



OFFICIAL REPORT  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Meeting of the Parliament (Hybrid)

Wednesday 15 June 2022

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# Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 15 June 2022

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

## Portfolio Question Time

### Health and Social Care

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** Good afternoon. The first item of business is portfolio question time. The first portfolio is health and social care. If a member wishes to request a supplementary question, I invite them to press their request-to-speak button during the relevant question or to enter the letter R in the chat function. As ever, I make a plea for succinct questions and answers so that we can fit in as many questions as possible.

#### Alcohol Services (Funding)

**1. Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it plans to allocate any funding specifically for alcohol services, in addition to that allocated to alcohol and drug partnerships for drugs services. (S6O-01215)

**The Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport (Maree Todd):** We are currently working in partnership with Simon Community Scotland to pilot and evaluate an innovative managed alcohol programme for people who experience homelessness.

Funding allocated to alcohol and drug partnerships—ADPs—is for both alcohol and drug treatment services. In 2021-22, ADPs and health boards received more than £106 million for alcohol and drug services. That funding is used to ensure that services meet the needs of people who experience alcohol as well as drug harms, and it includes preventative approaches.

**Miles Briggs:** I thank the minister for his answer. Although the Scottish Government stated that it recognises the twin public emergencies of drug deaths and alcohol harms, it stated earlier this month that it has no plans to introduce alcohol-specific treatment targets until 2024. I think that that is unacceptable. In 2020, the number of people who tragically died because of alcohol increased by 17 per cent to 1,190. Will the Scottish Government now rethink its approach and introduce specific treatment targets?

**Maree Todd:** Alcohol and drug-related harms are both important public health issues in Scotland, which is why we established a national mission to improve and save lives. At the core of

that national mission is ensuring that every individual is able to access the treatment and recovery that they choose. We are working to ensure that people with alcohol use disorder continue to receive the same quality of care as those who experience problematic drug use.

The forthcoming alcohol treatment guidelines will provide support for alcohol treatment that is similar to the medication assisted treatment—MAT—standards for drugs. We are developing alcohol treatment targets alongside stage 2 of the implementation of drugs targets, in 2024. I am more than happy to hear from the member should he think that there are things we are not tackling in our approach to alcohol issues, but I am very comfortable with the work that we are doing and the learning that we are gaining from the work that is being done in tackling our drug challenges.

#### Long Covid (Support)

**2. Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the support being made available to people with long Covid. (S6O-01216)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Humza Yousaf):** This year, we are providing £3 million to national health service boards to help them to respond flexibly to improve the care and support that is already available for people with long Covid.

That investment will enable boards to introduce care co-ordinator roles, which will provide a single point of contact for people and their families to ensure that they have access to the most appropriate care and support. It will also provide additional capacity for community rehabilitation, to help people to address issues that affect their day-to-day lives. Those include managing pain and fatigue and supporting a return to employment.

We have also established a national strategic network for long Covid, to ensure that the continued development of our national approach is informed by evidence and expertise, as well as by those who have lived experience.

**Audrey Nicoll:** I thank the cabinet secretary for his response. I have been assisting a constituent whose physical health has been so compromised by Covid that they are now wheelchair bound and remain in hospital almost one year after they were admitted. As they are a council tenant, their local authority is working with NHS colleagues as they try to secure a more suitable tenancy and resolve the debt that the person has unintentionally accrued. However, that is taking time, and the longer it takes, the longer they remain in hospital—essentially bed blocking. How is the Scottish Government working with councils and

health boards to ensure that people have timely access to the health and social care support that they need as they adjust to living with long Covid?

**Humza Yousaf:** I am sorry to hear about Audrey Nicoll's constituent. It must be a difficult experience for them and their wider family. I do not know all the details of their situation, but Audrey Nicoll is more than welcome to provide further details offline if she wishes.

We work regularly with local authorities, NHS boards and, crucially, health and social care partnerships across Scotland. We want them to work in an integrated fashion to deal with and address the issues to which Audrey Nicoll refers. We are putting considerable investment into tackling delayed discharge. It is difficult, with workforce being one of the most significant challenges in the social care sector. That is why, over the past 12 months, we have introduced two pay rises for adult social care workers.

However, there is more to do. The number of delayed discharges is far too high. Where health boards, local authorities and health and social care partnerships are not working closely together, I and the Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care will be more than happy to have the necessary conversations with relevant stakeholders.

**Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con):** It is not just Audrey Nicoll's constituent; there are 150,000 long Covid sufferers in Scotland. According to Professor Edward Duncan of the University of Stirling, many thousands of those 150,000 Scots require treatment but remain unsupported. It is also believed that some health boards are reluctant to offer support for sufferers of long Covid for fear that they will be overwhelmed.

Will the cabinet secretary commit to establishing a network of long Covid clinics to co-ordinate the support that long Covid sufferers are crying out for? Will he tell us whether any of this year's £3 million tranche has been allocated and for what?

**Humza Yousaf:** I saw the comments to which Dr Sandesh Gulhane refers. Some of the comments on signposting were well made. Therefore, we are picking them up with health boards up and down Scotland.

I do not recognise his comment that health boards are reluctant to support people with long Covid. As a clinician, he will know that clinicians—certainly, any clinicians that I have met—are not only willing but able to treat people with long Covid. I detect no hesitancy from health boards or clinicians to provide support for people with the condition.

As I mentioned in the debate that we had recently, the first tranche of that long Covid

support fund has been allocated. On long Covid clinics, I say what I have said to him previously: there is nothing preventing any health board in Scotland from establishing a long Covid clinic if it thinks that that is the best way to address the condition or, indeed, to provide support for people who are suffering from it. We will leave those decisions to local health boards, for them to come up with tailored, local solutions for the areas over which they preside.

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** There are 155,000 people in Scotland with long Covid and the number is rising every month. The majority are simply not receiving services. The £3 million that the Scottish Government has allocated is, of course, welcome but is a drop in the ocean. It works out at £19 per head in a given year. As the Scottish Government's response is two years late and inadequate, given the scale of the task, will the cabinet secretary commit to increasing the resources that are available this year?

**Humza Yousaf:** I will consider any request to increase resources, but Ms Baillie's comments are misinformed. The suggestion that the funding that she mentions is the only money that is being invested to support people with long Covid is, of course, incorrect. Prior to the announcement of £3 million of funding for specific projects in health boards up and down Scotland, health boards were already supporting people with long Covid.

However, I accept Ms Baillie's point that many people who are suffering from long Covid feel that they have not had the support that they require. There are also many people—I have met a number of them—who tell me that, if it was not for the support that they received from physiotherapists, general practitioners, doctors or nurses, they would not be alive today. Some have been as strong as that in the opinions that they have expressed to me.

To suggest that the only money that is being spent to support people with long Covid is the £10 million that has been announced is incorrect. I will, of course, explore Ms Baillie's broader point about considering what further money can be invested.

### **Nursing and Midwifery Vacancies**

**3. Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab):** I remind members of my entry in the register of interests.

To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to reduce the 6,600 nursing and midwifery vacancies reported at the end of 2021. (S6O-01217)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Humza Yousaf):** Nursing and midwifery staffing is at a record high. Staffing levels have increased by almost 15 per cent under this

Government and by over 2 per cent in the last year alone. Although the nursing and midwifery vacancy rate is high, it has started to come down in the last quarter. Investing significantly in workforce expansion, as we have done, creates new vacancies in the short term and we are now starting to see those posts being filled.

To continue the downward trend, we will invest a record £11 million to support further international recruitment, building on recent successes, which will see Scotland welcoming almost 400 new nurses from overseas. We are increasing domestic training, too. Over the last 10 years we have doubled the number of funded places for nursing and midwifery to a target intake of 4,837 in 2022-23.

**Richard Leonard:** First and foremost, I pay tribute to, and thank, all the staff in our national health service. One of the reasons why NHS staff are, in the words of the health secretary, “knackered”, is that they are overworked. One of the reasons why the staff are overworked is the high level of vacancies that I am raising with the cabinet secretary today. This is down to poor workforce planning, but it is also down to the undervaluation of NHS staff, including nurses and midwives. With inflation running at 9 per cent, does the cabinet secretary seriously think that a real-terms pay cut for nurses, midwives and other NHS staff of 4 per cent, which he is offering NHS unions today, will cut it?

**Humza Yousaf:** We are offering a 5 per cent increase, which is the largest single-year increase in the history of devolution, including, of course, when Richard Leonard’s party was last in power—which I accept was many years ago. I should also say that since that time, we have increased staffing levels in the NHS by almost 30,000. We have seen increases in nursing and midwifery staff and, of course, NHS staff in Scotland continue to be the best paid in the entire United Kingdom.

Of course, it will now be for trade unions to take that deal away and consult their members, and I absolutely respect that right. Discussions and negotiations with our trade union colleagues have been constructive and, at times, robust and challenging—I would expect no less from our trade union colleagues. We have a process in place and an offer has been made. I will leave it to trade union colleagues to take that offer to their members to either accept—which I hope they will—or reject.

**Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP):** I have previously met the Minister for Public Health, Women’s Health and Sport, Maree Todd, and midwife representatives from the Lothians about the roll-out of the best start five-year plan for maternity and neonatal care, which includes

continuity of carer. NHS Lothian has agreed to meet me about that shortly.

Can the cabinet secretary assure me that he is aware that midwifery vacancies may increase because of the way that the best start programme is being rolled out? Many single parents, other working mothers and older midwives may not be able to operate on call 24/7, five days a week, may not be contracted to do so and may leave the profession. Will he robustly question the pilot’s statistics? The results for mothers, babies and midwives are far from evident in the Lothian pilot, and I understand that the NHS Lanarkshire pilot was stopped.

**Humza Yousaf:** Fiona Hyslop can be absolutely assured that Maree Todd and I will look robustly at the data that is coming back from the projects that are in place. I should say that continuity of carer has restarted in all health boards right across Scotland following it being paused due to the pandemic. As part of that remobilisation, we will gather data on the implementation of the model of continuity of carer, which involves the same midwife, or a small team of midwives, providing care for a woman during and throughout her pregnancy, birth and after birth, which helps to build a continuous caring relationship between the woman and her midwife.

I should say that the best start model does not require, and has never required, midwives to work on call 24/7, five days a week, although I will explore the points that Fiona Hyslop has just made. We expect all boards to develop models of continuity in midwifery care that are flexible and focused on women but that also work for staff, including those who work part time and those who have other caring responsibilities.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Before I bring in the next supplementary question, I again make a plea for succinct questions and answers. The questions and answers in the last few exchanges have been quite lengthy.

**Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con):** Across Scotland, one in four vacancies for nurses and midwives has been open for at least three months, and nearly 300 vacancies are left unfilled for more than six months after first being advertised. Beyond the minister’s usual empty rhetoric, what long-term action is the Scottish National Party Government taking to tackle those long-term and hard-to-fill vacancies in our national health service?

**Humza Yousaf:** Craig Hoy might wish to dismiss facts as “empty rhetoric”, but I say to him that we have record levels of staffing in our NHS, and the numbers of qualified nurses and midwives have increased.

I take the points that have been made around retention and, on vacancies, I have asked the chief nursing officer to look into the issue of where we and health boards can provide greater levels of flexibility.

I should say that, as I am sure that Craig Hoy is aware, in Scotland, we have 8.5 qualified nurses and midwives per 1,000 people, which compares with 6.1 per 1,000 people in England. That is not “empty rhetoric”—those are, of course, the facts.

### Cervical Screening

#### 4. Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP):

To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the cervical screening programme. (S6O-01218)

**The Minister for Public Health, Women’s Health and Sport (Maree Todd):** The impacts of Covid-19 continue to pose challenges to the cervical screening programme. However, we are working closely with the organisations that oversee screening in Scotland to ensure that the programme remains on track against its agreed recovery road map. The latest uptake data for the cervical screening programme, for 2021-22, is due to be published later this year.

In recognition of the fact that the pandemic is likely to have exacerbated screening uptake inequalities, including for the cervical screening programme, we have committed more than £2 million over two years to tackle that. In addition, we have awarded more than £456,000 to Jo’s Cervical Cancer Trust in support of cervical awareness campaign work, and that includes the cervical screening awareness week that is due to start on 20 June.

**Gillian Martin:** I have been contacted by a couple of constituents who are facing longer waits for cervical screening results than normal, including one constituent who has been waiting for more than 12 weeks, which surprised me.

If someone goes for cervical screening and has never had any problems before, they usually forget about it. However, someone who has had problems will be waiting for that letter to arrive to tell them that they are clear.

The minister knows about this situation—I wrote to her last week about it. Can she advise what work is being done to ensure that everyone gets their results in line with the targets set?

**Maree Todd:** The national health service is currently meeting its target for the average turnaround time for all samples, which is within 14 days. In fact, more than 80 per cent of the participants in the programme receive their results within a week of the sample being taken. I am aware of the particular case that the member

raised with me on behalf of one of her constituents, which my officials are looking into, and I am keen to hear about others that there might be.

**Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab):** The Scottish Government’s women’s health plan accepts that women from higher socioeconomic areas are more likely to take up cervical screening than those from the more deprived areas. Given that we know that a clear way of bringing screening closer to home is by rolling out self sampling, can the minister outline any progress that has been made in that regard and say what role self sampling will play in the cervical screening programme in years to come, if the women’s health plan target of reaching more people who might not ordinarily engage is to be met?

**Maree Todd:** Although I agree that self sampling is likely to help in terms of uptake, it is not the whole answer, which we can see by looking at the bowel screening programme, which is done entirely at home but still does not have 100 per cent participation. We need to work harder and cleverer.

The chamber will be aware that home screening for cervical cancer is at an experimental stage. We are participating in piloting in Scotland, and we are happy to do so. The decisions about that will be made by the four-nations national screening committee, and we are putting in place work in Scotland to ensure that, if a decision is made to use home sampling, we are more than able to hit the ground running as soon as that decision is made. We are keen to do it; we are keen to do what we can. This is one of the most important issues that we are dealing with because, with cervical screening, we have an opportunity to prevent cancer before it is even there.

**Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD):** The effectiveness of the human papillomavirus—HPV—vaccine should be acknowledged and praised. The minister will be aware of research that shows that, with the vaccine’s success, the screening programme strategy could change in order to focus resources. Will that happen? If so, does the minister have a plan to communicate those changes, in order to ensure high take-up for the continuing screening?

**Maree Todd:** I thank Beatrice Wishart for her question and for her interest in that area. At the moment, uptake is higher among those who have received the vaccine than it is among those who have not received it. We are very keen to continue at the moment with the twin strategy of vaccinating the eligible population as well as using cervical screening to ensure that we detect cancer before it develops.

The member might be aware that the World Health Organization has some work and targets in place and is considering the possibility that cervical cancer could be eradicated. Of course, in Scotland, we are extremely interested in that work and are keen to play our part in leading the way in the eradication of cervical cancer.

### Residential Care (Future Funding)

**5. Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it considers it possible in the future for all residential care to be provided as a fully funded public service. (S6O-01219)

**The Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care (Kevin Stewart):** I thank Mr Coffey for writing to me on that important topic last month.

As he knows, individuals who have been assessed by their local authority as needing personal and nursing care, and who reside in a care home, will receive that care directly from the care home provider. For those who are self-funding their care home place, a payment to contribute to those aspects of their care will be made directly to the respective care home by the local authority.

The Feeley review considered whether it is appropriate for people to contribute to their accommodation costs in residential care or whether those, too, should be free at the point of use. The review concluded that, where the individual's means permit, it is reasonable for some charge to be made because, in other circumstances, that person would be paying accommodation costs at home.

**Willie Coffey:** The minister will be aware of the huge cost of private residential care in Scotland. It can run into thousands of pounds per week and often requires families to sell their homes in order to pay for it. Does he think that we can look forward to a system in Scotland in which families, who have paid their dues throughout their working lives, do not have to lose their life savings, pensions or homes in order to pay for that care? Might Scotland move towards a publicly funded and delivered residential care service at some point?

**Kevin Stewart:** As I pointed out, that was looked at in the independent review, and I have already stated what Derek Feeley had to say about it.

We recognise that the cost of residential care can be high and, to recognise the increasing costs, we have increased the free personal and nursing care rate—by more than the rate of inflation—for the past two consecutive years. That is an increase of 18.3 per cent since April 2020,

and we will continue to review those rates annually.

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** Bearing in mind what the minister has just said, I am interested in whether he can continue to claim that the new national care service will be like the national health service, which is free. If we continue to charge for residential costs, how can we justify the difference between those who are in hospital, who do not have to pay residential charges, and those who are in the national care service, who have to do so?

**Kevin Stewart:** One of the reasons why it is different is that folks who are in hospital normally still have to pay for their accommodation costs while they are in hospital.

I am open to discussions with members in the chamber on lots of issues, but I also have to know, from those folks who advocate change, where the money will come from to pay for that change. I have heard nothing from the Opposition on that front in any of the budget debates or discussions that have taken place in recent times.

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

### Accident and Emergency Departments (Waiting Times)

**7. Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to reduce waiting times at accident and emergency departments. (S6O-01221)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Humza Yousaf):** The Covid-19 pandemic continues to put pressure on hospitals and services. Despite that, more than two thirds of patients are being seen in our A and E departments within the four-hour target.

On 1 June, we launched our new urgent and unscheduled care collaborative for health boards, supported by £50 million, which will support the implementation of a range of measures to reduce A and E waiting times and improve the patient experience. The measures include offering alternatives to hospital, such as hospital at home; directing people to more appropriate urgent care settings; and, where it is clinically appropriate and safe to do so, scheduling urgent appointments to avoid long waits in A and E.

That new approach will capitalise on the positive work that is already under way, such as discharge without delay, virtual capacity and the redesign of urgent care.

**Dean Lockhart:** The most recent waiting times at Forth Valley royal hospital for accident and emergency and minor injuries show that more than

500 patients waited for more than eight hours and that 100 patients waited for more than 12 hours, despite staff working around the clock.

The cabinet secretary has outlined additional finance, but what practical and urgent steps, including the recruitment of additional staff, will he take to help Forth Valley royal hospital to address those wholly unacceptable waiting times?

**Humza Yousaf:** I agree with Dean Lockhart. We have regular discussions with NHS Forth Valley. The level of performance there is not acceptable and the management team knows that that is the case. As Dean Lockhart rightly said, along with clinical staff, the team is working hard around the clock to make improvements.

With regard to what we can practically do, a whole range of initiatives is under way, including at Forth Valley royal, and I am happy to write to Dean Lockhart in detail about them. I will give one example here, which is the hospital at home programme, which I referenced in my previous answer. We have recently increased our investment in that programme. Between September 2021 and February 2022, 4,500 people who would otherwise have been admitted to hospital were treated by hospital at home services. That equates to a saving of more than 26,000 bed days.

There is a range of initiatives, but, in the interests of brevity, I am happy to write to Dean Lockhart after this session with full details of all the interventions that are taking place and what we are doing to support Forth Valley royal hospital in particular.

**Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab):** I remind members of my entry in the register of members' interests.

Scottish Ambulance Service workers play a vital role in supporting the delivery of patient care in our A and E departments, but Unite the union's recent survey of those workers reveals that those departments are increasingly understaffed, that the staff are working longer shifts and facing greater abuse, and that many workers are contemplating leaving the Ambulance Service altogether. Will the Scottish Government begin immediate negotiations with Unite the union to explore the formal recognition of the Ambulance Service as an emergency service, with workers being employed on similar terms to those in the police and fire services?

**Humza Yousaf:** I have regular engagement with the trade unions that represent all those who work in the Scottish Ambulance Service, and I will continue that engagement.

Last year, we had a record year of recruitment of staff to the Scottish Ambulance Service, and

one of my first acts as health secretary was to introduce the paramedic bursary, which is incredibly important for the future pipeline of Scottish Ambulance Service staff. We continue to invest in the Scottish Ambulance Service, but, on Mercedes Villalba's specific point, I will take up further discussions with trade union colleagues.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I can take question 8 if I have succinct questions and answers.

#### **Unpaid Carers (Mental Health) (Support)**

**8. Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what support it is providing to unpaid carers who are experiencing poor mental health. (S6O-01222)

**The Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care (Kevin Stewart):** Our national wellbeing hub includes specific resources to help unpaid carers to look after their mental health. We have increased funding for breaks from caring as well as local carer support, including counselling and peer support.

Our "Mind to mind" wellbeing website links to lived experience videos and national resources that directly relate to unpaid carers. We have also expanded local psychological services and therapies teams, which unpaid carers can access if they require bespoke help.

Forthcoming standards for those services will include information about how carers should be supported as part of a whole-systems approach using a stepped care model.

**Finlay Carson:** Evidence suggests that the pandemic has greatly exacerbated the poor mental health of carers. According to Carers Trust Scotland, 45 per cent of young carers and 68 per cent of young adult carers stated in a survey that their mental health is worse due to the coronavirus. Furthermore, Support in Mind Scotland's report "Marginalised Rural Communities Report February 2021" establishes that

"money worries, care for relatives, feelings of isolation and stress"

greatly exacerbate the poor mental health of young carers. What targeted mental health support is being offered to unpaid carers, specifically in rural areas such as my Galloway and West Dumfries constituency?

**Kevin Stewart:** We will continue to do all that we can for all the population of Scotland to ensure that people's mental health is the best it possibly can be.

Mr Carson touched on money worries. I agree that there are money worries, particularly given the

Tory cost of living payment. Carers in Scotland who have been in continuous receipt of carers allowance have received more than £2,520 more than carers south of the border since 2018, thanks to our introduction of the carers allowance supplement in that year.

We will continue to urge Westminster to match our effort and to increase the level of support for unpaid carers, including by ensuring that unpaid carers who are not on universal credit also benefit from the United Kingdom Government's cost of living payments.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you, minister. That concludes health and social care—*[Interruption.]* Could we have some quiet, please, while we are trying to conduct business? That concludes health and social care portfolio questions.

