people, carers and families who are struggling to put food on the table want is to be able to go about their lives and have a system on which they can rely. They want a system that is complete so that they can realise the human right of social security and investment that the motion talks about. As Pam Duncan-Glancy said, what we have is three in four families not getting the child payment, disabled people still being subject to the 20m rule, and carers not knowing when their benefit will be fully paid by the Scottish Government.

Social security is the money that insulates the poorest in society from financial shocks and that protects people from being driven into poverty. It is

a lifeline and a right. However, the safe and secure transition that was promised before real changes are made is taking far too long, and that is costing people up and down Scotland.

The irony is that those delays are simultaneously compounding the understaffing and the black hole in funding, which, as Foyso Choudhury highlighted, now tops £700 million, with vital resources being expended on pricey information technology contractors and DWP bills instead of being directly invested in the people of Scotland. Since the programme began, the opportunities to discuss those delays and the financial costs of establishing the system have been far too few, especially when we consider the cost and complexity of the system.

I echo the comments of Miles Briggs and Willie Rennie, who talked about the costs of establishing the system, which have more than doubled since we passed the 2018 bill. Barely weeks before the pandemic, the Government published a long-overdue updated business case, which outlined costs in excess of £2 billion to 2025. That business case included the admission that the DWP would pocket £400 million to run the benefits while we waited for the Scottish system to come on stream. A further update should have been published ahead of this debate.

Fundamentally, the Scottish Government has underestimated the complexity of the task and has been unable to specify or control the causes of the substantial delays and additional costs. Audit Scotland's recent report on the subject included some bleak warnings. It said that timescales were challenging, that substantial risks remained and that hard-working staff were having to juggle temporary and manual processes. It noted that the Scottish Government had extended its deal with the DWP to use its payment system and that the number of contractors had doubled.

Members across the chamber have spoken about their desire for a human rights approach to be embedded in the forthcoming disability and carers benefits, but I seriously doubt that we can achieve that by mirroring the UK eligibility rules. Ominously, Audit Scotland reported that a swathe of benefits are still classed as “being replanned”, including employment injury assistance. Members will know from previous speeches that I have made that I am pursuing a bill to establish a scrutiny and research council for such a benefit, because a simple rebrand would not deliver a human rights-based approach or the dignity, fairness and respect to which we aspire. Changes are required now. While we continue to wait for the Government consultation, I hope that I can meet ministers to discuss aligning our work before I lodge my bill, later this year.

The genesis of that bill lay in asking trade unions whether Covid should be an industrial disease. Given how many people caught Covid at work simply as a result of doing their jobs—which, in too many cases, virtually destroyed their ability to work—the answer remains an overwhelming yes. I would be delighted if the minister, in closing the debate, would confirm that people with long Covid will be entitled to employment injury assistance.

Unless there is a fundamental change in employment injury assistance, the Parliament will soon be asked to accept regulations for a devolved benefit with an equalities impact assessment that will say that only 7 per cent of applications for that entitlement would come from women.

I hope that it is clear that that would be entirely unacceptable to this chamber, but that would be the case if a lift-and-shift approach was taken. Taking such an approach would risk embedding a system that promotes inequalities and fails to reflect modern Scotland.

That number is so low because, ultimately, women are denied entitlement to the Westminster benefit because it is a benefit for the injuries and diseases that men got at work in the previous century. As a result, cleaners with respiratory and skin diseases are not recognised by the current scheme. Breast cancer that is caused by shift work, which is the top occupational cancer in women, is not recognised. Even asbestos-related ovarian cancer, which is the most common gynaecological cancer in the UK, is not recognised. Women are entirely missing from that scheme and it seems that they will have to wait for further replanning.

Despite the rhetoric, the promised transformational changes to benefits, which offered dignity, fairness and respect, are not yet being delivered.

16:40

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): I will follow in Willie Rennie's footsteps by starting with some positive comments. There is a consensus in Parliament that we want the devolved social security benefits to work. We saw that when the bill went through and have seen it in committee. I wish the minister well—I see that he has taken off his jacket and rolled up his sleeves—and we will support him when things are going well, but we will also critique when things are not going well. That is the role of the Opposition.

The devolution of some areas of the welfare system presented a welcome opportunity to create a uniquely Scottish approach to social security, underpinned by the broad shoulders of the UK

welfare state. For Scotland, having two Governments working together gives us the ability to enact local policies with the backing of the larger national purse.

Unfortunately, once again, the powers handed to the SNP Government have been squandered, resulting in our social security system falling far short of its potential. As others have said, the motion that we have debated today amounts to nothing more than this Government giving itself a massive and entirely misplaced pat on the back. Either SNP members are burying their heads in the sand and ignoring their shortcomings or they really believe that a record of delay and inefficiency is the best that we in this country can do.

Let us make no mistake: Social Security Scotland has not had a smooth start. Every estimate that the Scottish Government made has been drastically wrong. Miles Briggs pointed some of them out. The SNP said that it would cost £307 million to set up the agency, but the amount ballooned to £651 million—more than 100 per cent over budget. The SNP claimed that Social Security Scotland would require 1,900 people to operate, but, again, that number has almost doubled—to 3,500. The SNP makes the same mistake again and again, presenting favourable numbers that inevitably end up being shown as fantasy.

The list of problems does not end with the setting up of Social Security Scotland; it is an ongoing issue. Admin costs at Social Security Scotland have gone from £36 million in 2019-20 to £130 million in 2020-21. Staff costs have almost doubled in the same period, while other admin costs increased from £13.8 million to £88 million. Those are not small margins of error. We are talking about millions of pounds of taxpayers' money, which should be going into the pockets of those who need it, not being wasted on a bureaucracy that the Scottish Government has created and encouraged. That is unacceptable.

Shona Robison: Will the member accept an intervention?

Jeremy Balfour: In a moment.

That sort of gross mismanagement would not be tolerated in any other sector and could even lead to people being fired, but, in this SNP world, the Government not only tolerates it but is so proud of its record that it comes to Parliament today to showcase it and to ask Parliament to support a motion saying how wonderful it is.

Those cost overruns and missed targets would be more understandable if claimants were receiving a high-quality service. Instead, they are being let down by a Government that is more focused on soundbites and headlines than on truly providing for those in need.

Ben Macpherson: Does Mr Balfour acknowledge the positive client feedback that Social Security Scotland has had? More than 90 per cent see the service as good or very good. Does he also acknowledge the fact that, because Social Security Scotland delivers seven benefits that are not available elsewhere in the UK, additional resourcing and investment have been required? We are doing more and we need to invest, not only to build a system for the future but to ensure that we deliver in the here and now.

Jeremy Balfour: I will address that. Across the board, processing times are unacceptable. It is taking far too long to get money into people's hands and, sometimes, money is not even reaching their bank account at the right time.

Let us look at the figures. They are not my figures; before the minister stands up and says that they are, I point out that they are figures from Social Security Scotland. In December 2021, only 1 per cent of Scottish child payments were processed within 10 days and only 5 per cent of funeral support payment applications were processed within 10 days—the average was as high as 18. Only 4 per cent of young carer grant claims and 2 per cent of best start grant applications were processed within 10 days.

Here is the hard-hitting figure that affects real individuals: over the Easter weekend, more than 2,000 Scottish child payments and child disability payments were delayed by more than one working day. That represents 20 per cent of all claims. The payments were due on Thursday 14 April but were not received until Tuesday 19 April because of the holiday weekend. That meant that families went without the expected money for four days.

Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Jeremy Balfour mentions delays over weekends and so forth. This has been pointed out already in the debate, but I take it that he is aware that the delay associated with applying for the UK's universal credit is five weeks before the first payment is made.

Jeremy Balfour: I say gently to Alasdair Allan that we are talking about benefits related to disability. I have been—[*Interruption.*] Does the cabinet secretary want to make a point?

Shona Robison: Yes. Are you saying that five weeks is okay because the benefit is delivered by the UK Tory Government? Is that seriously what you are saying?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Speak through the chair, please, cabinet secretary.

Jeremy Balfour: I am saying that we are debating benefits that have been devolved to the Scottish Government to look after. I have been in receipt of PIP for 25 years, and the payment has

not been late into my account on one occasion. You have been running a system for months and have already failed.

The figures that I have given are not only statistics; they represent real people who are going through real hardship and need real help. How do you think it looks to them that the Government is celebrating its performance?

Bob Doris: Will Jeremy Balfour give way?

Jeremy Balfour: No. I am sorry, but I have run out of time.

The Government is celebrating a performance that shows crippling inefficiency and has left people waiting.

There can be no doubt that Social Security Scotland is not fulfilling its full potential. I do not blame it; I blame the Government. Something has to change.