## Social Justice, Housing and Local Government

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The next portfolio is social justice, housing and local government. If a member wishes to request a supplementary question, they should press their request-to-speak button during the relevant question or enter R in the chat function. I again make a plea for succinct questions and answers.

### Mid-market Rental Accommodation (Lothians)

1. **Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what action is being taken to promote the creation of mid-market rental accommodation in the Lothians. (S6O-01223)

**The Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights (Patrick Harvie):** The Government is determined to increase and accelerate the affordable housing supply across all tenures, including mid-market rent, and to support local authorities to deliver their strategic housing priorities.

Mid-market rent housing is supported where it is identified as a strategic priority and meets a recognised need. In the four years up to March 2021, 1,817 mid-market rent homes were completed in the Lothian area. In the current financial year, we expect there to be 449 mid-market rent home approvals in the Lothian area and around 200 further mid-market rent homes should be available through the mid-market rent invitation.

**Jeremy Balfour:** Our capital is facing a crisis. The LAR Housing Trust is trying to address that by building and letting affordable mid-market rental properties. It works with a funding model that relies on loans from the Government that get paid back in full, with interest. Why will the Government

not commit to supporting housing trusts such as LAR Housing Trust, which is helping to provide local affordable rental properties and is good for the public purse?

**Patrick Harvie:** We certainly are aware of the work that that trust is doing. It pioneered the use of financial transaction loan money from the Government and has delivered housing with that. We have continued to work on that basis since 2016. We have provided £102.5 million of financial transaction loan funding, enabling private investment into large-scale mid-market rent housing projects.

As I said in my first answer, it is the wider affordable housing and social rented housing supply that will meet the critical need and be the more sustainable option for a great many people. The Government is delivering on that at pace.

**Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP):** The cost of living crisis is squeezing every household in Scotland, none more so than those on low and moderate incomes. In these difficult times, does the minister believe that mid-market rent can play an even greater role in the affordable housing supply programme, offering an alternative route for tenants?

**Patrick Harvie:** Yes, indeed. As I said in my answer to Mr Balfour, mid-market rent is one of a range of affordable tenures. We are actively looking at how further innovative delivery mechanisms can provide much-needed affordable housing of all kinds and all tenures.

However, we recognise that social rented housing is the more affordable option for many. That is why we have committed to delivering 110,000 affordable homes by 2032, with 70 per cent of those being for social rent. That comes on top of the announcement yesterday that we have surpassed the target of delivering 50,000 affordable homes since the start of the previous parliamentary session. It is worth saying that 9,757 affordable homes were delivered in the previous financial year; that is the highest figure in a single financial year since 2000-01. The Government will continue with this important work, benefiting communities right across Scotland.

### Accessible Housing Need

2. **Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what information it holds on the level of need for accessible housing in Scotland. (S6O-01224)

**The Minister for Equalities and Older People (Christina McKelvie):** Local authorities are responsible for assessing the housing need in their areas and setting out in their local housing strategies how that need will be met. That includes targets for wheelchair-accessible housing across

all tenures. Local authorities should make their local housing strategies available on their websites in the interest of transparency. Wherever possible, all affordable new-build homes that are delivered as part of the affordable housing supply programme are built to housing for varying needs standards. Ninety-five per cent of new-build homes that were delivered by housing associations and councils in 2020-21, where information was returned, met that standard.

**Paul McLennan:** The new Scottish accessible homes standard is an important part of the housing to 2040 strategy, building fairness and adaptability into Scotland's housing vision. What will the minister do to ensure that a culture of accessibility will remain at the heart of her house-building programme?

**Christina McKelvie:** The Scottish Government is committed to delivering accessible homes that are fit for purpose now and in the future, to meet the needs of older people, disabled people, wheelchair users and people with specific needs. We are currently reviewing "Housing for Varying Needs: a design guide", to help us inform the Scottish accessible home standard.

Our guidance for local authorities on preparing local housing strategies makes clear that they must ensure that specialist and accessible homes are central to their housing planning and delivery process locally. That includes the setting of all tenure targets for the delivery of wheelchair-accessible homes.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I have a number of supplementaries, and I hope to take all of them. The first is from Miles Briggs.

**Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con):** Evidence shows that people with motor neurone disease spend their final months fighting and waiting for adaptations to accessible homes that are urgently needed. What plans does the Government have to fast-track applications for adaptations to accessible housing for people with MND, which is a life-limiting condition?

**Christina McKelvie:** Miles Briggs will not be surprised to know that I have a personal interest in ensuring that people with MND live to the best standards that they possibly can. As I said in my answer to the previous question, we are looking to review the current housing adaptations system in order to make recommendations on how best to improve and streamline the system and to maximise the impact of those investments.

It is incredibly important that we are doing that piece of work. We are working with stakeholders on it, and ensuring that we are fit for the future and fit for changing needs, which is an important aspect here.

**Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab):** I thank the minister for her answers so far. However, she will be aware that, despite the strategies and the guidance, tens of thousands of disabled people are waiting on accessible homes, and some of them awaiting years. I would like the minister to set out whether she will commit to action to enforce—including possibly with legislation—that 10 per cent of homes that are built in every new development are accessible homes, in order to reduce the huge length of time that people are waiting just now.

**Christina McKelvie:** Again, it comes down to the review that we are undertaking on housing needs and assessment. As I said, local authorities set those targets, but we are looking to have targets set across all tenures. That standard and process are 20 years old now, so I am really looking forward to the review of that work, which will be done with stakeholders. I am sure that Pam Duncan-Glancy has great ideas that she can share with us to ensure that the review is as targeted and specific to the needs of people as possible.

**Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green):** The north-east has a significant number of military veterans, including disabled veterans, but does not have an adequate supply of accessible housing. I thank the minister for the detail that she has already provided in previous answers, but what steps can we take to ensure that there is a supply of accessible social housing that is proportionate to the needs of the whole community, and in particular the needs of veterans in geographical hotspots?

**Christina McKelvie:** Funding is available through the affordable housing supply programme to deliver accessible homes, including homes that are specifically for veterans, where local authorities identify that as a strategic need. Since 2012, more than £6 million has been made available through the programme to deliver more than 100 homes for veterans. In preparing their local housing strategies, local authorities must demonstrate that they have considered all housing needs, including those of armed forces communities, and that engagement has taken place with relevant organisations such as Veterans Scotland.

### **Addiction Treatment (Retention of Tenancies)**

3. **Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its plans to allow people who are seeking treatment for addiction to retain their tenancies through continued housing payments. (S6O-01225)

**The Minister for Social Security and Local Government (Ben Macpherson):** Under current

United Kingdom legislation, housing benefit, or the housing element of universal credit, are reserved benefits and cannot be used to support both a tenancy and residential rehabilitation. Therefore, last year, the Minister for Drugs Policy introduced the dual housing support fund to cover full tenancy costs while someone is in residential rehabilitation, to ensure that no one has to make the impossible choice between accessing residential rehab and keeping their home. The Scottish Government's dual housing support fund is part of the £5 million per year recovery fund, which supports individuals to access residential rehabilitation.

**Sandesh Gulhane:** I am glad that the minister spoke about the dual housing support fund, which was introduced in May 2021 and helps people with drug and alcohol dependencies not to give up housing. However, over a year later, there is very little information on the scheme, and implementation appears to have stalled. How many people have received support from the fund? Does the minister think that it is right that some people still have to choose between their health and their home?

**Ben Macpherson:** I am sure that Dr Gulhane will be interested in engaging with the Minister for Drugs Policy in making the case to the UK Government for changes to reserved benefits to help in that regard.

To answer the question directly, the dual housing support fund has not stalled; it has been working and helping people. To date, there have been several referrals to the fund, which have all been successful, and five people have been supported through it so far. If Mr Gulhane wants to see more support for people in such situations, I encourage him to engage with his UK colleagues on housing benefit and the housing element of universal credit so that those can be used to support both a tenancy and residential rehabilitation, along with the additional support that I have mentioned that the Scottish Government has provided.

#### **Social Housing Construction (Labour Shortages and Materials Costs)**

4. **Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what impact the reported labour shortages and significant cost increases on materials will have on social housing construction in Scotland. (S6O-01226)

**The Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights (Patrick Harvie):** We are of course aware of the global issues that are affecting construction and impacting affordable housing delivery. We are working closely with the construction industry and housing partners to mitigate that where possible,

and we operate a flexible grant system that can take account of increased costs.

Despite those challenges and the challenges that have been caused by the global pandemic in recent years, including the necessary lockdowns, the Scottish Government has, as I mentioned earlier, delivered 111,750 affordable homes since 2007, with 78,000 of those for social rent. We have passed the target of delivering 50,000 affordable homes, and we are starting on the delivery of an ambitious plan for a further 110,000 affordable homes by 2032.

**Colin Beattie:** Can the minister elaborate on what modern methods of construction are being considered by developers and the Scottish Government to meet our affordable housing targets?

**Patrick Harvie:** There is a great deal of work with the sector to examine the potential for modern methods of construction. We already deliver homes using off-site construction methods—predominantly timber-frame methods—and will continue to support proven approaches. Given the real potential benefits to housing delivery, tenants and the environment, we are considering how we can increase uptake of and investment in off-site construction to support the delivery of more efficient high-quality and net zero affordable homes in the future.

**Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab):** Social housing construction obviously depends on approval numbers, and recently published statistics show that the number of affordable home approvals has dropped significantly, with around 7,800 in 2021-22 compared with 12,800 in the previous year. Since 2016, the figure has never before dropped below 10,000. What is the reason for the drop in approvals, and how can the Scottish Government get the pipeline of affordable home delivery back up to previous levels?

**Patrick Harvie:** I have now had three opportunities over the course of two questions to remind members that, just this week, we have announced that we have surpassed the target of delivering 50,000 homes since the start of the previous parliamentary session. We are already making progress on delivering a longer-term and even more ambitious target of delivering 110,000 homes by 2032. In my previous answer, I think that I mentioned the figure of 9,000 homes, which have had the most significant impact in any financial year to date.

We are making significant progress. That contrasts very sharply with the approach of the United Kingdom Government, which is contemplating rebooting the desperately damaging right-to-buy policy, which this Government prevented from being introduced in Scotland. We

have no intention of repeating the mistakes that the UK Government looks about to repeat.

**Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD):** What is the Scottish Government doing to address the skills shortage in the construction industry in the islands, which is impacting much-needed social housing projects that have been in the pipeline for years?

**Patrick Harvie:** As the member knows, a significant amount of work is being done on skills and the supply chain not only for new builds but for retrofitting, which is a particular challenge in many island communities. We are working closely with the sector to address those challenges. I am sure that there will be much more on which to update the member as we develop the supply chain delivery plan later this year.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 5 is from Graeme Dey, who joins us remotely.

#### Child Poverty (National Mission)

5. **Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how it is prioritising the national mission to tackle child poverty. (S6O-01227)

**The Minister for Equalities and Older People (Christina McKelvie):** Our second delivery plan, “Best Start, Bright Futures”, sets out our actions to tackle child poverty, including our focus on long-term parental employment support, increased social security and measures to reduce household costs. The resource spending review allocates up to £300 million for tackling child poverty and for social justice. It also commits more than £23 billion through social security payments in the next four years, with almost £1.8 billion for the Scottish child payment, which will increase to £25 per child per week when the payment is extended to under-16s at the end of 2022.

**Graeme Dey:** The Scottish Government’s plans to mitigate the impacts of the cost of living crisis are as welcome as they are necessary, especially when they seek to tackle child poverty. However, those plans stand in marked contrast to those of the United Kingdom Government. Has there been an assessment of how many children could be lifted out of poverty by 2023-24 if the UK Government found its moral compass and matched the support that the Scottish Government is delivering as a result of the spending review?

**Christina McKelvie:** Recent Scottish Government analysis sets out that, if key UK Government welfare reforms that have been implemented since 2015 were reversed, an additional £780 million would be put in the pockets of those in Scottish households in 2023-24, which would lift 70,000 people out of poverty, including 30,000 children. That would be part of the

concrete long-term action that is needed to address poverty. Other actions could include matching Scottish Government action by uprating benefits and introducing the equivalent of the Scottish child payment.

However, we know that UK ministers do not prioritise tackling child poverty. The Scottish Parliament should have full powers over social security and employment so that we can take the action that is needed.

**Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab):** It has been estimated that about 30,000 children in Scotland are in poverty as a direct result of the cost of privately rented housing. At stage 2 of the Coronavirus (Recovery and Reform) (Scotland) Bill last week, in response to my calls for immediate action to freeze rent, the Deputy First Minister said:

“Obviously, the Government will seek to take whatever action we can in the short term.”—[*Official Report, COVID-19 Recovery Committee*, 9 June 2022; c 96.]

Will the Scottish Government commit today to working with me ahead of stage 3 to strengthen amendments that provide for an emergency rent freeze?

**Christina McKelvie:** I thank Mercedes Villalba for bringing up that issue. I am reliably informed by my colleagues that a meeting has been offered to talk about the subject that she has raised. I hope that she will take up that offer of a meeting, where that issue can be addressed.

#### Local Government Services (Shared Prosperity Fund)

6. **Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how it will align its priorities for local government services with future projects by local authorities that are funded through the United Kingdom Government’s shared prosperity fund. (S6O-01228)

**The Minister for Just Transition, Employment and Fair Work (Richard Lochhead):** We have maintained that the replacement of European Union funding through the UK shared prosperity fund ought to be devolved to the Scottish Government and Parliament to guarantee that investment best supports our national economic priorities.

As the UK Government has chosen to bypass the Scottish Government in delivering the UKSPF, it is difficult to ensure alignment with Scotland’s national strategy for economic transition. Despite that, we will continue to work in partnership with our local authorities to ensure that all resources deliver the greatest benefit for Scotland.

**Michelle Thomson:** Given that the UK Government plans yet another fund that is

intended to bypass the Scottish Government and that Westminster's Public Accounts Committee noted in a recent report that the UK Government does

"not yet have a strong understanding"

of what delivers local growth, will the minister consider legislation or perhaps even guidance in order to ensure that Scottish local authorities must take account of Scottish priorities when bidding for such funds?

**Richard Lochhead:** I noticed that Conservative members sighed when the member pointed out that one of the Westminster committees supports some of the concerns of the Scottish Government.

We have no plans to legislate at this stage with Scottish local authorities. They have their own powers, responsibilities and financial freedom to operate independently, so it would not be appropriate for the Scottish Government to do so. However, we are very clear that we want to use the regional economic partnerships as well as have discussions with local government to see where we can ensure that public investment is aligned with national priorities.

Michelle Thomson highlights an important example of why the shared prosperity fund should have been devolved to Parliament, given that we were promised that Brexit would strengthen Scottish devolution and that European funding would be matched. Instead, there is a massive shortfall and this Parliament has been bypassed.

### Affordable Housing Supply

**7. David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what actions are being taken to ensure the success and viability of Scotland's affordable housing supply programme. (S6O-01229)

**The Minister for Social Security and Local Government (Ben Macpherson):** More than £3.6 billion in funding is being made available in this parliamentary term to support the delivery of affordable homes, continuing the vital and ambitious work that we started in 2007, which, as was said earlier, has seen the delivery of more than 111,000 affordable homes.

We continue to work closely with our housing partners, who are critical to delivery, and have provided five-year resource planning assumptions to give them the certainty to plan ahead and ensure progress towards our commitment to deliver an additional 110,000 affordable homes by 2032, with 70 per cent for social rent and 10 per cent in remote, rural and island areas.

**David Torrance:** Challenges clearly exist in reaching the target of 110,000 affordable homes. It is important to celebrate the precedent that

Scotland has already set. Does the minister welcome, as I do, the fact that researchers in Australia recently called for Scotland to be used as a model for effective affordable house building, and can he illustrate how the Scottish Government and partners will build on that international recognition?

**Ben Macpherson:** We welcome that international recognition, which acknowledges the focus and priority that the Scottish Government places on ensuring that everyone has a warm, safe, energy-efficient and affordable home.

We will continue to work in partnership to build on our strong record, delivering affordable homes as part of our long-term housing to 2040 strategy. That strategy clearly recognises the vital role that housing plays in tackling poverty and inequality, creating and supporting jobs, meeting our energy efficiency and fuel poverty targets and tackling the climate emergency, and it ensures that we have connected and cohesive communities to live in. We should all be proud of, and look to build on, that international recognition.

### Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (Meetings)

**8. Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government when it last met COSLA. (S6O-01230)

**The Minister for Social Security and Local Government (Ben Macpherson):** The Scottish Government engages regularly with COSLA representatives to discuss a wide range of issues as part of our shared commitment to working in partnership with local government to improve outcomes for the people and communities of Scotland.

I had my most recent monthly relationship meeting with the COSLA presidential team on 31 May, and, alongside other ministerial colleagues, I will meet the new COSLA presidential team soon, following their election this coming Friday 17 June.

**Craig Hoy:** COSLA is well aware of the financial constraints that the Scottish National Party Government has imposed on it. Despite allocating £20 million to preparations for a second independence referendum, the SNP will slash council budgets by 6.3 per cent in real terms, which means a cut of £11 million in East Lothian by 2025-26. Why does the SNP-Green Government not just give it a rest and commit that £20 million to council services rather than waste it on its constitutional obsession?

**Ben Macpherson:** As was pointed out in the chamber yesterday, we have an obligation to the people of Scotland to fulfil the democratic duty for which we were elected.

I refer Craig Hoy to the poor record on local government funding that his party has in other parts of the UK—[*Interruption.*]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Excuse me, minister. Please resume your seat.

Members, please do not shout across the chamber while you are seated.

Minister, please continue.

**Ben Macpherson:** Thank you, Presiding Officer.

Overall funding for the Scottish Government has also been cut by 5.2 per cent in real terms since last year, but in 2022-23 we increased the total package of local government funding to £12.7 billion, which was a real-terms increase of 6.3 per cent.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I have three supplementary questions, and I hope to take all three if they can be reasonably brief.

**Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP):** Last month's local council elections were a chance to refresh and renew democratic connections between the Scottish Government and local authorities. Is the minister hopeful that the Scottish Government and COSLA can work positively, side by side, to address the major challenges that our communities are facing, such as the cost of living crisis and the impact of the war in Ukraine?

**Ben Macpherson:** Bill Kidd makes important points, and I have discussed them with the COSLA presidential team on several occasions. We, in the Scottish Government, recognise and value the important and unique role that councils play in the daily lives of the people of Scotland. Therefore, it is vital that we continue to work in partnership with local government, as different spheres of government, through COSLA and directly with local authorities to tackle the challenges that Bill Kidd rightly highlighted, and that we continue to be ambitious and share ideas about progress on our mutual aims and priorities. We are unequivocal about working with local government collaboratively and collectively. The people of Scotland are best served when national and local government work together.

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** What discussions have been had with COSLA about increasing the mileage allowance for social care staff, particularly those who are in the private sector, as fuel prices rise to £2 a litre? The Scottish Government can intervene because it already tops up the salaries of care staff in the private sector. The First Minister promised action six weeks ago, so what has happened since then and when will care workers get an increase in their mileage allowance?

**Ben Macpherson:** Jackie Baillie raises important issues. In a previous answer, I said that ministers with different portfolios engage with COSLA as well as those with a local government brief, so health and social care ministers engage with the health and social care lead for COSLA. I am sure that the new appointee to that position in COSLA will engage with relevant ministers on that issue as soon as the elections take place, on Friday.

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** Will the minister confirm that, even if there is a real-terms reduction in local authority budgets during the four years of the resource spending review because of cuts that have been imposed on the Parliament by the United Kingdom Government, it will still not in any way match the deep cuts that have already been imposed on local government in England by Mr Hoy's Tory colleagues, and that £20 million for an independence referendum in no way matches £4 billion of personal protective equipment being burned by the UK Government—a Government that really knows how to waste public money?

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

**Ben Macpherson:** As he has done on several occasions, Mr Gibson rightly, wisely and passionately emphasises the extremely poor record of the Conservative Party when it comes to local government finance and financial management more generally.

The outcome of our resource spending review means that, despite the most challenging of circumstances, we have protected the local government revenue budget in cash terms, with an additional £100 million being added in 2026-27. Although local government funding is not wholly comparable, we have delivered a 3.6 per cent cash terms revenue budget increase to Scotland's councils between 2013 and 2020 when, in the same period, English local authorities have faced a cash terms revenue budget cut of 14.7 per cent. The figures speak for themselves.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes portfolio questions on social justice, housing and local government. There will be a very short pause before we move on to the next item of business.

## Health and Wellbeing of Children and Young People

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** The next item of business is a Health, Social Care and Sport Committee debate on the health and wellbeing of children and young people. I call Gillian Martin to open the debate on behalf of the committee.

15:00

**Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP):** As convener of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee, I am pleased to open this afternoon's debate on the committee's inquiry into the health and wellbeing of children and young people.

We all want the best for children and young people. We want them to flourish and to lead healthy and happy lives. As a committee, we thought that, post the pandemic, the health and wellbeing of our children merited special attention, and we were glad to have cross-portfolio evidence to support our wide-ranging inquiry.

Before I discuss our findings, I thank everyone who engaged with the inquiry, whether through the call for views or by participating in an evidence session. Committees could not carry out their work without such people. In particular, I thank the children and young people who shared their personal experiences with us in informal settings, and the organisations that supported them to do so, which included Barnardo's Scotland, Who Cares? Scotland and Carers Trust Scotland.

Our inquiry considered the key issues that have the most significant impact on the health and wellbeing of children and young people. In particular, we looked at the impact of inequality and adverse childhood experiences, issues that impact the health and wellbeing of care-experienced young people and issues around mental health, including access to support and treatment. We also considered the importance of early intervention and the critical role that schools play in that.