I support the amendment in the name of Miles Briggs and implore others to do so. We will be critical friends. We want the devolution of benefits to work, but you need to stop saying that you have got it right when you have simply failed on so many occasions.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I gently remind colleagues that the only “you” in the chamber is the chair. Please address remarks through the chair.

16:48

Ben Macpherson: Next week—next Wednesday, to be precise—is the fourth anniversary of royal assent for the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018, which the Parliament, to its great credit, passed unanimously. One of the important aspects of that act was that we legislated for the principles on which we would deliver devolved social security. One of those principles states clearly:

“social security is an investment in the people of Scotland”.

That has been acknowledged in the debate. It has been great to hear the reflections of colleagues from Carol Mochan to Maggie Chapman, Bob Doris and many others. We talked about the change in culture that we are leading after decades of social security being talked down in the public consciousness and by Governments elsewhere. In particular, I refer to the Conservative Government, including the coalition with the Liberal Democrats, but it all started in the new Labour era, when Tony Blair said that welfare should become

“a hand-up not a hand-out”,

as if a handout was a bad thing to happen.

That is an important place to start, because the ideological opposition to welfare has got us to a point at which we have to make so many interventions to get back to eradicating poverty in our society and making a bigger difference so that we can fulfil everyone's potential. To the Parliament's credit, we agreed on the shared principle that investment in the people of Scotland is what social security is all about.

We need to continue to build on that. That is what the debate has been about: reflecting, listening, and aiming to do more. That is because we are leading on these islands. Whatever members' views on the constitutional position, we are collectively reinvigorating the concept of social security as an important and necessary aspect that should not be stigmatised. In that framework, people, rightly, are asking Government to do more.

People are asking the UK Government to do more. Today, I was glad to see that the chancellor used some of his vast powers to tackle the cost of living crisis, through a windfall tax, which I, as Minister for Public Finance and Migration, called for in this chamber a couple of years ago. *[Interruption.]* I am not taking personal credit for that; I am just saying that it is an idea that has been around for a while, and that we are glad that it is finally happening. We will see whether it has any benefit for Scotland, as we are not clear on that at the moment.

There have also been interventions through the universal credit and pensions systems, and for those on disabled benefits. We welcome that, but it is inadequate in the longer term, and we were disappointed that further investment, through an uplift to universal credit, has not been delivered.

We will therefore continue to push the UK Government into doing more. It is unwinding on all the problems that it has created for itself by not investing in social security and by delivering vast cuts to the public purse and household budgets for a significant time.

A number of members, including Willie Rennie and Carol Mochan, talked about how they want the Scottish Government to do more—and we will. I laid some of that out in my opening statement. However, we are working within a limited budget. The Parliament has some taxation powers, but those are limited, so, as a collective and a democracy, we have to make choices, and to be serious in those choices. Given a fixed budget, if we want to invest in one area of support, where does that resource come from? In what is a really serious time ahead, we need to raise our collective game on those points as we go towards the next budget process.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: The Labour Party has come to the Government with suggestions in two specific areas about how it could use its money, and where it could get money from, to reach children over six, so that they could get the Scottish child payment—at the doubled rate—or to put £400 into the pockets of the families who need it the most. Those were examples of how you could have used—forgive me for saying “you” for about the 12th time, Presiding Officer. Those were examples of how the Scottish Government could have used its powers to put money into people's pockets. However, the Government has refused to heed our calls. Why is that?

Ben Macpherson: As Pam Duncan-Glancy knows, I very much respect her constructive suggestions, which were made in good faith. However, from memory, I think the process that she engaged in—she will correct me if I am wrong—was not in synergy with the budget process. We have to be clever and focused, as we go into that process, to make sure that we utilise resources effectively over the period.

Part of that is about carers. Carol Mochan asked for more detail about our timetable for delivering the Scottish carers assistance benefit that I talked about in my opening remarks. As I have said, the consultation on that closed in recent days, and I will come back to the relevant parliamentary committee on the proposals and how we will deliver them.

Miles Briggs: On budget scrutiny and future budget projections, we know that it is being projected that £760 million will be needed to fund these welfare policies by 2026. Willie Rennie, Mark Griffin and I have raised that point. When is the Scottish Government going to lay out where that money will come from and what budgets will potentially be cut? More than £250 million has been cut from local authority budgets, for example.