As I have indicated, the committee was conscious that the policy area in question is relevant to a number of other parliamentary committees and Scottish Government portfolios. I thank those other committees, notably the Public Audit Committee and the Social Justice and Social Security Committee, for their helpful input. I am pleased that so many members of various committees will participate in this afternoon's debate. I also thank the Minister for Children and Young People and the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government for giving their perspectives and outlining the action

that they are taking in their work to improve the wellbeing of children and young people.

Poverty was highlighted as having an overriding impact on the health and wellbeing of children and young people by an overwhelming number of people who gave evidence to the committee. Poverty is a key driver of poor health and wellbeing outcomes, as it adversely affects a child's biological, social, cognitive and emotional development. We heard about the impact of the stigma of poverty on mental health and in presenting barriers to physical activity, as well as the obvious effects that hunger has on children who live in deprivation.

The committee welcomes the Scottish Government's on-going focus on tackling child poverty, but we must acknowledge that the rates of material deprivation are likely to continue to increase as a result of the current cost of living crisis, and that so much of what the Scottish Government is doing is being swallowed up by fuel and food cost increases. The United Kingdom Government's welfare system and austerity policies came in for significant criticism from people who gave evidence.

In addressing the overarching impact of poverty, we would like greater detail to be provided on how the Scottish Government's new child poverty delivery plan will help to improve the health and wellbeing of children and young people who are currently living in poverty. We also want continued concerted efforts to be made to help families to access the cash that they need to provide an adequate standard of living in the face of the challenges that I have outlined.

I turn to the impact of the pandemic. It is clear that the Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on children and young people's mental health. The closure of schools and nurseries, the challenges around home schooling and care, and the reduced opportunities to stay active and socialise with peers have all had significant impacts.

Certain groups in the young adult population have been particularly exposed to problems with their mental health during the pandemic. Those include young people with pre-existing health conditions, those who receive additional support for learning, young carers, and disadvantaged groups such as those from minority ethnic backgrounds and LGBTQ young people.

As we emerge from the pandemic, we have yet to understand the full extent of its impact on children and young people's mental health, physical health and wellbeing, or how long lasting that impact will be. Our report therefore calls on the Scottish Government to ensure that the long-term impact of the pandemic remains a key

consideration in the future design and development of mental health services and support.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** Gillian Martin cites the pandemic, which is of course a massive cause of mental ill health, but the Ukrainian refugees who are finding safe harbour in Scotland, many of whom are children, also have acute mental health needs. Can she speak to their plight and how we intend to fit them into the existing waiting lists for child and adolescent mental health services?

**Gillian Martin:** Alex Cole-Hamilton will appreciate that I am speaking on behalf of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee. I am not a Government minister, and I am certainly not the Government minister for that portfolio. It might be a good idea for the member to address his question to the Government, and perhaps Government representatives will pick it up. We took evidence just before the situation in Ukraine happened, so it is not included in our report. I hope that the member understands that.

In the same way that it affects other aspects of their health and wellbeing, poverty is a key driver of poor mental health among children and young people. Poverty impacts negatively on family relationships and parents who are anxious and stressed about their money situation can feel unable to offer a safe and secure home environment. Many young people experience shame and stigma from living in poverty, which further impacts their mental health. That was put across to us very strongly by the young people we spoke to.

Waiting times for CAMHS is a long-standing issue that pre-dates the pandemic. There has been recent investment to increase capacity, but in some areas the problem persists—there is variability across Scotland. Our report concludes that reducing CAMHS waiting times must be an immediate priority, which could be pursued by accelerating the implementation of the new mental health workforce plan, although we appreciate that there are serious challenges across health and social care on staffing and recruitment.

We also recognise that the Government should consider bringing forward a separate short-term action plan to expand the workforce to meet existing high demand. We heard good examples of where waiting times are coming down, such as in the Grampian area, so we ask that where good practice exists, it is communicated and replicated across Scotland where appropriate.

In the longer term, we need to continue to pursue a more preventative approach that further eases pressure on CAMHS by reducing the number of children and young people who reach

crisis point with their mental health. On that note of prevention, schools and youth services play a critical role in the life of every young person and in supporting their health and wellbeing. That includes opening up opportunities for them to be physically active and eat healthily.

The committee was particularly struck by the important role of school counsellors—and by how that intervention was welcomed by many of the people we spoke to—and other wellbeing practitioners in supporting the health and wellbeing of children and young people in schools. We welcome the roll-out of school counselling services to every secondary school in Scotland and look forward to a detailed evaluation of their impact once we have a few years of that intervention to analyse.

However, the committee heard evidence that teachers can struggle with the necessary skills, time and resources to do any effective monitoring of pupils' wellbeing. The wellbeing of teachers has also suffered during the pandemic, as it has for people in many sectors, further impacting their capacity to support children and young people. Our report calls for a dedicated plan to support teachers with targeted training to give them the necessary tools and skills to continue fulfilling their responsibilities.

Our report also highlights the growing number of children and young people in Scottish schools with additional support needs, and the particular challenges that they face with their health and wellbeing. In that context, we have requested an update on the implementation of the Scottish Government's additional support for learning action plan and, in particular, its impact on the health and wellbeing of children and young people with additional support needs.

During the inquiry, we heard many encouraging examples of close collaboration with youth workers and schools. We heard about the positive impact that youth workers can have in helping to mitigate some of the wider impacts of the pandemic, supporting young people towards positive destinations and reducing pressure on services such as CAMHS. Youth workers are often more accessible to young people, who might not want to speak to a teacher, for whatever reason. We encourage the Scottish Government to bring forward a follow-up national youth work strategy to continue to embed best practice more widely across the country.

I look forward to hearing the Scottish Government's response to the committee's report and to listening to other contributions to this afternoon's debate. Across the Parliament, we share a commitment to improving the health and wellbeing of young people. For our part, the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee will

continue to scrutinise progress in this area, so that all children and young people in Scotland are given the support and opportunities that they need if they are to be able to live long, healthy and happy lives.

15:10

**The Minister for Children and Young People (Clare Haughey):** I thank the committee for its inquiry report and for the opportunity to give evidence to its cross-portfolio inquiry. I am grateful for its focus on the health and wellbeing of children and young people and for the opportunity to speak about the Scottish Government's work in the area.

My ministerial colleagues and I place huge importance on the wellbeing of our children and young people. They are our future and it is vital that we do all we can to support their healthy development, the relationships that they build and their overall wellbeing.

The committee's report highlights the adverse impact of the pandemic on the health and wellbeing of our children and young people. As we recover from the pandemic, it is important that we get it right for every child and young person.

That is why improving the wellbeing of children and young people is one of the three key priorities that are set out in the Scottish Government's "Covid Recovery Strategy: for a fairer future". The strategy sets out key actions that we are undertaking to improve the wellbeing of children and young people, including action to support more active and healthier lives and targeted investment in our communities and schools.

We are also committed to delivering, over the course of this session of the Parliament, the £500 million whole family wellbeing funding that will enable the building of universal, holistic support services, which will be available in communities across Scotland and give families access to the help that they need, where and when they need it, for as long as they need it.

The wellbeing of children can be supported and promoted through the simple act of play, which gives our children the fun, excitement and friendship that can support healthy development as they grow through life. In 2021, I was delighted to see so many exciting projects and activities being funded by the £20 million get into summer programme, which offered enhanced opportunities for all children and young people to socialise, play and reconnect with their local communities and environments. I am pleased that a further £10 million has been invested in a targeted summer 2022 offer, which is designed to reach the school-age children and their families who can benefit most from access to free holiday childcare, activities and food.

Holiday childcare, especially over the long summer break, can be a cause of concern for families. We will build towards embedding a holiday childcare offer into a year-round school-age childcare system, which will help to reduce inequality of access to a wide range of activities around the school day and in the holidays.

Scotland is seen as a world leader in play as a result of the publication, in 2013, of the "Play Strategy for Scotland: Our Vision". The strategy has helped to deliver major improvements in how Government and our partners deliver play opportunities in our communities.

We are reinforcing our commitment to the importance of play by providing £60 million to local authorities for playpark renewal over this parliamentary session. The funding will support the acceleration of local plans to improve play opportunities for all children in Scotland. Ten million pounds of that funding has already been allocated, underpinned by a set of national principles that ensure that we prioritise engagement with children and young people, in order to meet their needs.

We recognise the huge importance of our partners in the third sector who deliver vital work to support the wellbeing of thousands of children and families across Scotland. Since 2016, we have been providing £14 million of core funding to the sector via our children, young people and families early intervention and adult learning and empowering communities fund. Last year alone, 116 organisations received funding and supported more than 2.4 million people.

As recognised by the committee report, schools play a key role in supporting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing, and we have continued to support them to deliver that vital role. We have committed to continued funding of £16 million per year to local authorities to provide counselling support services in all secondary schools in Scotland.

The personal and social education delivery and implementation group has already made good progress in delivering the recommendations of the personal and social education review. We remain committed to ensuring that the recommendations are delivered in full. That will help strengthen our excellent education system to help support our children and young people with the issues that they face as they grow up.

The Scottish Government is acutely aware that households across the country face a serious cost of living crisis—exacerbated by the UK Government's approach to Brexit—which, in turn, will impact on the wellbeing of children and families across Scotland. Those on the lowest incomes are being hit the hardest, with many of

those households likely to carry an increased burden of debt.

The recent measures that were announced by the UK Government are welcome, but they fall far short of what is needed to help the poorest households that are struggling now with the cost of living crisis. UK Government welfare cuts that have been imposed since 2015 have eroded the support for people who need it most. If those cuts were reversed, that would put an additional £780 million in the pockets of Scottish households in 2023-24, which would help to lift 70,000 people, including 30,000 children, out of poverty.

By contrast, the Scottish Government has declared that tackling child poverty is a national mission and has set out wide-ranging and ambitious action through “Best Start, Bright Futures: Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2022-2026”, which is our second tackling child poverty delivery plan.

Since publishing the plan in March, we have already doubled the value of our Scottish child payment to £20 per week for every eligible child under the age of six, and we have increased the value of a further eight Scottish social security benefits by 6 per cent, including our three best start grants. By the end of 2022, we will roll out the Scottish child payment for eligible children under the age of 16, and we will further increase the value of the payment to £25 per week for every eligible child. That will further enhance the already unparalleled financial support that we provide across the early years. By the end of this year, that support will be worth a maximum of over £10,000 for a family’s first child by the time they turn six; that is over £8,200 more than is available elsewhere in the UK.

Our plan commits to £10 million this year to mitigate the UK Government benefit cap as fully as possible within devolved powers—supporting up to 4,000 households with children. We have also committed to invest up to £81 million this year to deliver a new employability offer for parents, which is focused on providing the holistic wraparound support that they need to access and progress in work. Taken together, the actions set out in “Best Start, Bright Futures” could help to lift more than 60,000 children out of relative poverty in 2023-24.

We remain committed to incorporating the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into Scots law. In May, the Deputy First Minister set out in Parliament how we intend to address the Supreme Court judgment, bring an amended bill back to Parliament and secure royal assent. I am delighted that we can now move forward with legislation that will require all Scotland’s public authorities to take proactive

steps to ensure the protection of children’s rights in their decision making and service delivery.

The health and wellbeing of children and young people is a key priority not just for the Scottish Government but for our whole society. I am passionate about that, and I will continue to work with everyone to ensure that Scotland’s children grow up healthy, happy, safe and loved and that they achieve their full potential, and I recognise that we need to support families to achieve that ambition.

15:18

**Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con):** One of my constituents wrote to me in desperation about her 13-year-old granddaughter. She cannot sleep and has regular massive bouts of crying at home and at school. She is suffering so much from mental health problems that the family is at a loss as to know what might become of her. Her teachers believe that she has attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. It took nine months for her mother to get a virtual appointment with child and adolescent mental health services only to be told that they had to wait to be seen by another specialist, probably in eight months’ time.

That young person and her family are struggling to get by. They tried calling the crisis team but found that it is only concerned about suicide. They have also offered to go private to see a child psychologist but have been told that their education board can only act on recommendations from an NHS CAMHS specialist.

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** I am wondering whether that is part of the evidence that we took for the committee’s report. I thought that we were supposed to be speaking about the report.

**Sandesh Gulhane:** Gillian Martin is in the chamber to speak on behalf of the committee. We are here to talk about not only the report but what we have been told and what we find out as we work. I am telling members about somebody who wrote to me because of the work that our committee was doing.

That grandmother signed off her email with these words:

“Please help. Please help—we are desperate.”

This is June 2022. The Scottish National Party Government’s own standard says that 90 per cent of children and young people should start treatment within 18 weeks of referral to CAMHS. However, that target has never been met since it was introduced in December 2014, more than seven years ago. Members could be forgiven for thinking that, by now, it would be a priority for the

SNP Government but, given Tuesday's fanfare announcement to the media, it clearly is not, is it?

As we drill into the debate, it is important to be clear that, when we home in on failures, we mean systemic failures, strategic failures and failure to plan, resource and protect people and services. We are in no way pointing the finger of blame at families or at professionals in schools and healthcare teams, who are working tirelessly on the front line.

We recognise the hard work and dedication of so many people who are at the forefront of guiding and caring for Scotland's children and young people: our country's paediatricians, mental health professionals, campaigners, teachers, parents and guardians. The past two and a half years have been particularly tough and many of those people are suffering with poor mental health, exhaustion and burn-out. We need to take stock of where we are and move forward. The Parliament must step up and do its duty to look after our young people and the people who support them.

We are all aware of the significant impact that the pandemic has had on the mental health of children and young people but, as the committee's report highlights, the full extent of that impact and how long lasting it will be have yet to be fully understood. However, as many parents and teachers know for sure, waiting lists for CAMHS are far too long by anyone's yardsticks. Notwithstanding recent investment to increase capacity, our committee has heard extensive evidence of persistently long waits and the negative impact that that is having on the mental health of children and young people who are affected. There is a continuing need for the SNP-Green Government to prioritise investment to further increase the capacity of CAMHS and reduce waiting times.

**The Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care (Kevin Stewart):** Long waits are unacceptable and we remain committed to meeting the standard that 90 per cent of patients should start treatment within 18 weeks by March 2023. I point out to Dr Gulhane that the number of children and young people beginning treatment under CAMHS is at an all-time high. The latest national performance data shows that more than 5,000 children and young people began treatment in the last quarter. That is the highest number ever recorded.

**Sandesh Gulhane:** And yet, our waiting lists are the longest ever. That is the problem. The problem with the SNP-Green Government is that it pats itself on the back instead of thinking what can be done for the people—the children—of Scotland. On that note, I am pleased that Scottish Conservative councillors are keen to introduce

trained mental health leads in every school to help to improve children's wellbeing.

We are also worried about poor mental health among girls. The Government does not seem to have a strategy on that, nor is it tackling poor body image, which bothers many teenagers—boys increasingly but particularly girls. Viewing digitally altered body shapes on social media is impacting children's self-esteem. As many as one in three teenagers in the UK feels some shame about their body, and 94 per cent of girls aged 11 to 21 believe that more needs to be done to protect young people from body image pressures online.

Members might wish to take a look at a campaign by Dr Luke Evans MP. His body image pledge calls on brands, charities and organisations to promise not to digitally manipulate a person's body proportions in any of their direct images. A bill that is going through Westminster would require advertisers and influencers to label images that have been digitally altered.

**Clare Haughey:** I am keen to hear what representations Sandesh Gulhane has made to the UK Government on amendments to the Online Safety Bill that is currently going through Westminster, to which he referred.

**Sandesh Gulhane:** I am supporting Dr Luke Evans, as I have just asked the chamber to do. That is what we need to do: we need to do actual, practical things in order to help people.

The Scottish Government's commitment to increasing funding for sport and physical activity over the course of this parliamentary session needs to be accompanied by a national strategy with clear and measurable goals for achieving increased physical activity and improved physical health for Scotland's children and young people. The status quo is not good enough. Scotland continues to face significant challenges, with 29 per cent of children at risk of being obese or overweight, which leads to significant problems. In my general practitioner surgery, we are seeing a rise in the number of children who are developing type 2 diabetes, which is related to obesity, poor diet and a lack of exercise. We need to make healthy foods more affordable and available to families, particularly people from low-income households. We also want funding commitments over the course of the session to remove barriers to accessing sport and physical activity, including play, for those families, as the minister said earlier.

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

**Sandesh Gulhane:** I am afraid that I have already taken three interventions.

I am pleased to say that Scottish Conservative councils are keen to reintroduce primary 5

swimming lessons, and to deliver more support for children and youth groups.

Finally, the SNP-Green Government really needs to tackle new and growing threats to the health of our young people. It is estimated that 10,000 Scots children now suffer from long Covid. Those children are victims of the pandemic that the SNP-Green Government has forgotten. I have been calling for long Covid clinics since the summer of 2021. We have all heard the SNP-Green Government announce money, but there has been little in the way of action. Last September, £10 million was pledged, but last month, that was revised down to £3 million for this year. We understand that there is now a pilot project in NHS Lothian involving 70 patients of all ages, which is aimed at courting support. That is a start, but with 150,000 Scots struggling with long Covid, we urge the Government to get a grip faster.

The health and wellbeing of our children and young people has fallen by the wayside. Yes, the situation has been exacerbated by the pandemic, but we were on a downward trajectory well before March 2020. For sure, the issues that are being debated are complex and multifaceted, but let us not forget that our country's young people are our country's future.

Finally—if I may be indulged, Presiding Officer—we all need to be aware of the fact that more and more school-age children are using drugs. In a BBC report this week, a Glasgow-based physical education teacher said that he sees at least one student every day turning up in class after taking cocaine, cannabis or amphetamines. That was echoed by a teacher in Ayrshire and a Unison representative for classroom assistants. Few teachers are trained in how to deal with children who are under the influence of drugs, but they are having to deal with growing numbers of those children, which poses a safety risk to the children, other pupils and school staff. We need to provide help to our teachers and schools.

I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of interests—I am a practising NHS doctor.

15:27

**Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab):** I am pleased to open the debate for Scottish Labour.

We welcome the committee's report into the health and wellbeing of children and young people. That is an overlooked and important subject that requires much greater attention, especially as a cost of living crisis looks set to grasp hold of many families for months, and possibly years, to come. Let us hope that that

does not continue for years—but let us hope that, in the Parliament, we all commit to taking the necessary action to ensure that, if it does, it does not affect our young people. We must do that in every way that we can.

The evidence is overwhelming. It is not just that there are too many children living in poverty in Scotland—even one is too many—but that as many as one in four children is living in poverty. I will say that again: one in four children in this country lives in poverty.

In a great number of cases, those children are not living in homes where no one works, although the right-wing media would like to paint that picture sometimes. Those children are often from working families that simply cannot put food on the table. There are many factors as to why that is the case. Above all, for me, it is a matter of people being underpaid and abandoned to insecure work that simply does not provide enough to raise a family on. If we change that, the mental and physical health of young people across Scotland will begin to improve, year on year.

Naturally, young people cannot wait for all Governments to get their act together, so we must reflect on the marked effects that deprivation has on mental health as well as on physical health right now, and we must do all that we can to prevent inequality and ensure that prevention strategies are properly funded so that our young people's health is protected right now.

The committee recognised that we must look at CAMHS. At the end of March 2022, more than 10,000 children and young people were waiting for CAMHS treatment. I know that this is said every week to the minister in this chamber, but it appears not to be being heard: these figures are unacceptable and clearly demonstrate the SNP's long-term inability to improve mental health services. For eight years, the First Minister has followed the same script about her Government's priorities with regard to young people, but young people need action, not rhetoric.

That includes, as the report highlights, dealing with the limited capacity in our mental health workforce. We clearly cannot wait for the SNP Government's workforce plan to bear fruit. We have to train and employ a generation of new mental health workers on good wages who can commit their working lives to helping to tackle this problem. Scottish Labour is calling for real investment in mental health services to bring down waiting lists and put specialists in every GP practice, and I reiterate that call today. The Scottish Government must prioritise the issue and do more.

We Labour members recognise that many young people have unpaid caring responsibilities,

as the report mentions. Despite that, there is no real strategy in Scotland for unpaid carers—particularly young carers. We heard a lot of evidence about that. Those young carers desperately need the restoration and expansion of respite services, with entitlements to short breaks and wellbeing services as standard. They are entitled to those things and we should press to ensure that they are available across the country.

It has been raised with me that we must also continue to analyse and report on the impact of Covid-19—particularly the impact of long Covid on the health and wellbeing of children and young people—and consider what challenges that is already creating and will create in the future, ensuring that that influences any policies that we implement.

All those reforms will help us to focus on prevention and early intervention in the immediate term, while wider economic change is, I believe, inevitable and essential. The cost of living crisis is rapidly exposing how thin our safety net is, and, in my opinion, the entire concept of employment and the ways in which the state protects and assists its most vulnerable people need to be revisited to create something that is fit for the 21st century.

There is no reason why a wealthy and prosperous country such as ours should even have to worry about this problem; it should be the first order of every day in every Parliament across this country. However, under successive Governments of all stripes, not enough has been done. That has to stop. We all have to do more.

I am sure that I speak for my party and many people in the Parliament and around the country when I say that the current state of provision is well below what is acceptable and we will not continue to put up with it.

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** Carol Mochan has been talking about tackling poverty, and supporting people's salaries is obviously one of way of doing that. Does she agree that one way in which we could tackle poverty would be to fully devolve employment law to this country?

**Carol Mochan:** The member knows that we, on these benches, have called for a number of measures. However, when we debate these issues, I would like the Government and back-bench members to come forward with plans that we can implement now. They often tell us that change takes a long time, so let us use what we have here and now to do everything that we can to ensure that children and young people do not live in poverty.

The last Labour Government went some way towards reducing child poverty, but our understanding and methods to combat it have moved on since then, so we will not rest. That is

why Scottish Labour's focused plan has, at its heart, a child poverty commission that will develop real plans to tackle child poverty—we hope—once and for all.

As I said at the start of the debate, if we want to alter the trajectory of young people's health and wellbeing over the long term, the only solution is sustained investment in services. The Scottish Government must do more to commit to mental health services, in particular. We must look at employing more qualified staff on good salaries. Again, the Scottish Government must do more on that than it has done so far. Above all, we must wipe away that low-pay, insecure world of work that so many families barely earn a living from. All Governments must do more in that regard.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You need to conclude now.

**Carol Mochan:** I thank my colleagues from the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee for their work on the report, and I look forward to ensuring that the actions that are recommended in it are delivered.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You need to conclude.

**Carol Mochan:** I hope that the committee members will see themselves in the important role of holding the Scottish Government to account.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We now have no time in hand, so members will have to stick to their allocated speaking times and accommodate interventions within that.

15:36

**Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** I extend my apologies to the chamber, because I will be called away briefly, although I will be back for the closing speeches.

Debates such as this are why I am in politics. This topic is what keeps me, as a youth worker of 19 years and a children's charity worker of 13 years, up at night. I am therefore grateful to the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee for bringing this important debate to the chamber today. The committee's report offers much food for thought, but, as many members have done already, I will focus on the state of Scotland's child and adolescent mental health services.

I am sure that many other MSPs will attest to the fact that, in recent months, there has been a noticeable uptick in our mailbags on the subject of unfulfilled child and adolescent mental health needs. In large part, that is down to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown isolation. However, it is also symptomatic of the fact that we have not been getting things right for a long time.

Many have the same story to tell of a young person who is brave enough to ask for help but has to wait an unacceptably long time in order to get it.

Some of the stories are truly harrowing. Many of our children and young people are suffering terribly and without the support that they desperately need. Problems that already existed before the pandemic have been heightened and exacerbated by it, and that is small wonder. Our young people have had to face deep uncertainty about their future while being denied normal access to education and prevented from socialising with their peers—all at a time of deep societal mass anxiety.

Although the pandemic has had an undeniable impact, it would be wrong to ascribe all the failures in the CAMHS system to it. As Audit Scotland has highlighted, mental health care for children and young people was already struggling to meet and keep pace with demand before any of us had heard of Covid-19. To illustrate how dire the situation is, the latest statistics from Public Health Scotland—some of which we have heard already—show that the Government's 18-week mental health treatment waiting time target was being missed for almost 30 per cent of children and that 1,600 children and 4,400 adults waited more than a year for treatment.

I heard the minister say that more children are being seen than ever before, but we really need to debate and get to grips with the unmet need, which is where the Government has fallen woefully behind. I ask members to think about what that chunk of time in a young person's life means.

**Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP):** In our evidence, we found that the picture across Scotland was variable and that there are areas of Scotland that are getting it right. Does Alex Cole-Hamilton agree that we really need to look at it on a health-board-by-health-board basis and, where there is good practice and waiting times are coming down, replicate the good practice and share it, so that we can learn from the boards that are getting it right?

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** Gillian Martin is certainly right about the geographical variability, but that is not something to be pleased about. With regard to rural and remote areas, in particular, the paucity of in-patient tier 4 beds for children anywhere north of Dundee is a scandal. The Government really needs to reflect on that.

Amid that, the latest CAMHS workforce figures show a fall in the number of staff who are working in vital specialist in-patient settings, as I just described. The professionals who are charged with supporting young people are clear that the current system is inadequate—it is leaving

children to suffer without the help that they need, and heartbroken parents are powerless to help, which has a demonstrable impact on their wellbeing as well.

The reality of CAMHS is that a person does not get a referral unless their need is deemed critical, which means that the demand for the service might be being vastly underestimated. We are faced with unprecedented demand for those services and fewer staff to meet that demand. Successive health secretaries have spent years trying to spin a positive tale even as the waits for young people get longer and longer. They should take a long, hard look at themselves for that. I have challenged the First Minister about it on countless occasions, yet we still find ourselves in this dreadful position. It became a crisis many years ago, and that crisis, which the Government seems wholly unequal to coming to terms with, is sustained to this day.

Liberal Democrats have long championed the cause of Scotland's mental health. We secured £120 million for it in last year's budget and we lodged a motion, which was backed by the Scottish Parliament, to declare a national mental health emergency. We believe that everyone should have access to good local mental health services, and we have called for mental health first aiders at every stage of education. That starts with having a trained talking therapist—a counsellor—available in every school in Scotland.

The Government should also lower the referral bar for young people from deprived communities, because we know that those who are at risk of multiple adverse experiences need access to early support. We still do not know who they are or where they are. We need to capture that information and get help and healing to them fast.

Changes should be made to the CAMHS system now. There should be a single point of contact for CAMHS waiting lists so that GPs and families can understand whether remaining on that list offers a real opportunity of timely care.

The Government needs to act. As the committee's report recommends, it needs to provide a detailed timeline to clear CAMHS waiting lists. We need action backed up by fresh funds for mental health services and more local and accessible services and practitioners. Instead, in its spending review, the Government failed to provide any detail at all of how it intends to meet its manifesto commitment to ensure that 1 per cent of the front-line healthcare budget is spent on CAMHS by 2026 or how it will ensure adequate staffing of CAMHS.

What is most troubling about the delays in treatment is that some young people's mental health will deteriorate unnecessarily while they

wait for that treatment. Many of them are reaching crisis point, which could have been avoided, and that is heartbreaking.

When it comes to the health and wellbeing of young people, Scotland has a chance to do things differently. In recent years, our young people have made serious sacrifices in order to keep others safe. It is time that we recognised that and met it with action.

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

15:42

**Siobhian Brown (Ayr) (SNP):** I thank the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee for its inquiry and for bringing the debate to the chamber today.

As my colleagues in the COVID-19 Recovery Committee will agree, the pandemic has had a massive effect across all areas of public life, and as we heard in committee, children and young people's health and wellbeing are no exception.

On Monday, with many other parents, I attended my youngest daughter's first sports day. I am pleased to report that she came first in the egg and spoon race. Needless to say, she does not take her sporting abilities from me. My eldest had her school leaving prom last week; I cannot tell you how lovely it was to attend both events and to see some sense of normality returning for our kids. My point in bringing that up is that small events in a person's life contribute massively to their wellbeing. Being surrounded by friends and family and celebrating together is, unfortunately, something that our young people have, largely, missed out on for the past two years.

During the pandemic, we asked Scotland's young people to do what none of us had to do at their age: we asked them to give up all sense of normality. We asked them to stay inside, to stay away from their friends, and to do their school work from home. That it was necessary at the time did not make it any easier. We should all say a big "Thank you" to our young people for the sacrifices that they made for the greater good. Our children are our future.

I welcome the committee's recommendation that "the long-term impact of the pandemic remains a key consideration in the future design and development of mental health services and support for children and young people."

It has never been more important to look after our mental health, so I welcome the fact that the Scottish Government is providing record investment to improve the nation's wellbeing and our mental health services. The Scottish Government's mental health transition and

recovery plan investment of £120 million is the single largest investment in mental health in the history of devolution.

I also welcome mention in the committee's report of healthy eating and obesity and, more specifically, of the link between poverty and poor diet. I do not think that we should beat around the bush: childhood obesity is too high and we need to do more to combat it. I welcome that Scotland is leading the way to expand access to free school meals, so that more children can feel the benefits of nutritious cooked meals during the week.

When I last visited South Ayrshire Foodbank, volunteers told me that some people who are using the service need a bit more information on healthy eating and cooking. We could look at improving aspects of home economics education in our schools to counteract that.

We all know the impact that living in poverty can have on the health and wellbeing of Scotland's most vulnerable people, so tackling poverty is one of the Scottish Government's priorities. Despite the rapidly rising living costs under the Tories' watch, the UK Government ploughed ahead with the cruel £20 cut a week to universal credit, which has financially impacted on more than 60,000 families, including their children, in Scotland. That comes on top of a decade of enforced Tory austerity, changes to the benefits system and—as we are all aware—a rapid increase in use of food banks.

"Best Start, Bright Futures: Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2022-2026", sets out the Scottish Government's bold action to drive progress on tackling child poverty. A recent Child Poverty Action Group report shows that the cost of bringing up a child in Scotland will be lowered by 31 per cent—equivalent to £24,000—once the Scottish child payment is doubled and the expansion of free school meals is delivered.

**Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con):** Scotland has the lowest level of breakfast provision of all four UK nations and the lowest number of pupils per school on average accessing breakfast provision each school day. Can you explain why that has been allowed to unfold under the SNP Government?

**Siobhian Brown:** Thank you for your scripted question.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Could both members address points through the chair, rather than addressing each other as "you", please?

**Siobhian Brown:** I am sorry, Presiding Officer. Yes, we are dedicated to expanding free breakfast provision throughout schools.

The newly doubled Scottish child payment, together with the three best start grants and the

best start food payment, will be worth more than £10,000 by the time a family's first child turns six, and it will be worth £9,700 for a second child and subsequent children.

The Government's actions are putting money in the pockets of families now, which, as we know, is desperately needed because of the cost of living crisis. The policies and funding that it is putting in place across all areas are vital in achievement of our goal of making Scotland the best place for children to grow up in.

Progress is being made. I know that every MSP, regardless of their political colour, shares the Government's ambition. I highlight today's news that South Ayrshire leads Scotland with 97.6 per cent of school leavers going on to positive destinations—work, training or further study.

I thought that a 2019 report by the World Health Organization and UNICEF made an interesting point. It was that no country in the world is providing the conditions for children to live a healthy life and an environment that is fit for the future. That means that, although richer countries might invest in children's health, they are also producing record amounts of CO<sub>2</sub>, which will affect children all over the world in years to come. That demonstrates that, as with everything else in politics, we must take a multifaceted approach when it comes to the health of our children. We cannot tackle it through one policy area alone. The report also shows that the challenges that we are facing in Scotland are not unique but are being experienced all over the world, and were even before the pandemic began.

If we continue to make children's wellbeing our priority, we can get it right for every child and can make Scotland a country that is healthy, nurtured and active.

15:48

**Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con):** I am very grateful for the opportunity to speak in this important committee debate. I offer my apologies, because I will need to leave the chamber before the conclusion of this afternoon's debate.

I, too, thank the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee for publishing its report, which makes 99 recommendations for the Government to consider in order that it can improve the wellbeing of young Scots. It now falls to the Government to consider seriously the recommendations and to make much-needed improvements.

In March, the Scottish Parliament restated its commitment to keeping the Promise and improving outcomes for care-experienced young people. Although that was welcome, the SNP ignored calls from the Conservatives to

acknowledge the concerns that had been raised by various charities and third party organisations that work directly with young people in care. I found it upsetting that, during the minister's opening remarks, not one reference was made to care-experienced young people.

**Clare Haughey:** The member will accept that I had only limited time. I referred in my speech to the whole family wellbeing fund, which is specifically for fulfilling the Promise.

**Meghan Gallacher:** I thank Clare Haughey for her intervention. However, given that the Promise is one of the Government's flagship policies and a recommendation of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee, I would have thought that there would be more focus on the matter in the minister's opening remarks.

On top of that, more concerns have emerged since the SNP's handling of implementation of the Promise. The concerns outline a lack of progress since the independent peer review that was initially launched in February 2020.

Recently, I had the opportunity to meet Fiona McFarlane, who is the head of oversight at the Promise Scotland, to discuss the work that the oversight board is undertaking to ensure that the Promise is rolled out. She has been critical of the level of progress that the Government has made in the past two years, and she admitted that young people's lives will not have improved but might even, in some instances, have got worse.

A study that was conducted by the Promise Scotland oversight board found that the pledge that had been made by the Government in 2020 was more of a commitment than a true implementation plan. One of the main flaws in the Government's Promise policy relates to a lack of meaningful data or true understanding of young people in care. For example, the study shows that between 2019 and the first nine months of 2021, 59 young people died, of whom 17 were children in care, seven were in continuing care and 35 were in throughcare and aftercare. One death of a young person in care is one death too many. It is heartbreaking that the data on the lives of those young people has not been properly recorded.

Failure to understand young people not only makes recording data more difficult—it fails to provide authorities with important information that could prevent future deaths. Although MSPs can accept that the Promise has been described as a 10-year transformational change, those problems have existed for years.

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

**Meghan Gallacher:** No. I am sorry; I have a lot to get through.

The SNP is failing young people in care by not urgently addressing the glaring issues in implementation of the Promise. That must change.

As I have mentioned before, we are corporate parents. It is our responsibility make sure that we are listening to young people who have experienced the care system so that we can ensure that the Promise can get back on track. I would be grateful for the minister's committing today to ensuring that appropriate data will be recorded about young people in care, which has previously been rejected by the Scottish Government.

Before I move on, I will raise a local issue that was brought to my attention by a campaigner from Who Cares? Scotland. Despite council tax having been abolished for care leavers five years ago, South Lanarkshire Council does not provide any information on reductions for care leavers. The information is not even listed in the "Am I eligible?" section of the forms. Other councils, such as Highland Council, have a whole section on exemptions for care leavers, but no mechanism for people to select that option. The individual whom I interacted with on social media stated:

"Policies don't matter if they are still inaccessible after 4 years".

If there is a quotation to take away from today's debate, that should be it.

There are also good examples of best practice. City of Edinburgh and Stirling councils display a clear page for care leavers and offer a 25 per cent discount on council tax for other household occupants. Aberdeen City Council has gone a step further by extending the offer to care-experienced young people who have been in kinship care and, who might not have met the definition of care leaver.

However, those examples highlight the inconsistency in the support that is being offered by councils to care leavers and care-experienced young people. It should not be a postcode lottery. I hope that the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Scottish Government will work together to ensure that support for the health and wellbeing of care-experienced young Scots improves across all levels of government.

Presiding Officer, I was hoping to cover mental health and the mental ill-health pandemic that is affecting our young people today, but I realise that I am quickly running out of time. I also understand that the issue has been articulated by many other MSPs in the debate.

The issues that I have raised cover just a few of the recommendations that are set out in the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee's report. The report lays bare the failings of the SNP

Scottish Government and illustrates the measures that we must take to ensure that young people across Scotland receive the necessary help and support. The only way the Scottish Government can fully focus on the day job is if it drops its obsession with breaking up the United Kingdom.

15:54

**Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP):** I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in the debate, as the health and wellbeing of our young people are central to our nation's future.

In reflecting on the inquiry into the health and wellbeing of young people this year, it is important to ask what it really means to be a healthy young person. "Healthy" can mean different things to different people but, generally, it means a state of positive physical, mental and social wellbeing. Simply put, it means that someone is happy, thriving and flourishing. That chimes with the Scottish Government's getting it right for every child, or GIRFEC, policy approach, which seeks to ensure that all our young people are safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included.

The committee looked at the barriers to achieving positive health and wellbeing. Time and again, we heard how poverty harms our children and young people. So far, much of the debate has focused on poverty, and it will be my focus, too—I make absolutely no apology for that. In the oral evidence sessions, Heather Connolly of the British Psychological Society, among others, concluded that the biggest issue affecting the health and wellbeing of children is poverty, and that message was echoed again and again.

Aberlour has highlighted the impact of poverty on the family as a whole and reminded us that children spend only around 15 per cent of their time in school. That is why so much of the third sector's work to support children's learning focuses on family wellbeing by, for example, helping with challenges around family relationships, struggles with debt and domestic abuse.

The committee heard worrying evidence about how poverty damages health and wellbeing and that the pandemic has hit the poorest the hardest. However, despite all the evidence, the UK Government ploughed ahead with a deadly £20 cut to universal credit, which pushed a further 20,000 children into poverty. That was a really callous and disturbing decision. As the cost of living crisis pushes even more families into poverty, our children will again pay the price through the impact on their health and wellbeing.

Child poverty is a scourge that means growing up without access to good, decent and nutritious food. It means missing out on sport and other healthy activities, saying no to fun with friends and home living conditions that strain family relationships and make it really difficult to study and to learn. Hungry children from cold and damp homes, with parents who are battling poverty every day, will struggle to learn, grow and thrive in our classrooms and in our society more generally.

Poverty has a clear and undeniable negative impact on the mental health of whole families and, as we have heard, it often leaves children feeling stigmatised and isolated. In many struggling families, children are in the heartbreaking situation of looking out for their parents and, in effect, shouldering the responsibilities of poverty. We cannot ignore the stories of kids hiding their school trip leaflets or avoiding social get-togethers with their friends. Too often, having fun costs money, and those kids do not want their parents to feel as though they are letting down their children. Those stories are a clear manifestation of the impact of poverty on our young people's wellbeing.

Of the committee's 99 recommendations, I will highlight two that I believe are the absolute cornerstones of enhancing children's health and wellbeing. The first is recommendation 32, which calls on the Scottish Government

"to further prioritise spending to mitigate the adverse impact of poverty on the health and wellbeing of children and young people."

The second is recommendation 42, which states:

"Tackling poverty has to be at the heart of an effective strategy to improve the health and wellbeing of children and young people."

In evidence to the committee, Heather Connolly, from the British Psychological Society, told the committee:

"If we do not target poverty and child poverty, all the other money that we are spending on services and early interventions will not work as well. People will not be able to engage with those services, because they will still be too worried about getting food on the table or getting clothes for their kids in order that they can go to school. They will not feel safe and secure or a sense of hope that things will get better; therefore, they will be unlikely to engage with services or professionals."—[*Official Report, Health, Social Care and Sport Committee*, 11 January 2022; c 26-7.]

That is why the Scottish Government continues to invest in actions to tackle the blight of poverty in 2022, as we have heard. I again highlight that more than 100,000 children have already been supported with the Scottish child payment, and I welcome the further roll-out of the payment to 400,000 children by the end of this year. It is also worth mentioning that, this week, encouraging figures were published on positive destinations for school leavers. The gap is narrowing.

In the absence of fiscal autonomy, we, as a devolved Government, are confined to balancing public finances without being able to borrow. However, as Audit Scotland's recent report acknowledges, the Scottish Government has successfully delivered existing social security benefits and has introduced complex new ones—including the Scottish child payment, the child disability payment and the adult disability payment—in challenging circumstances, amid a pandemic. Audit Scotland highlights that as a significant achievement, and we must continue to step up to such challenges, because our young people are counting on us to make Scotland the best place in the world to grow up in.

Yesterday, the First Minister fired the starting gun on a new campaign for Scottish independence, and she will set out a vision over the coming weeks and months. That vision will have tackling poverty and inequality at its centre, and it could dramatically improve the life chances of our young children. I can think of no better case for independence than finally being fiscally free to invest in strategies that will lift all children out of poverty, thereby enhancing their health and wellbeing.

16:01

**Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab):** It is a pleasure to contribute to today's debate. I pay tribute to all colleagues on the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee. I do not sit on the committee, but I keep a close eye on it, given the importance of its work.

I do not intend to take up the full time that I have available today. I will try to focus my remarks on the crisis that our child and adolescent mental health services face by highlighting the real-life challenges and consequences that many of our constituents live with as a result of that crisis.

The report on the health and wellbeing of children and young people highlights many challenges, but, for me, the starkest of all relates to the pressures that CAMHS across Scotland face. The most recent Public Health Scotland data shows that, at the end of 2021, almost 10,500 children and young people were waiting to be seen by CAMHS. Of that number, 46 per cent were waiting longer than the 18-week target that the Government has set. That is an extraordinary number of children and young people who are, to be frank, being failed by the system. We know that that target is vital. In its submission to the inquiry, Social Work Scotland stated that "long delays" in accessing treatment can lead to "more entrenched difficulties" by the time a child or young person is finally able to access the service.

There is no denying that the impact of the pandemic has been hugely significant, and the report acknowledges that. However, if anything, that makes it all the more important that we get on top of the problem now. We could talk about statistics all day—I am sure that that would be done with the best of intentions—but we cannot shy away from the fact that there are real-life consequences to delays in accessing CAMHS.

**Gillian Martin:** Recommendation 11 in the report points to the “turnaround” in waiting times in NHS Grampian. Does Paul Sweeney agree—I made a similar point to Alex Cole-Hamilton—that we need to look at where there is best practice and where there has been a turnaround, and that we should replicate what is working elsewhere across the country?

**Paul Sweeney:** I absolutely recognise that. We need to have in place much more robust mechanisms that show us where performance is good and how that can be quickly cross-pollinated to other health boards in different areas, because there is an administrative lag in the bureaucracy across Scotland—things are quite fragmented. That is a constructive suggestion about how we move forward, and I commend it. I encourage the committee to press that issue with the minister. I hope that he has heard Gillian Martin’s comments and will address the issue in his closing speech.

I will mention a constituency case that troubled me so much. I was contacted by a constituent regarding his 13-year-old daughter, who is care experienced and was adopted by the family about eight years ago. The pandemic had a profound effect on her. The lockdown and the lack of school routine and normal socialising led to some challenging behaviour at home—so much so that the family sought a CAMHS referral on 2 June 2020. More than two years later, there is still no timeline or indication of when she will be given access to the services that she needs.

In April 2021, the family’s GP made another referral, due to the deterioration in her mental condition and a perceived increase in risk. That particular crisis led to an emergency CAMHS appointment, but the assessment was that she should remain on a routine waiting list. Heartbreakingly, she wants to engage with CAMHS and cannot understand why she is being made to wait so long. As the chamber will appreciate, that situation is not only having an adverse impact on my constituent’s daughter; the challenging behaviour is having an adverse impact on the whole family, one of whom has been sitting her national 5 exams in recent months.