Ben Macpherson: Miles Briggs has raised an important point. The budget position will be set out through the medium-term financial strategy and the positions that the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy will take and set out to the Parliament in the period ahead, and, collectively, we will have to make decisions about our budget. However, the Scottish Government is committed to providing the social security benefits for which we have made provision and that we have set out in our programme. The question for the Parliament will be, as always in a fixed-budget Parliament, how we balance the budget. Of course, the big flaw in Miles Briggs's argument is that the Conservatives never come with a balanced position; it is always “spend more and tax less”. The Conservatives just do not have a sensible or credible position.

In due course, I will set out how we will finish the programme of devolved benefits. I have been able to update the Parliament about that today, where possible, and we will publish another programme business case by the end of the year. As I said, we also have to work with the DWP. We are not yet in a position to be able to provide full clarity about that, but we will update the Parliament in due course.

I am somewhat dispirited that a number of members have accused the Scottish Government of back patting. Acknowledging the difference that a Government has made is not back patting: as Emma Roddick emphasised, it is an effective mechanism to raise awareness of benefits and to help our constituents. There is more to do, which we appreciate and acknowledge. However, a lot has been done. The child disability payment has already helped 3,000 more children at a cost of £3 million. The young carer grant has helped 4,000 people, at a cost of £1.6 million. We made 20,000 payments in the past year for the child winter heating assistance, which is one of our new benefits. The carers allowance supplement has paid £188 million to 126,000 carers since 2018. That support is not available elsewhere in the UK. The Scottish child payment is supporting more than 100,000 children as we speak, and, when we roll that out and extend that benefit, we will be supporting 400,000 children across Scotland. That is using our powers. That is making a difference. *[Ben Macpherson has corrected this contribution. See end of report.]*

We are mitigating the effect of the bedroom tax at a cost of £350 million—money that we should not have to waste. We are going to be mitigating the benefit cap at a cost of £10 million. I am very happy to update Maggie Chapman about that, and we will be working with local authorities and the third sector to raise awareness about how to do that.

For those who have criticised our adult disability payment, I would say that they should listen to what Elena Whitham and Emma Roddick have said about the difference that they saw when they went to Social Security Scotland to learn about that benefit. An invitation was extended to Conservative and Labour members; they did not take that up, but we look forward to welcoming them—*[Interruption.]*

Miles Briggs: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. The minister should apologise, because committee members who could not attend, including myself, then went to a briefing with Social Security Scotland. I think that the minister needs to correct the record.

The Presiding Officer: Although that is not a point of order, it is now on the record.

Ben Macpherson: I can clarify that we would be very happy to invite members of the committee again.

Miles Briggs: The minister is saying that we have not been to Social Security Scotland.

Ben Macpherson: Members have been, but they have not been to the follow-up session, where they would have been taken through the application form for the adult disability payment and would have seen the difference that that has made.

Some Conservative members made statements about the fact that they did not feel that the eligibility criteria were correct. A very simple way to change that would be for the UK Government to change the eligibility criteria for PIP across the UK. We are not going to create a two-tier system, and members know that we are seriously considering, through our independent review, what changes could be made.

I know that there are different views in the chamber on Scotland's constitutional future, but we are responsible for building a system that will serve the needs of Scotland, whatever the outcome of the next referendum on independence. However, I also know that there would not be a Scottish social security system if it was not for all the people who campaigned for a yes vote in 2014, and I want to acknowledge their contribution.

There is much more that we want to do with the powers that we have and new powers that we think this Parliament should have. However, our focus right now is on making the biggest difference that we can with the powers and resources that we have.

I make a plea to Parliament to work together, be constructive and give our constituents as much support as we can in this time of need. We are happy to accept criticism, but creating cynicism for political point scoring is just unhelpful in this situation. We need Opposition parties to stop talking down Social Security Scotland and get behind the shared project in actions as well as words, in order to help their constituents. We have made remarkable progress and, together, we will do a lot more. Instead of thinking about the next headline or election, let us unite and help the people we represent.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is consideration of two Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motion S6M-04617, on committee membership, and motion S6M-04618, on committee substitutes.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that—

Rachael Hamilton be appointed to replace Alexander Stewart as a member of the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee;

Jeremy Balfour be appointed to replace Craig Hoy as a member of the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee;

Tess White be appointed to replace Sue Webber as a member of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee;

Sue Webber be appointed to replace Stephen Kerr as a member of the Education, Children and Young People Committee;

Alexander Stewart be appointed to replace Tess White as a member of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that—

Craig Hoy be appointed to replace Jeremy Balfour as the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party substitute on the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee;

Tess White be appointed to replace Rachael Hamilton as the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party substitute on the Social Justice and Social Security Committee.—
[George Adam]

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

Decision Time

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): There are four questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S6M-04621.1, in the name of Miles Briggs, which seeks to amend motion S6M-04621, in the name of Ben Macpherson, on an update on the delivery of social security benefits, 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.