My constituent is just one of the parents who find themselves in that position, and his daughter is sadly one of thousands of kids who are waiting for vital treatment. It is clear that, in many

circumstances, the 18-week target for treatment is nothing more than a cruel pipe dream. In my constituent’s case, that target has not been missed marginally. We are now 106 weeks down the line—a period almost six times longer than the 18-week target—and the family is no further forward, with no light at the end of the tunnel.

The longer we continue to shirk that issue, the longer children and their families will continue to be failed by the system. I ask the minister to engage with that issue constructively and request that my constituent’s case be looked at urgently. I am happy to share the details with her if she agrees today to intervene and insist that the case is resolved with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde.

Fundamentally, we need to do much better, because we are currently failing thousands of children across Scotland who desperately need our help.

16:06

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** As a member of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee, I welcome the opportunity to speak about how important it is that we value the health and wellbeing of our young people in Scotland. I thank colleagues and everyone who contributed to the inquiry.

Our committee’s report speired, or inquired, into a range of issues and covered a number of areas. It is worth reading the report, but I will focus my contribution specifically on three of the areas that I have been actively involved in: supporting folk experiencing eating disorders, health and wellbeing support for young people in school and education settings, and poverty.

First, a number of submissions to our inquiry highlighted a recent rise in demand from children and young people who need support for eating disorders. The pandemic has exacerbated that trend, with a reported increase of 86 per cent in referrals to specialists between 2019 and 2021.

People with eating disorders typically develop severe physical health problems, and overall quality of life has been estimated to be as low as in symptomatic coronary heart disease or severe depression. Access to the right treatment and support is life changing, and early intervention provides the best chance of recovery.

In our report, we call on the Scottish Government to outline what it is doing to respond to the recommendations of the national review of eating disorder services, including details of any funding that it is putting in place to support their implementation.

I welcome that the minister outlined the Government’s response to the recommendations

during a members' business debate, which I led, on eating disorders awareness week. He outlined that the Scottish Government's

"transition and recovery plan ... is backed by the £120 million recovery and renewal fund, which will help to transform"

eating disorder

"services, with a renewed focus on prevention and early intervention."

Additionally, the Government announced

"£5 million to implement the recommendations of the national eating disorders review"—[*Official Report*, 1 March 2022; c 98.]

as well as "more than £400,000" of funding for the fantastic charity Beat to enable it to continue its vital work.

I welcome those steps and ask the minister, in closing, for a commitment that the Government will continue its support to Beat.

I turn to health and wellbeing support in schools. In our report, the committee recognises the central and pivotal role that schools have to play in co-ordinating a whole-systems approach to supporting the health and wellbeing of children and young people. Counselling can help children and young people to explore, understand and overcome issues in their lives to improve resilience.

In Dumfries and Galloway in my South Scotland region, the council has received national recognition, including from Young Scot, for its innovative approach to school counsellors. The local authority has provided the youth enquiry team with access to counselling education, destigmatising the language around the word "counsellor" and encouraging more young people to access support, should they require it. I welcome that action and encourage other local authorities to look at the example of Dumfries and Galloway Council, which seeks to improve services with the aim of achieving the best possible health and wellbeing outcomes for our young people. I will follow up the outcomes and the measurements of the goals and aims of that adopted approach.

Against a backdrop of a cost of living crisis, the pandemic, Brexit and harmful UK Government welfare policies, the Scottish Government continues to mitigate cruel Tory cuts that harm our young people. We know that living in poverty can have severe impacts on health and wellbeing, which is why tackling child poverty, as our committee asked for, is rightly a national mission for the Government. Indeed, in its report, our committee notes that it

"has been struck by the volume of evidence it has received showing the overriding impact poverty and deprivation has on the health and wellbeing of children and young people."

I jalousie that the Opposition will nae like tae hear this, but it has to be accepted that this poverty is largely down to the UK Government, as Mary Glasgow from Children 1st indicated during the inquiry. Despite the rapidly rising living costs under the Tories' watch, the UK Government ploughed ahead with a cruel £20 cut to universal credit, which pushed 60,000 Scots, including 20,000 children, into poverty.

Scottish Government analysis found that reversing key UK Government welfare reforms that have been made since 2015 would bring around 70,000 people in Scotland out of poverty, including 30,000 children, in 2023-24. The total cost of reversing those reforms, including the two-child limit, the removal of the family element, the benefit freeze, and changes to universal credit work allowances and the taper rate, would be around £780 million per annum.

Presiding Officer, "mitigate, mitigate, mitigate" are the words that my colleague Christine Grahame used in another recent debate. She said that she was fed up with talking about mitigating Tory policy and I am also fed up with mitigating Tory policy. It is time that the announcement about the independence referendum, the move towards it and the full fiscal autonomy that Stephanie Callaghan talked about in her contribution were taken forward, along with the actions that will support the mental health and wellbeing of all our citizens in Scotland including our children and young people.

16:12

**Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green):** I welcome this debate on the health and wellbeing of young people and thank all those who gave evidence to the committee.

During committee sessions, we heard a wealth of evidence about how the pandemic has impacted on children and young people and the services that care for them. It has been a turbulent two years for young people, who have seen their education disrupted, their social lives restricted and, unfortunately, in some cases, their loved ones becoming very ill. In the wake of multiple lockdowns, it is vital that we examine the many ways in which young people have been affected, and what that means for their health.

The committee report recommends that the Scottish Government and other key stakeholders should continue to monitor the long-term impacts of the schooling restrictions that were imposed by the pandemic on the health and wellbeing of children and young people, particularly those who

have struggled with or missed out on important milestones in their education. That must be prioritised to reduce the risk of young people falling through the cracks and disengaging from services.

During evidence, we heard from many witnesses about how Covid has impacted on engagement with young people and their families and carers. In particular, we heard about the difficulties that schools have had in engaging with parents after remote learning, with school and nursery staff reporting that they were not having the same depth of engagement with many families when communication was not face-to-face. Work must be done to re-establish those relationships.

Alongside improving engagement, we need to ensure that services are there to help young people when they need help, and that no one is turned away. Long waiting lists for CAMHS were frequently highlighted to the committee, with Mary Glasgow from Children 1st stating that:

“We need to fill that gap between universal services and very specialist services such as CAMHS with that whole-family support and community-based offer that any parent or carer, without stigma or shame, can reach out to and access quickly to get the support that they need.”—[*Official Report, Health, Social Care and Sport Committee*, 11 January 2022; c 13.]

As well as improving waiting times for CAMHS, we need to expand provision in the community so that people can access support without referral to specialist services, where that is appropriate. That is why, as part of the Bute house agreement, the Greens and the Scottish Government committed to doubling the budget for community-based mental wellbeing services for children and young people to £30 million.

It is also important that community services are properly equipped to help children and young people. For example, link workers play a vital role in GP surgeries in connecting people to local resources. They must have the training and the resources that they need to help children and young people and to connect them with person-centred, dedicated support that takes account of the particular issues and challenges that they face.

The committee also heard about children and young people being subjected to a postcode lottery. The NSPCC highlighted that we need to urgently understand what local capacity there is across health boards because, although there are examples of good practice, as Gillian Martin told us, levels of provision are variable and there is no clear national picture.

In its report, the committee recommends that the Scottish Government commissions further research on the prevalence of mental health conditions in children and young people and maps levels of existing capacity across mental health

services. Given the pressures related to the pandemic that I laid out earlier, we know that there is greater unmet need. We must determine the level of need and what support is already available if we are to properly plan services for the future.

That leads me on to my next point, which is about data on health inequalities. During a committee evidence session, Dr Mairi Stark from the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health said:

“The prevalence of mental health difficulties is probably much higher than we realise. We often see only the tip of the iceberg, but a lot of children could do with a lot more support.”—[*Official Report, Health, Social Care and Sport Committee*, 18 January 2022; c 21.]

We need to have a better understanding of the barriers to accessing support that young people face. For example, we do not know whether members of marginalised groups are more likely to receive a rejected referral. Improved data on that will aid our understanding of why some people are not getting the help that they need.

Given that it is pride month, it would be remiss not to mention LGBT young people’s experiences. We need to ensure that health services are able to help LGBT young people with the particular issues that they face. Yesterday, it was revealed that hate crimes against transgender people rose by 87 per cent over the past year. That appalling figure reveals the discrimination and hate that trans people, including young trans people, have to face every day. It would be foolish to imagine that that will not take a toll on their mental health.

We know that 40 per cent of LGBT young people consider themselves to have a mental health problem, compared with 25 per cent of all young people in Scotland. It is vital that services are properly equipped to deal with that and that there is awareness and understanding of the specific challenges that LGBT young people face and how those impact their health.

According to the Mental Health Foundation, although being LGBT is not in itself a risk factor when it comes to developing a mental health problem, some LGBT young people are more likely to develop a mental health problem, as a result of their being at greater risk of exposure to certain risk factors, such as discrimination, loneliness, homelessness and poor access to health services, than their non-LGBT peers.

The Mental Health Foundation also highlighted that the pandemic has increased waiting times for young trans and non-binary people who are seeking to access gender identity clinics, which could severely impact their mental wellbeing. Progress is being made to reduce waiting times, and I welcome the Minister for Public Health, Women’s Health and Sport’s commitment to

improvement, but waiting times are still too long. We need to ensure that trans and non-binary young people receive compassionate, informed and understanding support from health services while they are waiting for an appointment.

Children and young people have had a very difficult two years, and much work needs to be done to improve their health and wellbeing and ensure that they get the help that they need, when they need it. The committee's report sets out a clear way forward, and I, too, would like to thank everyone who gave evidence and helped the committee with its work.

16:19

**Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP):** I thank the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee for bringing the debate to the chamber and for the report that it published in May on its inquiry into the health and wellbeing of young people across the nation, which covered a wide range of important issues.

As we continue on our trajectory to making Scotland the best place for a child to grow up in, it is important to reflect on the critical work that is currently under way and to speak frankly about the many challenges that we face in getting there.

In Scotland, and in every country, poverty and social inequality are complex and multifaceted. They relate to much more than just income. Amnesty International's former secretary general, Irene Khan, sums them up as being about

“economic and social rights, insecurity, discrimination, exclusion and powerlessness.”

In the committee's report, there is worrying evidence of the growing impact of the cost of living crisis on our children and young people. Bill Scott, the chair of the Poverty and Inequality Commission, highlights the fact that

“Control over the vast majority of means-tested benefits, which are the most effective way of delivering support to low-income families, is held at the UK Government level.”—*[Official Report, Health, Social Care and Sport Committee, 31 May 2022; c 26]*

If memory serves me correctly, the Conservatives are more concerned with cuts than with offering meaningful support to people who are most in need.

New research published by Action for Children sheds light on the devastating impact of the recent cuts to universal credit. Analysis of the charity's crisis fund, which provided emergency grants for food, utilities and other essentials to people in difficulty, found that more than half of the grants that were issued were awarded to those who were already receiving universal credit, suggesting that the payment is falling well below what is needed to

meet even the most basic living costs. Among the appalling statistics are stories of keyworkers—who are doing all that they can to help—finding children arriving at school with chilblains on their feet because their house was so cold, or helping a single mother of two who, despite working 37 hours a week as a finance officer, still needed food vouchers to feed her family at Christmas.

By contrast—and as stated by the cabinet secretary to the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee—in its never-ending attempt to mitigate the ripple effect of Tory austerity, the Scottish Government has worked hard to strengthen the financial support that is available for low-income families across the early years. The Scottish Government's package of five family benefits includes the best start grant, best start foods and the Scottish child payment, which was doubled to £20 per week per child in April this year, all of which was achieved as part of the SNP Government's first tackling child poverty delivery plan.

However, social security alone is not sufficient to tackle inequality. It is crucial to recognise the indisputable link between deprivation and poor mental health and how that, in turn, impacts on young people's ability to thrive and reach their full potential. The millennium cohort study shows that poorer children are four times more likely to develop mental health problems by the age of 11 than children in higher-income families, not to mention the physical and emotional strain that living in poverty places on parents, causing feelings of shame and embarrassment that invariably filter through to their kids and can alter family dynamics.

Professor Hazel Borland, from NHS Ayrshire and Arran, touched on those feelings in her evidence to the committee:

“Poverty is incredibly stigmatising for families because it reduces choice. It reduces options and means that a child, young person or family cannot say yes to things that they might want to say yes to. Therefore, their world becomes much narrower”—*[Official Report, Health, Social Care and Sport Committee, 11 January 2022; c 17.]*

and they begin to view themselves through a very limiting lens.

In the light of those points, I was pleased to see that the Scottish Government's mental health transition and recovery plan is backed by a £120 million recovery and renewal fund over 2021-22. That represents the single largest investment in mental health in the history of devolution, as colleagues have mentioned.

I also welcome the additional £15 million that has been provided to local authorities to deliver locally based mental health and wellbeing support for five to 24-year-olds in their communities, and

the announcement of £5 million of funding for see me—the national programme to eliminate mental health stigma and discrimination.

As we look forward, and as part of the wider effort to ensure that children can flourish here, in Scotland, I join the committee in calling on the Scottish Government to set out in greater detail how the new child poverty delivery plan will contribute to improving the health and wellbeing of children and young people who currently live in poverty and to commission further research on the prevalence of mental health conditions among children and young people, so that we can build a better picture and allocate resources most effectively while remaining cognisant of the fact that prevention and early intervention are key.

No child should be going to school hungry or battling the stigma that goes with that. I look forward to the progress that we will make together as a country.

16:25

**Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con):** I am delighted to speak in this afternoon's debate. The Health, Social Care and Sport Committee carried out its inquiry into the health and wellbeing of children and young people before I became a member. I pay tribute to the convener, clerks, members, witnesses and stakeholders for such a substantial piece of work on a vital topic.

The committee's inquiry was wide ranging, which is a reminder that so much has a bearing on the health and wellbeing of our young people—even before the significant impact of the Covid-19 pandemic is taken into consideration. I am especially pleased to see recommendations from the committee that relate to the mental and physical health of young women and girls. I sincerely hope that we will see action in those areas. What happens during the formative years can hugely affect later life, so we need to get our approach and interventions right.

The starting point of the committee's inquiry was this question: is Scotland the best place for a child to grow up in? Given that the committee made 99 recommendations, there is still a long way to go, but that needs to become the reality.

In the past few weeks, the education secretary and the First Minister have been at odds over the timeline for closing the educational attainment gap. On the keystone policy commitment of Nicola Sturgeon's SNP Government, the situation has got worse on the Government's watch. There was a real-terms cut of almost £15 million from the children and families budget in the most recent spending review, but—predictably—the SNP still managed to find £20 million to fund preparations for another independence referendum.

**Emma Harper:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Tess White:** Will I get the time back, Presiding Officer?

**The Presiding Officer:** We are tight for time.

**Tess White:** I will proceed.

Official figures that were published last Tuesday reveal that more than a quarter of children and young people are still not being seen within the target of 18 weeks for referral to child and adolescent mental health services. In fact, the Scottish Government has never—I repeat, never—met its target in that regard. Yet the SNP-Green Government has found the time to commission and publish a paper—the first of many, apparently—on building a new, independent Scotland. That is another distraction from the SNP's woeful record on the delivery of public services.

As if that were not enough, Audit Scotland, which scrutinises how the public purse is spent, faces having its "wings clipped" for shining a light on Government failings that long predate the pandemic. In particular, the spending watchdog has repeatedly raised a red flag on CAMHS. It has said:

"Serious concerns have existed for years about access to children and young people's mental health services."

The committee rightly looked at CAMHS during its inquiry and suggested a number of recommendations to address lengthy waiting lists and workforce capacity.

The report commends the work that NHS Grampian, in my region, has undertaken to improve waiting times for CAMHS, but I emphasise that that turnaround took roughly 10 years. That is time that the system simply does not have. As the Royal College of Psychiatrists in Scotland has made clear, at one stage last year, more than 1 in every 100 young people was being referred to CAMHS. We cannot leave Scotland's children and young people in limbo any longer.

The committee highlighted the role of schools in supporting health and wellbeing. I am pleased that schools have started to embed counselling services, but I am aware that there is a shortage of qualified and accredited counsellors in parts of the north-east, which means that some services might not be fully up and running for some time. We constantly come up against poor workforce planning by the SNP Government, and our public services are poorer for it.

The committee called on the Scottish Government to set out how it intends to increase rates of physical activity among children and young people—especially girls and young women.

In her evidence, the Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport said, in relation to low participation levels in women's sport:

"you cannot be what you cannot see".—[*Official Report, Health, Social Care and Sport Committee*, 1 February 2022, c 35.]

In my region, there are some exceptional women who are leading the way in that area. They include Montrose Football Club Women, who recently won the Scottish Women's Football Championship; Aberdeen-based cricket team Northern Lights, who won their debut match in the Women's Premier League; and Hollie Davidson, who was the first female to referee a men's six nations side in a test match. Those are the successes that we must celebrate and share to improve participation in women's sport and achieve parity of recognition with men's sport.

It is abundantly clear that the SNP-Green Government has the levers it needs to improve our public services, from health to education. This is not a question of powers but of good governance. The SNP needs to get its own house in order, yet it is already thinking about building a new one. Let us rebuild Scotland, not divide it.

16:31

**Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab):** I begin by thanking the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee, as Paul Sweeney did, for its very significant and comprehensive report. However, the question that we need to begin with is why is the demand for mental health support so high, and why is it so commonplace for teenagers and young people in their early 20s to turn to mental health support? We must try to understand why.

Alex Cole-Hamilton talked at length about long waiting lists—rightly so—but it is important that the Parliament understands what is behind that. I said before that I do not think it is simply an issue of resource; it is also an issue of design.

In similar debates, particularly in relation to young people's mental health, I have said that the system—certainly in Glasgow, which is the part of the country that I represent—seems to be the opposite of what people need. People need to opt into the service and if they do not respond within five days they get knocked off the list; that is the opposite of what people who are struggling with their mental health need. I would like to think that by the end of this parliamentary session some of these issues will have been tackled.

As Carol Mochan, Siobhian Brown and Stephanie Callaghan rightly said, there are complex reasons behind the growing problem of mental ill-health. Poverty is obviously very significant, as are trauma in people's lives and the impact of the pandemic.

Alex Cole-Hamilton said that we are beginning to realise the impact of being isolated for so long on very young children. We have to try to understand that so that we know how to respond.

Although I am a relative newcomer in trying to understand mental health services, I have made the point before that in redesigning those health services, we need to ensure that we keep pace with good practice and international practice. For example, eye movement desensitization and reprocessing therapy is not widely used, but some people think it could be a useful tool to have available.

I want to focus on an area that I think needs some attention: the mental health of girls, which Tess White also spoke about. Arguably, we have seen progress, but it has been eroded. I was dismayed—but not surprised—to read in the committee's report that the Association of Scottish Principal Educational Psychologists identified a

"recognisable downward trend"

in the mental health of children and young people in Scotland.

It also said that the

"mental health of girls is overall judged as worse than boys, and the mental health of adolescent girls is particularly poor."

I completely agree with the assessment of NHS Grampian—it has had a lot of mentions today—which suggested that possible underlying causes of that disparity could be that

"Issues of body image and intense sexualisation of girls are impacting upon their wellbeing as seen in issues such as harmful aspects of social media, sexual bullying, revenge pornography etc."

As has been discussed in many debates, the advent of smart phones and social media has meant that teenage girls are often under pressure from boys to send them nude photographs of themselves. That has been widely reported in the press and there is not only anecdotal evidence of it.

**Gillian Martin:** We did not have time to look into that issue, but I am glad that Pauline McNeill has raised it because a piece of work really needs to be done on what more the social media companies can do to protect young women and girls.

**Pauline McNeill:** I know that Gillian Martin is committed to that. Other committees need to consider the matter too, but we cannot ignore the need for a longer-term look at the issue of the social media age. Control over Snapchat, Instagram and TikTok is not a matter for the Scottish Parliament alone, but we know that all those platforms can seriously damage the mental

health of many people, not just our children. I support what Gillian Martin said.

It is alarming that boys as young as nine or 10 are viewing online pornography. It affects the way that they view girls and understand sexual relationships, so there is an urgency about the matter. There is talk of something called rape culture in schools. Before we go any further, we must try to understand where that comes from. It also means that we need to do work in schools.

In February this year, the University of Glasgow's social and public health sciences unit published a report on sexual harassment in secondary schools in Scotland. The study found that it is common:

"almost 70% of students reported having experienced some type of sexual harassment at or on the way to school within the past three months."

Lead author Professor Kirstin Mitchell said:

"Sexual harassment is common, and often seen as 'normal' among teenagers at school."

There are many issues to address, but that is deeply concerning. If any young person thinks that that is normal behaviour, it is our duty as leaders in communities and as politicians to put that right. We must seek to understand exactly what is going on in schools and give girls support and encouragement not to accept such behaviour. We need a seismic shift in attitudes.

I realise that I have only 30 seconds left, but I will ask ministers about a cross-cutting issue between the justice and health teams. I want to know whether there are plans to expand the equally safe at school programme, which is brilliant, beyond 31 schools.

I will also comment on the issue that Tess White talked about: girls in sport. Recommendation 25 of the committee's report recognises

"that the mental health of girls can be vastly improved by encouraging participation in sport and physical activity."

It is sad to see after all these years that, when they leave primary school, girls are not taking up sport for reasons that are on the same theme as I spoke about.

There are many complexities to the matter. I thank the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee for some excellent work.

16:37

**Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con):** As a previous member of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee and, now, a member of the Education, Children and Young People Committee, I am delighted to close the debate for the Conservatives. However, it is hard not to suggest that, under the SNP, the health and wellbeing of

our children and young people have fallen by the wayside. The number of children being referred for mental health care in Scotland has risen by 22 per cent since last year, but only 73.2 per cent of children and young people were seen within 18 weeks of referral. The Scottish Government said that it was committed to its 18-week target for 90 per cent of patients beginning treatment, but that target has never been met.

Those figures should remain a source of grave concern for our SNP ministers. The mental health crisis among our young people long pre-dates the pandemic, but there is still not enough action from SNP ministers. The Covid crisis has only aggravated the issues. There must be an urgent plan that will deliver the necessary support; otherwise, the mental health crisis among young people in Scotland will only continue to grow. As we heard from Alex Cole-Hamilton, we have not yet got it right, and have not done so for a long time.

One of my constituents—a young boy—has been on the waiting list for the ADHD clinic since April 2021. His family say that, as a result, it has been left to them and his school to attempt to hold everything together until he can receive treatment. For them, the idea that they will be seen within 18 weeks of referral has been a pipe dream. Every piece of support that he has received has been sourced by his parents or his school. He needs sleep medication, but the NHS cannot help until it has diagnosed him rather than him being diagnosed privately.

I highly doubt that he is the only one who is caught between a private diagnosis and an inability to access medication.

Paul Sweeney spoke about the CAMHS crisis and the extraordinary number of children and young people who are on waiting lists, and the difficulties that are entrenched for those young people by the time they access the service.

Those are real people with real problems, and they are suffering because of the failure to ensure that children and young people can access vital mental health services as quickly as possible. One of the most distressing evidence sessions that we had in committee clearly indicated that we are letting young people in care down.

Like my colleague Meghan Gallacher, I would like to reinforce the Promise, which includes a commitment that every child who is in care in Scotland will have access to intensive support that ensures that their educational and health needs are fully met.

**Gillian Martin:** My comment relates to the informal evidence session that Sue Webber has mentioned. One of the things that was mentioned by care-experienced young people is that there

was some good practice during the pandemic, when young people had access to mental health support over telephone lines, which they would like to see being extended.

**Sue Webber:** I thank Gillian Martin for her comments. That session was empowering and a lot of good practice came forward; however, that session also laid bare some of the concerns that we have.

More needs to be done to raise awareness among care-experienced children of the support that is available to them. The committee has called on the Scottish Government to set out what measures it is taking to do that. We regularly hear that waiting times in CAMHS are because of workforce pressures and a lack of planning and resources. Time and time again, we have asked for specifics and details on how that workforce crisis is being tackled. Little information, rather than big numbers—and certainly no details—has been forthcoming from the minister. Thankfully, in a briefing last week from NHS Lothian, I heard about some of the targeted and innovative plans that are being rolled out in its mental health service to address health staffing—those plans have more to do with adult services, but they are transferable.

For example, NHS Lothian is working with the Open University to expand the route to a registered nurse qualification using a modern apprentice pathway. Staff will be recruited as band 2 apprentices and then progress through band 3 after 16 months. At the end of four years, they will qualify as registered nurses. Importantly, throughout that time, they will be paid to train. NHS Lothian has plans with the corporate nursing education team to introduce a development programme to encourage the retention of experienced staff, which is really important. Those experienced staff will stay at the front line of delivery of clinical services. The board has also spoken about recruiting art and music therapists into additional roles. If those initiatives are successful, NHS Lothian is hoping that other specialties, and indeed, other health boards, may benefit from a similar approach.

As Carol Mochan stated, we should be doing all we can now to help our young people. Devolved benefits that could improve the wellbeing of children and young people in Scotland are being rolled out too slowly. The young carer grant is being rolled out at snail's pace; Social Security Scotland is failing to properly roll out the Scottish child payment; and the Scottish child disability payment is being processed more slowly than ever.

**Clare Haughey:** I hear the member's criticism of the Scottish Government's benefits; however, would she recognise that the UK Government's

benefit cap, the £20 cut to universal credit, benefit sanctions, the two-child limit, the rape clause and a decade of austerity are contributing to child poverty in Scotland?

**Sue Webber:** I thank the minister for her intervention—actually, I am not sure that I will thank her, as £41 billion has been delivered to the Scottish Government to allow it to make its own decisions about how it spends its money, and that—

**Clare Haughey:** Mitigating Tory cuts!

**Sue Webber:** Somehow, it has decided to mitigate decisions that the UK Government has made: it is nonsensical. It merely reveals to everyone in the chamber that the grievance culture that is at the very heart of the SNP drives everything and motivates every decision that it takes. *[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** Members! Thank you.

**Sue Webber:** I could continue to list the SNP's failures, but I am very aware of the time.

I will highlight some of the proactive measures that the Scottish Conservatives are taking. Dr Gulhane has reminded us that Scottish Conservative councillors across the country are working to introduce trained mental health leads in every school to help to improve children's wellbeing. In our 2021 manifesto, we pledged to introduce free school breakfasts and lunches. We have proposed legislation in Parliament that would ensure that every child gets at least one week of residential outdoor education through my colleague Liz Smith's proposed outdoor education bill. The Scottish Conservatives will continue to work on delivering for our children and young people.

16:44

**The Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care (Kevin Stewart):** I thank the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee for raising much-needed awareness of the health and wellbeing of young people through its work on this inquiry. I also thank members for their contributions to the debate and I welcome the opportunity to respond to some of the key issues that have been raised this afternoon. The range of topics that have been covered today illustrates how important this issue is.

As Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care, I am particularly interested in ways in which we can further support the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people, ensuring access to appropriate support at the time that it is needed. As a Government, we have made significant investments in the past year to improve

mental health support and services for children and young people. Those include the continuation of £16 million a year of recurring funding to local authorities to provide counselling support services in all secondary schools across Scotland, as many members have mentioned. We have also allocated around £40 million to child and adolescent mental health services to reduce waiting times and to support the implementation of a national CAMHS specification. We have also provided funding for a range of children and young people's organisations in order to create a suite of online resources, information and advice to support the emotional health and wellbeing of children and young people, such as the Aye Feel hub. We have also invested £18 million in perinatal and infant mental health to develop services, increase awareness and enhance workforce and training. Through that investment, I am determined to ensure that children and young people are supported in the most appropriate way that meets their needs.

We know that CAMHS is not always the right option for everyone and that early intervention is crucial to supporting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing. Young people and families have told us that they need more support for mental and emotional distress and for wellbeing and resilience, and for that support to be delivered in a community setting. That is why we have provided an additional £15 million a year to local authorities, which has funded 230 new and enhanced community services for children and young people aged five to 24. I am pleased to say that, in the second half of 2021, more than 18,000 people accessed those services, which are spread across every local authority in Scotland. Those services include the Aberlour primary outreach service in Falkirk which supports children aged five to 12 with emotional distress, and the LGBT Youth Scotland service in Dundee, which supports the wellbeing of LGBT+ people aged 13 to 25. Earlier this month, I visited a community service in Aberdeen called the Fit Like? hub, which provides whole family support at an early stage to support mental health and wellbeing, reducing the need for escalations to services such as CAMHS. I met parents whose children had been supported by the hub, and it was clear that the strong relationship that they had with those delivering support in their communities was making a difference to their wellbeing and that of their children.

Establishing those services has been a significant step forward in terms of supporting the mental health of children and young people and ensuring that they receive the help that they need, when they need it. However, we are committed to doing more. As a result, as Gillian Mackay outlined, we will double the funding for community-based mental wellbeing services for children and

young people to £30 million a year by the end of this parliamentary session. In delivering those policies, we continue to work closely with colleagues across NHS boards, local authorities and the third sector. Without their support and hard work, much of what we are doing would not be possible, and I am grateful for their continued efforts to improve the services and support available across Scotland to our children and young people.

A large amount has been covered in the debate and, from the SNP and Labour benches, there has been a lot of discussion around poverty. I do not think that we can discuss mental health and wellbeing without recognising that poverty creates a major strain for families, young people and communities. Poverty and its stigma have created a real difficulty on top of young people's experience during the course of the pandemic. Tory austerity, the cost of living crisis and welfare cuts have added to the woes of young people and their families across our country. That has been highlighted today by Stephanie Callaghan, Emma Harper, Gillian Martin and Carol Mochan. Ms Mochan did not want to touch on some aspects of this, but I agree with her on fair work, pay and conditions for workers, which would make real odds. However, I am disappointed that the Labour Party continues to refuse to call for employment law to be devolved to this Parliament, which could make a real difference to our futures.

**Pauline McNeill:** Scottish Labour does support the devolution of employment law. I do not know where the minister gets his information from, but I have repeatedly called for it.

**Kevin Stewart:** That is new to me, and I am glad that Scottish Labour has called for the devolving of employment law, because I think that that would make a real difference in improving wages, increasing the minimum wage and getting it right for people across communities.

That is one of the many things that we need to take control of in this Parliament, in order to truly tackle some of the ills that face our society, including our young people.

We cannot continue to put up with Tory austerity, including the slashing of universal credit and the continued attack on working people across this country by Tory ministers. We should have those powers here, so that we can tackle the cost of living crisis and ensure that we get it right for families across the country.

**The Presiding Officer:** Please conclude, minister.

**Kevin Stewart:** Sue Webber said that we should not be mitigating Tory cuts. Let us be honest; if we were not, we would be in an even worse place than we are. If we had not doubled

the Scottish child payment to £20 per week, we would be in a worse situation.

**The Presiding Officer:** You must conclude.

**Kevin Stewart:** If we had not increased benefits by greater amounts than the UK Government has done, we would be in a worse situation. We know that the past three years have been exceptionally difficult for the mental health and wellbeing of many children, young people and their families.

**The Presiding Officer:** I must ask you to draw your remarks to a close now.

**Kevin Stewart:** We are committed to getting it right for people across Scotland.

16:54

**Paul O’Kane (West Scotland) (Lab):** I am pleased to have the opportunity to close this important debate on behalf of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee. As we have heard this afternoon, the inquiry has highlighted a number of key challenges and opportunities that we face, as Scotland seeks to improve the health and wellbeing of all its children and young people.

As the convener stated in her opening speech, we all want children and young people to be able to live happy and healthy lives. I think that that was echoed by Alex Cole-Hamilton when he said that the topic should keep us all up at night. We can all agree on that.

It falls to me in closing to try to build some consensus. I think that the debate has found a degree of consensus at points, but it has been challenging in other areas as we exchange ideas and views. However, it is clear to me that everyone who has contributed to the debate wants to see a better future for children in Scotland.

During our inquiry, we asked witnesses where they thought that policy actions should be focused as a first priority to improve health and wellbeing outcomes for children and young people. Our witnesses were unanimous in their response: tackling poverty needs to be the overriding priority. As other members of the committee have done, I take the opportunity to thank our witnesses and all those who gave evidence to our committee.

That need for a primary focus on tackling poverty has been reflected in much of the debate this afternoon. We must acknowledge the evidence that we received, and the minister’s evidence to the inquiry, which illustrates what the Scottish Government is doing to tackle poverty in order to improve the health and wellbeing outcomes of children and young people. As many argued during the debate, we should not be under any illusions that there are not challenges with regard to the policies that are being delivered.

**Tess White:** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I cannot hear Mr O’ Kane because there is a conversation going on.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Ms White. It appears to have ceased, for which I am grateful, so we will continue to hear from Mr O’Kane.

**Paul O’Kane:** As many argued during the debate, we should not be under any illusions that, in the face of the current cost of living crisis, there is not a huge challenge in terms of poverty and the issues that it is creating for children and young people across our country.

In the evidence that we heard in committee, it is clear that we need both the Scottish Government and the UK Government to work closely in addressing the crisis. We have heard an exchange today about some of the things that both Governments need to do in order to make that a reality.

Witnesses told us about the devastating impact that many UK Government welfare reforms and reducing budgets in welfare have had on young people and families across Scotland. However, witnesses also pointed to the need to use the powers of this Parliament to go further on the Scottish child payment and to provide more sustainable funding for local government services and third sector providers in order to tackle the cost of living crisis.

I was particularly struck by evidence that was recently submitted to the Social Justice and Social Security Committee by the Poverty and Inequality Commission, which is included in our committee’s inquiry report. Bill Scott from the Poverty and Inequality Commission put it quite starkly when he said that, irrespective of whether current targets on child poverty are technically met,

“poverty is deepening for real people at the sharp end”

and concluded that

“that will have a lifelong impact on ... children’s health and attainment.” —[*Official Report, Social Justice and Social Security Committee*, 21 April 2022; c 19.]

There can be little doubt that that is a theme that our committee and others across the Parliament will return to over the course of this session. In particular, the conclusions that the inquiry has drawn about the overarching impact of poverty on the health and wellbeing of children and young people are already being taken forward as part of the committee’s current inquiry into broader health inequalities. On the topic of health inequalities and the relationship with poverty, I thought that Carol Mochan, Emma Harper and other colleagues spoke powerfully.

Our inquiry and today’s debate have highlighted a number of key areas in which we, as a committee and as a Parliament, might wish to

undertake further, more in-depth scrutiny in the future. We have heard that today in many contributions from across the chamber. Colleagues have highlighted issues, including those experienced by care-experienced young people, which we heard about from Meghan Gallacher, and the cost of the school day, which Stephanie Callaghan highlighted, as being areas that we must drill down into and look at in more granular detail in order to tackle many of the inequalities that we have found through our inquiry.

The inquiry also heard about the intrinsic link between physical health and mental health, and about how participation in sport and physical activity has the ability to benefit both. In its evidence to the committee, the Scottish Sports Association described investment in sport and physical activity as the best buy in public health and it argued that encouraging

“lifelong participation in physical activity ... reduces the burden on the NHS and the need”

to intervene to address

“illness and other long-term health conditions.

As part of the inquiry, we have welcomed the Scottish Government’s commitment to increase funding for sport and physical activity during this session of Parliament. All of us will, of course, want to scrutinise the delivery of that. However, it is quite clear that we need to find ways to encourage and support young people throughout their lives to engage in sport and physical activity. Siobhian Brown spoke about the joy that a child might experience in taking part in an egg and spoon race on their first sports day. How do we continue that throughout their life and break down the barriers to participating in sport and physical activity that often exist as children get older?

That is particularly true for girls and young women, and a variety of witnesses told the committee about the challenges and barriers that can exist for them. The committee will look at, in more depth, what those barriers are and how we break them down. We will also look at other groups who experience barriers to participation in sport, not least black and minority ethnic and LGBT+ people. I thank Gillian Mackay for exploring some of the broader health issues for LGBT young people.

Today, there has been a focus on CAMHS and mental health services for young people across Scotland. We heard a large amount of evidence in committee around the need to continue exploring better ways to provide services to young people, and to look at where services are offered in communities and where they are offered in schools. Gillian Martin and others have referenced good-practice examples in places such as

Grampian that we need to look at when expanding the available service provision.

**Paul Sweeney:** On the critical issue of CAMHS, does my friend agree with me that it is unfortunate that the minister did not address the Glasgow case that I have raised? Perhaps he could encourage the minister to take cognisance of that and respond to me in due course.

**Paul O’Kane:** I was just coming on to reference the challenges that exist in CAMHS—

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

**Paul O’Kane:** If the minister will forgive me, I am not keen to facilitate a conversation between two members in my summing up on behalf of the committee. I am sure that they might want to take up the issue offline.

Problems persist in CAMHS, as Dr Gulhane and Paul Sweeney both showed when referring to cases to do with a constituent. We need to look in more detail at what happens when people experience a mental health crisis. People need to be taken seriously, and the service that they are given needs to get the heart of the issue and seek to support them in a holistic manner.

I am conscious of the time, Presiding Officer, so I conclude by thanking everyone who has contributed to this afternoon’s debate and by echoing the convener’s earlier words of gratitude for all the contributions that we received during the inquiry.

As we have heard today and throughout the inquiry, although there are many challenges, there are also lots of opportunities and inspiring examples of good practice we can draw on to improve health and wellbeing outcomes for children and young people across Scotland.

I look forward to the Government’s formal response to the committee’s inquiry report and hearing how ministers intend to take forward our key findings and recommendations. I believe that, across all parties, we share a common goal to improve the health and wellbeing of all children and young people. I hope that the debate has been a useful springboard for us on the way to achieving that.

## Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill: Stage 3

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-04938, in the name of Mairi Gougeon, on the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill.

Members who wish to participate in the debate should press their request-to-speak buttons now or as soon as possible. I call Mairi Gougeon to speak to and move the motion.

17:04

**The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands (Mairi Gougeon):** I very much welcome this opportunity to open the stage 3 debate on the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill. I begin by thanking members from across the Parliament for their keen interest in the bill. It is very clear to me, from discussions around the good food nation and from the number of amendments that were lodged at stages 2 and 3, that there is widespread support and passion for improving the lives of the people of Scotland when it comes to the food that we buy, grow, cook and eat.

I also take this opportunity to thank the wide variety of food organisations and businesses from across the entire supply chain that enthusiastically engaged with me, as well as with the committee, on the bill. With their continued support and efforts, we in Government can deliver on our good food nation ambitions.

I also want to recognise that the bill's delay due to Covid-19 was a huge disappointment to organisations such as Nourish Scotland, the Soil Association, the Trussell Trust and many more—they are too numerous to name. I hope that today all supporters of the bill will join me in celebrating a really significant step on our good food nation journey.

Food is central to all of our lives. It sustains and nourishes us, both physically and emotionally. In sharing food around the table with family and friends, we see the importance of food in how we socialise. Food production is woven into the very fabric of rural and coastal life in Scotland. Food is part of our shared culture and heritage, and it is a cornerstone of the Scottish economy, with food and drink being Scotland's top export sector year after year.

Given the importance of food in our lives, it is incumbent upon us to effect a positive change across the food system. The Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill represents our opportunity to take that world-leading and innovative approach to food policy and to improving outcomes in health, the

environment and biodiversity, the economy and many other areas.

The good food nation has attracted significant international attention. It was a privilege to have the United Nations special rapporteur on the right to food give evidence on the bill, commenting that the

“good food nation bill is a timely and exemplary response to ... deep-rooted challenges”

that are seen in every country's food system.

This framework bill puts in place the necessary structures to ensure that public policy relating to food is planned on a long-term basis, to help us secure the sustainability of our food supply chain for future generations. The bill will make our ambitions and plans around food central to a host of Government activities and decision making. It also creates important links between the national and local levels, to enable a more joined-up approach to improving people's lives when it comes to food.

It is worth stating, though, that the bill does not mark the beginning of our good food nation journey. Work on many aspects of food policy is already under way across the Scottish Government.

For example, Scotland already offers the most generous provision of universal free school lunches in the United Kingdom, with pupils in primaries 1 to 5 and in special schools already benefiting from the offer of universal free school meals. We will continue to work with our partners in local authorities to plan for the expansion of free school lunch provision over the next academic year. In addition, the Scottish milk and healthy snack scheme expands and improves upon the UK nursery milk scheme, which it replaced in August 2021, promoting better health outcomes for children through a nutritious and varied diet.

This Government is ambitious when it comes to the health of the people of Scotland. We are taking wide-ranging action to support healthier choices, as set out in our 2018 diet and healthy weight delivery plan. We intend to introduce a bill in this parliamentary session that includes powers to restrict promotions of food and drink that are high in fat, sugar or salt, and we are already consulting on out-of-home calorie labelling. The bill underpins the work that we are already doing across Government, and it provides the additional framework for our work on the good food nation.

I recognise and welcome the importance that many members who are here today, as well as organisations and businesses across Scotland, place upon the good food nation. I have met with members from all parties across Parliament in recent weeks to take on board their views on the

Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill and on how we go about creating and sustaining real change in our food system. I have also listened carefully to the considered views of the Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee in its stage 1 report.

That is why I lodged amendments at stage 2 that set out the Government's high-level principles for the good food nation, while recognising that specific food policy targets, outcomes and initiatives will be more appropriate in the good food nation plans that will follow. That approach is in line with the committee's recommendations.

In the stage 1 debate, I committed to dealing with the question of an oversight function by the end of the bill process. I took the time to carefully listen to voices from inside Parliament and from organisations from across the food system in making a decision about how best to deliver adequate scrutiny of our work on the good food nation. I also recognised that, at stage 2, there was strong support for enhanced scrutiny provisions from all the parties and from organisations such as the Scottish Food Coalition.

After considering all available options, I was pleased to announce last week that I would support the creation of a new Scottish food commission, as set out in amendments that were lodged by Ariane Burgess. That decision and those amendments are the culmination of close co-operation that was undertaken as part of commitments that were set out in the Bute house agreement.

I thank Ariane Burgess for working with me on the issue, and I thank members from across Parliament for meeting with me to share their views on it. The amendments set out the terms on which a new Scottish food commission will be created and strike a balance between the need for independent scrutiny of our good food nation plans and implementation, with the need to take into account the budgetary constraints that we face. The amendments will create a food commission that will be streamlined, efficient and focused on the key tasks that will help us to realise our good food nation ambitions.

I look forward to the work that I and my ministerial colleagues will do in setting out our ambitious food policies, objectives and outcomes in the future national good food nation plan. I also look forward to our continued work with local authorities and health boards in relation to food, because that co-operation will only be enhanced by the bill.

Most of all, I look forward to the bill enabling the change that we all want in our food system and to affecting people's lives in a real and positive way. I firmly believe that the Good Food Nation

(Scotland) Bill will ensure that we have in place the necessary framework, structures and organisations to do just that.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill be passed.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I advise members that there is absolutely no time in hand and that I will vigorously enforce the time limit for each speaker.

I call Rachael Hamilton, who has up to six minutes.

17:12

**Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** I am pleased to speak in today's debate on the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill, which provides an opportunity to address some of the key issues that we face as a nation today. Before I cover that, I would like to thank my colleagues on the RAINE Committee for the time and effort that they put into the bill. I also thank all those who gave evidence, and the clerks, who supported our work most magnificently throughout the process of bringing the bill to the chamber for debate today—it comes after six years of waiting but, thank goodness, we are here now.