17:02

Meeting suspended.

17:06

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We come to the division on amendment S6M-04621.1, in the name of Miles Briggs. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is closed.

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I was unable to connect. I would have voted no—I mean yes.

The Presiding Officer: Will you confirm your vote, Mr Carson, please?

Finlay Carson: Presiding Officer, I had a temporary brain fade. I would have voted yes.

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

For

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)

Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 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)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)

Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-04621.1, in the name of Miles Briggs, is: For 28, Against 85, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-04621.2, in the name of Pam Duncan-Glancy, which seeks to amend motion S6M-04621, in the name of Ben Macpherson, on an update on the delivery of social security benefits, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

The Minister for Social Security and Local Government (Ben Macpherson): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. May I check that my vote has been registered? It is not clear on my screen.

The Presiding Officer: It has been registered.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (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)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (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)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 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)
 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)
 Constance, Angela (Almond 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)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)

Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 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)
 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)
 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)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-04621.2, in the name of Pam Duncan-Glancy, is: For 49, Against 64, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-04621, in the name of Ben Macpherson, on an update on the delivery of social security benefits, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

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)
 Constance, Angela (Almond 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)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 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)
 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)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (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)
 Dowe, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)

Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 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)
 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 motion S6M-04621, in the name of Ben Macpherson, on an update on the delivery of social security benefits, is: For 65, Against 48, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that social security is a human right and an investment in people; welcomes the introduction and delivery of 12 Scottish social security benefits in total, seven of which are new forms of support only available in Scotland, including most recently the Scottish Child Payment, Child Disability Payment and Adult Disability Payment; notes the more humane and compassionate process for applying for the Adult Disability Payment, which contrasts with the intrusive assessments often required to receive Personal Independence Payment from the UK Government; further notes the implementation of a clinically determined definition of "terminal illness" and fast-tracking of these applications for support; welcomes the introduction of indefinite awards within Scottish disability assistance, which provides the most severely disabled people with long-term financial security; looks forward to the introduction of new benefits, including Low Income Winter Heating Assistance and Scottish Carer's Assistance; notes that social security is one of the three key pillars in the national mission to tackle child poverty, and commends the extension of the Scottish Child Payment to under-16s and plans to increase it to £25 per week per child by the end of the year; welcomes the substantial financial support that these benefits provide to people, which is important at all times and particularly so now as people are impacted by the cost of living crisis in the UK, and acknowledges the Scottish Government's record investment of £3.9 billion in benefit expenditure in 2022-23, which is £360 million above that received by the UK Government, all of which will provide meaningful social security support to over one million people, including low-income families and households, disabled people and carers.

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

No member having objected, the final question is, that motions S6M-04617, on committee membership, and S6M-04618, on committee substitutes, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that—

Rachael Hamilton be appointed to replace Alexander Stewart as a member of the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee;

Jeremy Balfour be appointed to replace Craig Hoy as a member of the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee;

Tess White be appointed to replace Sue Webber as a member of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee;

Sue Webber be appointed to replace Stephen Kerr as a member of the Education, Children and Young People Committee;

Alexander Stewart be appointed to replace Tess White as a member of the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that—

Craig Hoy be appointed to replace Jeremy Balfour as the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party substitute on the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee;

Tess White be appointed to replace Rachael Hamilton as the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party substitute on the Social Justice and Social Security Committee.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Meeting closed at 17:12.

Correction

Ben Macpherson has identified an error in his contribution and provided the following correction.

The Minister for Social Security and Local Government (Ben Macpherson):

At col 109, paragraph 2—

Original text—

The Scottish child payment is supporting more than 100,000 children as we speak, and, when we roll that out and extend that benefit, we will be supporting 400,000 children across Scotland.

Corrected text—

The Scottish child payment is supporting more than 100,000 children as we speak, and, when we roll that out and extend that benefit, around 400,000 children will be eligible for support across Scotland.

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

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