I also thank the Scottish Government for meeting me to discuss some of the amendments that I proposed and to work towards a shared approach to important additions to the bill, such as the amendments on inclusive communication and matters to be taken into account in preparing plans. I know that the cabinet secretary will be disappointed that she cannot be here today, but I am sure that we all send our best wishes for a speedy recovery to action.

As I said, the bill is an opportunity. The amendments that I moved yesterday will, I hope, help Scotland to move towards becoming a healthier nation that understands food, where it comes from and how it impacts our bodies, communities and environment. The bill is also an opportunity to address inequalities, overhaul procurement strategies, and support our fantastic food and farming industry, from producers to purveyors, and enable it to play a leading role in helping Scotland to become a fantastic good food nation.

As I said in the committee at stages 1 and 2, we know that Scotland is not a healthy nation.

Presiding Officer, I keep looking at the screen, expecting Mairi Gougeon to be there, but she is not. However, I have George Adam in front of me, although I am not going to look at him now.

Sixty-five per cent of our adult population is overweight or obese, and that figure will continue to rise without intervention from the Government. Malnourishment has been highlighted as a key issue that the Scottish Government must do more to address and, during the evidence sessions, the stakeholders favoured education on healthy eating. As always, we know that the bill will not be a magic bullet that will miraculously and suddenly solve all those issues, but it clearly has potential to start addressing issues in earnest.

The theme of healthy eating in addressing poor health outcomes relating to diet shone through in many of the amendments in yesterday's stage 3 proceedings, and I was, to be quite frank, a bit shocked that the Government opposed a number of amendments that sought to address that issue.

The bill could have established

"an integrated food policy, tackling the health, social and environmental impacts of food."

It could have obliged the Scottish Government to

"reform procurement law to oblige public kitchens to source food from more small local businesses and organic producers."

It could have obliged the Government to

"fund local emergency food and food resilience networks, ensuring everyone can access good food in times of crisis."

If any of those points sound familiar, it is because they are straight from the Green Party's manifesto. That is the same Green Party that shamelessly decided to vote against some of the crucial amendments that would have delivered those aims. The philosophical inconsistency and outright duplicity of its voting record yesterday were palpable. Nonetheless, my party will continue to do the right thing by calling for those important issues to be addressed.

I turn to one of the key points that I mentioned. When our national health service is under such sustained pressure, tackling obesity—an issue that has led to a higher number of Covid deaths and a prevalence of chronic diseases that sap our NHS resources and lower productivity—should be a priority for Scotland at every opportunity. We need to throw everything at tackling the issue. Instead, through the bill, the Government decided to kick the can down the line. According to Obesity Action Scotland, the wider economic cost of not addressing the issue could be up to £4.6 billion every year, which is almost a third of NHS Scotland's budget.

Another key issue in the bill is tackling malnourishment by ensuring that children have access to nutritious food, but amendments that sought to address that issue were rejected by the Government. I was grateful to Opposition members for their support; I was very pleased to

be working with Labour and Liberal Democrat members who had similar intentions. I have spoken a lot about the opportunities that the bill presented. However, despite our best efforts, those opportunities have been missed. I specifically thank Monica Lennon and Beatrice Wishart for working so collegiately on some of those issues.

I will touch on school breakfasts, which are an integral part of the bill and on which Brian Whittle and I lodged amendments. I ask the cabinet secretary—if she can hear me—why her Government has not laid plans on a timescale for the provision of breakfasts for children in primary and special schools. I would like to know why her party is not delivering on its manifesto pledge to pilot the provision of free school breakfasts in secondary schools. That is part of the party's DNA and was part of its manifesto, so the Government should be delivering on it. That needs to happen as soon as possible.

Nonetheless, I will finish on a more positive note. The cynic in many of us might have worried that the bill might end up being nothing more than a box-ticking exercise for the Government. However, as amended, the bill will amount to something a little bit more than that. We have worked across the parties to agree to some very important amendments that will allow the bill to fulfil some of the aims that I have discussed. I do not feel that the bill has been perfectly allowed to fulfil its potential, though, so we must step up our game to deliver the changes that are needed in this country.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you very much, Ms Hamilton. I am sure that we all agree that George Adam is the very embodiment of a good food nation.

I call Colin Smyth.

17:18

**Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab):** It will be hard to follow that.

We have come a long way since the Government challenged the very idea that we need legislation to underpin our ambition to be a good food nation; today, the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill will be voted into law—unanimously, I am sure. We have also come a long way since stage 1, when the bill was more of an empty frame than a framework bill. The final bill has improved during the parliamentary process.

Positive changes to the bill have been made that will strengthen parliamentary scrutiny and consultation. The inclusion of plans—long supported by Labour—for an independent food commission, thanks to the tenacious campaign by

members of the Scottish Food Coalition forcing the U-turn from the Scottish National Party and the Greens, is a positive step forward. However, the failure to set out proposals for the commission until last week—on the very last day on which stage 3 amendments could be lodged, and four years after the Government began consulting on the bill—meant that there was little opportunity to properly scrutinise the detail, including the limit on the number of commissioners being as few as three.

The final bill has many omissions. For example, it fails to include any meaningful measurable objectives. Yesterday, Ariane Burgess said that the bill should not have targets because it is a framework bill. So, too, was the Climate Change Act 2008. It is a good job that the Greens were not in Government when it was passed, or we would never have had the target of net zero emissions by 2045 in that act.

To quote a phrase, “That’s what happens” when the Greens are in Government. That is the reason why small but nonetheless important amendments, such as the inclusion of integration joint boards as relevant authorities, were voted down, when the Greens would not have thought twice about voting for them in Opposition.

That is why an amendment from the Opposition to consult people with lived experience of food-related issues—including trade unions that represent food workers and charities that tackle obesity—when preparing good food nation plans was voted down, because it apparently singled out groups. However, the Government passed an amendment that gives big private food firms preferential treatment during consultations on implementation of the plans.

That is why we have had to settle for the weak commitment to merely “have regard to” the principle of the right to food. The bill could, and should, have unequivocally enshrined in Scots law the right to food. Delivery of that right should drive everything about Government food policy. That common purpose and clear vision would have set the direction of travel for building the fairer, healthier and more sustainable food system that Scotland desperately needs.

It remains to the shame of all of us that, in a country that has so much fine food and drink, so many children will still go to bed hungry tonight and so many families will continue to rely on food banks. I do not just want to “have regard to” food poverty; I want it to be eliminated.

In a country that leads the world in fine food and drink products and businesses, it is a disgrace that so many people in the sector are still employed in jobs that are insecure and poorly paid. I do not just want to “have regard to” fair work standards—I

want to end the scandal of many of the people who make and serve our food having to choose between heating and eating.

In a country that has plenty of land and sea and so many talented producers, too many of our farmers and fishers cannot make a decent living. I do not just want to “have regard to” the climate and nature emergency and animal welfare—I want those issues to be at the very heart of our food policy and of a new agriculture support system that delivers sustainable fishing and farming.

Our current food policies are not working for Scotland. The bill takes a step, but not the giant leap that we need to deliver a better and fairer way to feed ourselves that does not damage our people and our environment.

The progress that we have made in delivering the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill is a step forward that is due in no small part to the members of the Scottish Food Coalition who have led the debate about how we can transform Scotland’s food system in order to end food insecurity and ensure that everyone has access to healthy and sustainably produced food.

For far too long, far too many people in Scotland have lacked adequate access to food; that situation has exposed the gross inequalities that we face today. I genuinely hope that the bill kick-starts a debate and the development of good food nation plans that will ensure that Scotland’s food policy delivers environmental sustainability, healthy eating, better animal welfare and fair work standards for our food and drink workers.

Ultimately, I hope that the legislation begins a process of rethinking how we approach access to food in this country, and of recognising that access to food is a fundamental right that every single Scot should enjoy.

17:23

**Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD):** I am pleased to speak today at stage 3 of the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill. Scottish Liberal Democrats have supported the creation of a good food nation bill for some time, and included it in our manifesto. I am pleased that the bill has now reached stage 3.

As deputy convener of the RAINE Committee, I add my thanks to the clerks and bill team for their work, and to my committee colleagues and convener Finlay Carson. I thank all witnesses who gave evidence, organisations that provided briefings and Professor Mary Brennan for visiting Shetland on behalf of the Scottish Food Coalition. I also thank the cabinet secretary for meeting me to discuss various issues.

With the bill, Scotland has an opportunity to reform our food system and to lead the way in sustainable food, food security and local food production. The good food nation plans must address food-related issues including tackling food insecurity and poor health by increasing access to healthy food and harnessing the potential of local food production through short supply chains and a focus on sustainable and environmentally friendly food. To achieve those aims, sharing of good practice across various aspects of the food system and good linkages between local areas for regional supply chains will be needed.

I am pleased that the Scottish Government listened to calls from stakeholders and MSPs, including me, to establish an independent Scottish food commission. That new body must harness good practice and provide overall structure for the food policy arena, which has been described by witnesses as “fragmented”. The new commission will be dedicated to overseeing implementation of the legislation, and it must co-ordinate the activities of relevant authorities, foster good practice and monitor activities using dedicated resources while taking a cross-cutting approach and drawing on expertise from across the food sector.

The right to food is the right of everyone to have physical and economic access at all times to sufficient, adequate, and culturally acceptable food that is produced and consumed sustainably. Fulfilment of that right is key to addressing food-related issues in Scotland, so I am disappointed that the Scottish Government rejected cross-party calls to set out fulfilling the right to food as the explicit purpose of the bill. Our becoming a good food nation must include deliberate steps to ensure that everyone in Scotland can realise their right to food. I hope that, in implementing the legislation, the commission, Scottish ministers and relevant authorities will place the right to food at the forefront of their vision. I understand that the Scottish Government intends to introduce human rights legislation that will include incorporation of the right to food; I trust that it will ensure that there is coherence and links between it and the bill that we are debating.

Had an amendment in my name been passed, it would have required local authorities to allow for flexibility in meals provision, which would have particular relevance for school hostel residents. In island communities such as Shetland, young people whose homes are beyond commuting distance live in a school hostel during the school week. It is their home from home. While we ensure that the food that is provided is healthy and nutritious, it is also important that people can make choices about their meals because enjoyment of food and the social aspects of meals are significant, especially for young people who

are away from home. I hope that the relevant authorities will bear that in mind when they make their good food nation plans. Today's young people will, after all, be the first generation of Scots to benefit in the long term from our being a good food nation.

The Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill must not be seen in isolation. It is laying the foundations for future related legislation on agriculture, the environment, public health, the circular economy and human rights. The Scottish Parliament must continue to play a crucial role with legislation, so I look forward to scrutinising future good food nation bills as implementation gets under way.

Today, I and the Scottish Liberal Democrats will support the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Ms Wishart. We now move to the open debate. I call Jenni Minto to be followed by Brian Whittle. You have up to four minutes, Ms Minto.

17:27

**Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP):** It is a privilege to speak in the stage 3 debate on our Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill. I thank my committee colleagues, the clerks and our witnesses. I also wish the cabinet secretary a speedy recovery.

I want to focus on the positive difference that the bill will make to Scotland. Last week, I was proud to join the pupils, teachers, staff and their partners at Dunoon grammar school, where it was announced that the school has been shortlisted for the prize of world's best school for community collaboration. During Covid, Dunoon grammar school, like others across Argyll and Bute and Scotland, recognised that being at the heart of its community meant that it could pivot its resources to ensure an appropriate community food response that went wider than offering free school meals. The school embraced the community food process, and worked with the local supply chain and local producers. The school illustrated what can be done by getting out there and doing it—working sustainably, making whole families healthier and bringing communities closer together. As the world's best school prizes website says, it created

“a ripple of change that spreads from schools to society making both stronger.”

That is exactly what our Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill will do by providing an overarching framework for a clear, consistent and coherent future Scottish food policy. It will be a fresh approach that seeks to embed food within the wider landscape of public policy.

In the stage 1 debate, I talked about how one of my own staff recalled lunches that he and his friends enjoyed when Dunoon grammar school provided food that was nutritious and delicious. He also reflected on how the meals were especially important to youngsters who came from disadvantaged backgrounds. The saying goes that “You are what you eat”, but increasingly for many families, you are only what you can afford to eat. The bill will go some way towards offsetting Westminster’s cruel attack on families—on children, in particular.

During stage 2, amendments were agreed to include the addition of a new set of principles that the Scottish ministers and relevant authorities must “have regard to” when preparing national food plans. Those principles acknowledge the systematic nature of the food system and supply chain; the role of sustainable food production in mitigating climate change, reversing biodiversity loss and improving animal welfare; the importance of adequate and appropriate food for physical and mental wellbeing; that adequate food is a human right; and the importance of the food business sector in Scotland. All those principles improve the bill.

It is fair to say that the area on which there has been most debate is oversight. I am pleased that, following careful consideration and discussion with members across the chamber and organisations outwith it, including the Scottish Food Coalition, the cabinet secretary has decided that a statutory food commission will be established. That further strengthens our good food nation legislation.

On Monday, I met Jayne Jones from Argyll and Bute Council, who provided the Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee with compelling evidence in support of the bill. She is passionate about food and making sure that Argyll and Bute gets its food strategy right—from the local butcher on Islay who provides meat for the island’s schools, which Mary Brennan also visited, to producing with Assist FM the first-ever Scottish school meals recipe book.

**Rachael Hamilton:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Jenni Minto:** I have just about finished my speech.

Jayne Jones believes that the bill will ensure that appropriate food plans can be developed for Argyll and Bute and Scotland—plans that recognise local needs, from early years learning through to care homes, and the strengths of local supply chains and local producers. She also believes that the establishment of a Scottish food commission will pull together everyone who is involved in food in Scotland, provide the

necessary strategic oversight and ensure that all partners across Scotland engage.

The expression “oven ready” has—justifiably—fallen out of favour. Thanks to Brexit, we know that “oven ready” really means “half baked”. However, I believe that the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill is fully baked, nutritious and wholesome. I urge members to support it.

17:31

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** I am delighted that we have reached the stage 3 debate on the bill. Given how long it has taken us to get here, I was becoming concerned that I might succumb to old age before I had a chance to speak on it.

This week, I wrote in my athletes’ training programme, “If you don’t eat according to your goals, don’t expect to reach them.” I think that that is true of achievement in any aspect of life, not just sport. Therefore, reducing food inequality should be the absolute priority of the Scottish Parliament.

Few bills in Holyrood can so appropriately be described as “better late than never”. A good food nation bill was first promised by the SNP in its 2016 manifesto, and again in its 2021 manifesto, in between which we had five years of the SNP promising it and never quite delivering it.

However, the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill has arrived, and I welcome the opportunity to speak on it. Members will know that one of my greatest bugbears is how poorly Scotland does when it comes to getting our superb local produce into our schools and hospitals. We all know—not least because I have said it often enough in this chamber—that a healthy, balanced diet brings very real benefits for physical and mental health. That is no more important than in schools, where we can encourage the next generation to eat more healthily and to live longer as a result, and hospitals, where a good diet can aid recovery.

What an opportunity has been missed. Although I welcome parts of the bill, not least the recognition that we must do better when it comes to encouraging local food procurement, it falls woefully short of what it could and should have been. As members will know, I lodged various amendments—which were supported by NFU Scotland and farming communities—with the aim of having stronger, better-defined targets: targets on increasing local procurement, including for free school meals; reducing food waste; increasing local food processing; and reducing emissions of greenhouse gases. We are looking to have an impact on the health of the nation, to improve educational standards, to reduce the attainment gap and to tackle climate change, all of which the bill could have gone a long way to address.

However, that would have required a plan with substance and a definite route map to success. The Scottish Government has always been good at offering world-leading, headline-grabbing targets without providing a reasonable plan for hitting them but, this time, it has even dropped the idea of targets. Instead, we have woolly words and promises about doing better tomorrow and asking councils to develop plans, without having any way of measuring their success or otherwise.

Most disappointing, as has been alluded to, is the Greens' response and their abandonment of their own principles. It seems to me that they were oh-so-comfortable when they were in opposition, smugly lecturing the chamber on their green credentials, only to quietly capitulate to whatever the SNP decided was best. It is left to the Opposition to bring forward progressive green policy ideas that are bold and measurable. The truth is that the Greens are green in name only.

Indicating plans is a positive step forward, but a plan is only as good as its implementation. After all, this Scottish Government made plans for new CalMac ferries, green jobs, eliminating student debt, giving every child a bike and an electronic device and closing the attainment gap, and it has made many plans for economic growth. All have failed.

It is disappointing that the Scottish Government opted not to accept my amendments, which would have strengthened the bill and ensured that when good food nation plans are produced, they are not just another exercise in woolly language.

The Scottish Conservatives will support the passage of the bill at decision time, not because we believe that it is the best that it could have been, but because a small step in the right direction is better than no step at all.

17:35

**Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** I thank all those who have campaigned for years to get us to this stage, particularly my colleagues Elaine Smith and Rhoda Grant, and I thank those in the Scottish Food Coalition who have worked hard to persuade the Government to be more radical.

Today is a good result, because we do not have just a bill; we also have the food commission, which as Colin Smyth argued, is critical to ensuring the implementation of the bill and a joined-up approach to delivering it in communities across Scotland.

I very much welcome the SNP Government's last-minute U-turns, which we got used to in the previous parliamentary session—for example, on tied pubs and on period products—when we led the way in arguing for ambitious legislation but

were knocked back, with the Government withholding support, only to cave in at the end of months of discussion.

Like other members who have spoken today and yesterday, I think that the bill could have gone further. As Rhoda Grant said yesterday, the bill should have included the clear purpose of enshrining the right to food in law. We need to make the best use of the Scottish Parliament's powers, and I want to focus on what comes next.

We need a joined-up approach and stronger political leadership to focus on ending the poverty that leads to many families having to rely on food banks. This is about access to affordable and nourishing food, and to decent incomes. Much more needs to be done—for example, on ensuring that school students get the free school meals that they need without stigma. As Monica Lennon said yesterday, the Scottish Trades Union Congress supports that for good reason.

**Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab):** Will the member take an intervention?

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

**Monica Lennon:** I will be quick. I was keen to say this to Jenni Minto. It was great to hear about Dunoon grammar school and its achievements, but does Sarah Boyack agree that we need to do everything possible in the immediate days and weeks ahead to ensure that children in Dunoon grammar and elsewhere have access to free school meals without stigma or shame?

**Sarah Boyack:** The critical issue will be the funding that follows, which the SNP-Green Government needs to get sorted.

WWF Scotland made good points about supporting farmers and food producers to speed up the delivery of food that benefits our climate, nature and people. Colin Smyth's points about fair work are also hugely important.

As I come to halfway, or more than that, through my speech, I want to focus on the impact of community gardens and how they can transform people's lives. In Edinburgh, some fantastic work has been delivered by projects such as Edible Estates, the Bridgend community garden and the crops in pots project in Leith links.

The back greens initiative could be learned from across Scotland. The space between tenements in Gorgie, Dalry, Marchmont and Leith has been brought to life by local residents, and the gardens have been made attractive and productive again. Political leadership is needed to deliver those benefits, work with local councils, share best practice and think about how we manage our parks and brownfield land.

With the right funding and support, community gardens can help to address food insecurity among low-income urban communities. They will not solve the cost of living crisis, but they need to be on the agenda for the commissioners who are appointed. Community gardens give physical, social and ecological benefits to volunteers, where they live. We also need to think about how we spread that knowledge in our schools to the next generation of young people.

As we pass the bill, we need the food commissioners to be appointed swiftly, so that we can make the progress that is needed, with a more inclusive and accessible approach, so that everybody can be informed to help to deliver the legislation.

We need cross-sectoral support, so that everyone gets access to affordable, nutritious food, regardless of their income, while we address our climate and nature crisis. We need to end the need for food banks. Everyone has the right to dignity and to be able to afford the food that they need to sustain themselves and have a healthy life. That is what the bill must deliver.

17:40

**Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green):** Many civil society organisations have worked hard for years to help to assemble the ingredients for this bill. I especially acknowledge all the member organisations of the Scottish Food Coalition, which kept the issue of good food on the table. I also thank my colleagues and clerks on the Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee, which led parliamentary scrutiny of the bill. In that process, I put the bill under the grill. Today, after months of engagement with the Government under the Bute house agreement, I am proud of what we are serving up.

Scotland has so much good food to bring to the table, but it is clear that most of our country is not well served by the food system. The motivation that is baked into the global food system, which is to produce the most calories for the least cost, is profoundly damaging to people's health, to nature and animals and to our climate. It also drives injustice. Many of our farmers, food producers and supply chain workers cannot afford to buy the food that they produce, and many people struggle to put food on the table, while big retail corporations make comfortable profits.

**Brian Whittle:** Will the member give way?

**Ariane Burgess:** I need to make progress.

The bill is an opportunity to forge a different path and to change Scotland's food system for the better, so that everyone has access to high-quality, nutritious and sustainably produced food

that is good for people, for animals and for the environment.

That is why I supported calls to add principles to the bill. I am proud of the contributions that I made to those principles, including through the amendment in my name that made clear the importance of sustainability across the system, from food production to consumption and throughout the supply chain.

It is also why I contributed to the list of high-level outcomes to which ministers and relevant authorities must have regard when producing good food nation plans. My stage 2 amendment that added a focus on climate change and wildlife will help to focus minds on how the food system can help us to achieve net zero and meet future biodiversity targets.

Even with those improvements, it still felt as if a crucial ingredient was missing from the bill. How would public bodies be supported to develop the right policies? How could we ensure that the plan development process would be inclusive? How would we measure and support progress? I was convinced by the arguments from numerous stakeholders, including the Scottish Food Coalition, that an independent body is required to perform those roles.

**Monica Lennon:** Will the member give way?

**Ariane Burgess:** I need to make progress.

I persisted in making the case for such a body and I am delighted that the Greens and the Scottish Government agreed that an independent food commission, with broad expertise and understanding of all aspects of the food system, is the best way to provide effective oversight and drive fundamental change. An amendment that I lodged provided that the food commission will be streamlined and efficient. It will deliver significant benefits across portfolio areas.

Instead of contributing to existing problems, our food system can contribute to solutions, helping to improve health and wellbeing, strengthen national security and local economies, provide good jobs, reach net zero and ensure that everyone can enjoy the world-class food that our good food nation produces.

However, the work does not stop here. It is crucial that we ensure that the food commission benefits from the right people with the right expertise, and supports an inclusive and effective process of plan and policy development, so that we all have a seat at the table. This will be an opportunity to get people excited about food, empower local communities and demonstrate leadership. I look forward to seeing the fruits of our efforts as we continue the journey towards making Scotland everyone's good food nation.

17:44

**Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP):** I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in support of what is one of the most important pieces of legislation that we will pass during this parliamentary session.

As WWF Scotland has pointed out, the way in which we currently produce and consume food represents one of the biggest drivers of the climate and nature emergencies that we face across the globe.

This legislation will be an important foundation to support and advance existing Scottish Government commitments on health and wellbeing, including the extension of free school meals and the halving of childhood obesity from its current rate of 29 per cent by 2030.

Obesity Action Scotland advised that healthy food can cost up to three times as much in deprived areas. The poorest one fifth of households need to spend 40 per cent of their disposable income to eat healthily, as opposed to just 7 per cent for the richest one fifth. Making good food affordable and accessible will be a primary objective of the good food nation plans that the Scottish Government and local authorities will be obliged to produce.

I note my sympathy with Monica Lennon's amendments that related to the extension of the free school meals provision and the incorporation of UNCRC article 24 into Scots law. That article states that children and young people have the right to high-quality, nutritious food.

The Scottish Government will extend the free school meals provision from all primary 1 to 5 children to all children in primary and special schools during this parliamentary session. That is a significant commitment, with funding identified to deliver it. Further extension would require funding to be identified from a fixed budget. However, it is an ambition worthy of serious consideration should our future circumstances as a nation change.

The Scottish Government has made clear that it is committed to incorporating the UNCRC into all Scotland's laws, within the limits of devolution. In the meantime, it is significantly increasing funding for child poverty and children's rights-related action. I look forward to an update on work on incorporating UNCRC at the earliest opportunity.

Just as the food that we eat is fundamental to our health and wellbeing, the bill has the potential to underpin a range of policies from healthy eating and equality of access to good food to meaningful improvements in school meals and hospital catering, and from supporting local food producers and food production to taking responsibility for how our food system impacts on the environment.

Those outcomes are urgently required. That is why organisations such as the Trussell Trust, Glasgow Community Food Network, Nourish Scotland, the Soil Association, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and many others have campaigned so hard and so effectively for this legislation.

I welcome the cabinet secretary's acceptance of the amendment from Ariane Burgess, which requires the establishment of a Scottish food commission to oversee preparation and implementation of the plan.

Evie Murray, the founder and chief executive officer of Leith-based charity Earth in Common and long-term member of the Scottish Food Coalition, pointed out that

"It is very significant that the Scottish Government has recognised the importance of an independent food commission to oversee the implementation of the Good Food Nation Bill. Without it, the bill would have been toothless—not a good thing when it comes to food!"

Evie went on to say:

"With such a commission, Scotland is setting an example to the rest of the world. I believe that this cross-cutting, commission-backing legislation will produce multiple benefits for the people of Scotland and that other countries will follow suit."

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You need to finish now, Ms Stewart.

17:48

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** I am relieved that we have a bill in front of us that is much improved from the one that we were presented with before. As Colin Smyth said, the major improvement is putting in place a food commission that will oversee the drawing up of good food plans. May it also be independent of Government, which will allow the Government to focus its mind on how we implement our human right to food.

The amendments that relate to the food commission were lodged by Ariane Burgess who, bizarrely, voted against similar ones at stage 2. I thank her for having the conscience to change her mind and stance—Sarah Boyack also thanked her for that.

However, credit for the commission being established lies elsewhere. First, it lies with Elaine Smith, and I pay tribute to her work in campaigning to have a commission set up. She wanted to create legislation that the Government refused during the previous parliamentary session. I am sure that she will be delighted that her hard work paid off.

Credit also goes to all the others who fought for a commission: the Scottish Food Coalition, the Co-

operative Party, the Trussell Trust and many other organisations and individuals too many to mention, many of them working to bring food to people who cannot afford it. I thank them for their help and advice during the consultation for my proposed bill.

The cabinet secretary gave credit to them, too, and included the UN rapporteur but ignored their pleas to enshrine the rights to food in the bill where it rightly belongs. That is a major omission from the bill and, even at this stage in the process, Ariane Burgess failed to mention it in her speech. Again, we see the Greens abandon their principles—a theme that runs through the process. To be frank, without the right to food enshrined in it, the bill is half baked.

Colin Smyth talked about the fact that the bill could have set targets to eliminate food poverty and has not. Rachael Hamilton, Beatrice Wishart and Brian Whittle expanded on that point and talked about where those targets could have been set. Beatrice Wishart spoke clearly and passionately about the right to food and her hopes that the food commission will deliver where the Government has not. Sarah Boyack talked about how the bill could have gone much further in dealing with food poverty. That was echoed by Monica Lennon in her intervention.

When the commission is set up, a lot will fall at its door to deal with the things that the Government has omitted to do during the passage of the bill. The bill should bring us a step closer to ending hunger in Scotland but it really needs the Government to act. Its unambitious bill does not fill me with confidence that it will do so, but I live in hope. The Government needs to understand that failure to end hunger costs us all. It costs in health inequalities in Scotland, where life expectancy depends on your postcode and can vary by 20 years and where children, who are our future, are failed due to hunger.

I dream of a world that is better than that: one that is free of the need for food banks and where no one faces the inability to feed themselves and their family. The Scottish Government can realise that dream if it really wishes to.

17:52

**Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** I am pleased to contribute to the stage 3 debate on the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill.

As the convener of the committee that considered the bill, I put on record my thanks to the committee clerks and committee members for their hard work and my thanks to the hundreds of stakeholders who waited patiently—and not so patiently—for this much anticipated bill. Many stakeholders expressed frustration at the level of

ambition articulated in the bill. As Professor Mary Brennan from the Scottish Food Coalition highlighted in her oral evidence to the committee:

“Our food system offers huge potential to be unlocked. The governance of the system must be organised to reflect not only the gravity of the challenges but the scale of the positive outcomes that we can achieve.”—[*Official Report, Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee*, 19 January 2022; c 2.]

From the outset, the committee questioned the framework nature of the bill and was disappointed that the bill as introduced provided little detail relating to the purpose and direction of travel for Scotland’s food system or a coherent cross-governmental framework of food-related policies and legislation. Indeed, the committee was unequivocal that the national good food nation plan should articulate and reflect those wider ambitions when laid before the Parliament.

At stage 1, the committee concluded that effective oversight of the good food nation policy and accountability for the statutory good food nation plans would be essential to achieving the good food nation ambitions. It recommended that the bill be amended at stage 2 to strengthen the oversight function by giving the Parliament a greater role in relation to the good food nation plans and requiring parliamentary approval after the national good food nation plan has been laid.

The Scottish Government confirmed that any oversight role identified would be dealt with in the bill. However, the formal response to our stage 1 report included no further information other than to say that the Scottish Government was carefully considering the points that the committee had made.

I remind the chamber that the Scottish Government’s response to our stage 1 report was not received until weeks after the stage 1 debate—weeks after the Parliament had to decide whether to agree to the general principles of the bill. That is simply not acceptable.

At stage 2, the committee welcomed amendments to make the regulation-making powers under section 4 of the bill subject to the affirmative procedure, providing additional parliamentary oversight.

A number of members proposed amendments to the bill that would have introduced a new Scottish food commission. At that time, as at stage 1, the cabinet secretary said that she was not in a position to support the amendments but that the intention was that the oversight would be addressed conclusively by the Government by the end of the bill process. There was, after all, time for any proposal to come to the committee before stage 2.

At the time, I expressed my disappointment at the way in which the process had been handled. The Scottish Government had ample time when drafting the legislation to consider the inclusion of a food commission, but it opted not to do so. If the inclusion of a food commission was integral to the governance of the good food nation plan, why not include the commission in the bill so that the committee and stakeholders could properly scrutinise proposals?

That sets a worrying precedent whereby we are presented with framework legislation containing limited detail and using plans that are defined in secondary legislation to drive policy development. A major addition to the bill was then announced only days before the stage 3 debate, which provided limited scope for scrutiny. The cabinet secretary wrote to the committee and confirmed her intention to support a food commission; however, the letter included no information to assist the parliamentary scrutiny of those legislative proposals.

The RAINE Committee believed that an oversight function was essential to the effectiveness of the good food nation plans and that it was vital that the Parliament had the information and time to consider the proposals. However, it was only after being asked for further information and only hours before the stage 3 debate that the cabinet secretary confirmed that the new food commission will be a non-departmental public body with an anticipated running cost of less than £1 million a year.

Although I was grateful for the response, I maintain that it would have been helpful if the committee had been able to properly scrutinise proposals for a food commission when it considered the bill at stages 1 and 2. Stakeholders and members had minimal input to the scrutiny of the amendments that were passed yesterday, and I would recommend that the Scottish Government give due consideration to how proposals for a new commission can be developed collaboratively.

Secondary legislation to make the more detailed provisions relating to the commission will be subject to the affirmative parliamentary procedure and the committee will, I am sure, want to scrutinise that in detail. Ultimately, we all want to see Scotland become a good food nation. We all want to see the legislation work in support of that aim.

I want to assure stakeholders, particularly those who have expressed concerns about a lack of oversight, that the committee will continue to monitor the progress of the plans for the new food commission, to ensure that we develop a food system that is resilient and that supports those people who are most in need.

17:57

**Mairi Gougeon:** I thank members for their contributions to the debate. I also thank them for their well wishes today and yesterday. I assure the Parliament that no one is more disappointed than I am that I am not in the chamber for the final stage of the legislation. Undertaking a stage 3 while you have Covid is definitely not an experience that I would recommend.

The passion that members feel for the bill is absolutely clear from the contributions to the debate on a huge range of food-related topics. I am also grateful for the weight that so many organisations across Scottish society have placed on the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill.

I know that the bill has taken time to finally reach the Parliament, having been disrupted by the pandemic, but we now reach an important milestone on our good food nation journey. The bill will enable everyone who is affected by food policy decisions to hold the Government to account. It will create new and innovative national and local food plans that will fulfil ambitions, on a long-term basis, for the betterment of everyone in Scotland and for our health, our environment and our wonderful food and drink industry. That is important because of the global challenges that we face, from climate change to the supply chain disruption that we have seen through Brexit, the pandemic and the war in Ukraine.

We must effect the changes that are needed to address those challenges, both on a national scale when it comes to our food system and in our food culture in how we think about food and in the food that we choose to eat. That will be achieved only through long-term planning that effectively links the Government with public bodies at a local level. The bill will give us the tools to do that.

Many points have been raised in the debate, which I will try to touch on. I hope that I manage to cover them all. I will start with universal free school meals. There has been much discussion about the provision of universal free school meals. I stress again that the Scottish Government takes the issue of school meals seriously. We are already committed to funding the expansion of free school lunches to all children in primary and special schools during the course of the Parliament, and, as things stand, all children in primaries 1 to 5 are offered universal free school lunches during school term time.

Yesterday, I asked Parliament to reject amendments that Monica Lennon lodged on the issue because they would have created unclear legal effects on public bodies such as health boards and local authorities. Again, I want to be absolutely clear: this Government is committed to the expansion of free school meals. However, the

right way to expand universal free school meal provision is to work with our partners in local authorities to plan for that expansion, and we will, of course, continue to do that.

Rachael Hamilton put a couple of questions to me today. In response to those questions, I say that, in the coming year, we will develop plans to deliver free breakfasts to children in primary and special schools and will start a pilot provision. We know that delivering free breakfast provision in primary and special school settings will improve the equality of access to nutritious food for children, and, in order to effectively deliver an expanded breakfast offer, we need to better understand the extent of current breakfast provision across local authorities. This year, our priority is to map that existing provision and plan what the delivery of a future breakfast offer should look like in order to best meet the needs of children and families in Scotland. That sort of work will be important for all our good food nation plans. As I said yesterday, those plans are the best place for that detail to be.

The right to food was raised by Colin Smyth and others. As is the case with other comments of his, he mischaracterised the Government's position on that, because the Scottish Government is committed to the right to food and to enshrining it in law—there is no question about that. However, as I have said before, there are complex interdependencies between a host of human rights, which is why we cannot take a fragmented approach to their incorporation. That is why we will bring forward a human rights bill during this session of Parliament. However, I strongly believe that, although that incorporation is important, it is through the kind of initiatives that we intend for the good food nation plans that we will make access to healthy, local and nutritious food a reality for everyone, which will really give effect to that right.

I will touch briefly on the use of language in the debate today as well as in the bill. Colin Smyth made much of the bill having regard to various provisions, and he really downplayed that phrase. It is important to remember that we use that language and that legal text for a reason.

**The Presiding Officer:** Cabinet secretary, I ask you to pause briefly. I am aware of several conversations going on in the chamber at the moment. I would be grateful if members would ensure that we can all hear the cabinet secretary.

**Mairi Gougeon:** The language that we have used is important, because it has legal effect, and the Scottish Government can be held to account—and has been, in the past—because of the use of that particular language. It is important to highlight that.

There has been a lot of discussion of the food commission. I thank my colleagues in the Green Party for working with me to ensure that we arrived at a position that allows for real scrutiny of the Government's work on the good food nation goals while respecting the budgetary constraints that we are operating within. I have listened to a range of viewpoints on scrutiny in the context of the bill, and I have met members of all parties in Parliament in recent weeks to discuss their views. Having considered all the options, the views of stakeholders and the support for a commission from all Opposition parties at stage 2, I decided to support the creation of a new food commission. I believe that the independent and expert advice that will be provided by the new food commission will be valuable for relevant authorities in the creation of their plans.

Finally, I will touch on the issue of targets, which have been the subject of much of the debate today. Having listened to the points that have been raised by members across all the parties, I have to say that we are not far apart on the aims that we ultimately want to achieve, whether they involve health, education or tackling poverty. I completely understand the motivation of those who have sought the inclusion of those targets in the text of the bill, and that question was discussed at length during the committee's evidence sessions. Many stakeholders gave a range of examples of targets that they would like to see in the bill. I want to stress that each of those targets is important in its own right, but we firmly believe that the best place for such targets is in our plans, following widespread and inclusive consultation with all stakeholders. That was also the view that the Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee expressed in its stage 1 report.

**The Presiding Officer:** Please conclude, cabinet secretary.

**Mairi Gougeon:** I am just drawing to a close, Presiding Officer. In doing so, I again make the point that, of course, food is important and is central to the lives of everyone in Scotland. We have the unique opportunity today to take an important step on our good food nation journey that will help us to address the many challenges that we face today in relation to food security, supply chain resilience, health and climate change. The bill that we have before us now is one that Scotland can be proud of, because we are taking a novel approach to food policy development and we are doing so in the international spotlight. I believe that, using the tools and structures that the bill gives us, we will lead the way in creating joined-up and long-term changes in our food system, our supply chain and our food culture.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes the debate on the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill.

## Business Motions

18:05

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

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-04997, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 21 June 2022

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)

*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: World Refugee Day – Welcoming and Supporting Refugees in Scotland's Communities

*followed by* Stage 3 Proceedings: Non-Domestic Rates (Coronavirus) (Scotland) Bill

*followed by* Committee Announcements

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

6.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Wednesday 22 June 2022

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:  
Justice and Veterans;  
Finance and Economy

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: Deaths in Custody

*followed by* Scottish Labour Party Business

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.40 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 23 June 2022

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

*followed by* Members' Business

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:  
Education and Skills

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: Provisional Outturn 2021-22

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: Medication Assisted Treatment Standards

*followed by* Stage 3 Proceedings: Fireworks and Pyrotechnic Articles (Scotland) Bill

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

6.30 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 28 June 2022

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)

*followed by* Stage 3 Proceedings: Coronavirus (Recovery and Reform) (Scotland) Bill

*followed by* Committee Announcements

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

6.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Wednesday 29 June 2022

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:  
Covid Recovery and Parliamentary Business;  
Net Zero, Energy and Transport

*followed by* Scottish Government Business

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 30 June 2022

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

*followed by* Members' Business

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:  
Rural Affairs and Islands

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.25 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 20 June 2022, in rule 13.7.3, after the word "except" the words "to the extent to which the Presiding Officer considers that the questions are on the same or similar subject matter or" are inserted.—[George Adam]

*Motion agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next item is consideration of business motion S6M-04998, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on committee meeting

times. Any member who wishes to speak against the motion should press their request-to-speak button now.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that, under Rule 12.3.3B of Standing Orders, the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee can meet, if necessary, at the same time as a meeting of the Parliament on Wednesday 22 June 2022.—[George Adam]

*Motion agreed to.*

## Parliamentary Bureau Motions

18:06

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** The next item of business is consideration of five Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motions S6M-04999 to S6M-05002, on approval of Scottish statutory instruments, and S6M-05003, on designation of a lead committee.

*Motions moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Criminal Justice Act 1988 (Offensive Weapons) (Amendment, Surrender and Compensation) (Scotland) Order 2022 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Disability Assistance for Working Age People (Transitional Provisions and Miscellaneous Amendment) (Scotland) Regulations 2022 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Legal Aid and Advice and Assistance (Miscellaneous Amendment) (Scotland) (No. 2) Regulations 2022 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Surrender of Offensive Weapons (Compensation) (Scotland) Regulations 2022 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Criminal Justice Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Bail and Release from Custody (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.—[George Adam]

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

## Decision Time

18:06

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** There are two questions to be put as a result of today's business.

The first question is, that motion S6M-04938, in the name of Mairi Gougeon, on the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill, be agreed to.

There will be a short suspension to allow members to access the digital voting system.

18:06

*Meeting suspended.*

18:12

*On resuming—*

**The Presiding Officer:** We come to the division on motion S6M-04938, in the name of Mairi Gougeon, on the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is now closed.

**Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I would have voted yes.

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

**For**

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Doney, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 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)

Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 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)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire)  
 (Con)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse)  
 (SNP)  
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine)  
 (SNP)  
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)

Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley)  
 (SNP)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 113, Against 0, Abstentions 0.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill be passed.

**The Presiding Officer:** The Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill is passed. [*Applause.*]

**The Presiding Officer:** The final question is, that motions S6M-04999 to S6M-05003, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, be agreed to?

*Motions agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that, under Rule 12.3.3B of Standing Orders, the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee can meet, if necessary, at the same time as a meeting of the Parliament on Wednesday 22 June 2022.

That the Parliament agrees that the Disability Assistance for Working Age People (Transitional Provisions and Miscellaneous Amendment) (Scotland) Regulations 2022 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Legal Aid and Advice and Assistance (Miscellaneous Amendment) (Scotland) (No. 2) Regulations 2022 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Surrender of Offensive Weapons (Compensation) (Scotland) Regulations 2022 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Criminal Justice Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Bail and Release from Custody (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes decision time.

## Point of Order

18:16

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. As you are well aware, I am no stranger to robust and, sometimes, even heated debate in this chamber—after all, we are all here because we are passionate about our country and our desire to improve the life chances of those whom we represent. I would hope that we all agree on that point, albeit that we might have different routes to deliver on that. I have said before that, when debating, it is important that we at least treat each other with a bit of respect.

I believe that Angus Robertson, the Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture, when responding to legitimate questioning from Opposition members in the chamber yesterday, crossed a line by devaluing the role that list MSPs have in this place. He seemed to suggest that, because we are not constituency MSPs, we have no right to question or scrutinise Scottish Government opinion and to represent the significant number of Scots who also disagree with him. He did so again on the radio this morning.

I would consider that branding MSPs losers for being list MSPs is hardly respectful. I gently suggest to Angus Robertson that he is the last person in here who should bandy about the term “losers”. Presiding Officer, that not only—  
[*Interruption.*]

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** Members, can we please hear Mr Whittle? Thank you.

**Brian Whittle:** Not only is that disrespectful to my esteemed Conservative colleagues Stephen Kerr and Craig Hoy; the cabinet secretary is being disrespectful to every list MSP in this chamber, past and present. In their ranks, we can include Nicola Sturgeon, 66 Scottish National Party MSPs and even your good self, Presiding Officer.

To be honest, I am surprised that someone of Angus Robertson’s stature need resort to such base language and tactics. Surely, such discourse cannot be the way in which we should treat colleagues in the chamber. Those of us who were involved in the 2014 independent referendum know the vitriol and hatred that was stoked up, which was due in no small part to the conduct and language of those in this building. We certainly do not want to pour petrol on that fire.

Presiding Officer, what can you do to ensure that parliamentarians conduct themselves with a bit of decorum and treat colleagues—even those with whom we disagree—with a bit of the respect that they would want afforded to themselves?

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Whittle. I responded to a related point yesterday. If any member in this chamber were to suggest that the status of regional and constituency members differed, I would intervene.

Constituency and regional members have equal status as members of the Scottish Parliament. The Scotland Act 1998 and standing orders make no distinction in terms of their powers in representing constituents and in scrutinising and holding the Government to account. The Presiding Officers act impartially, taking account of the interests of all members equally.

Mr Whittle is right of course—debate in the chamber can be robust and passionate. I take the opportunity to remind all members of the requirement, under standing orders and the code of conduct, to treat each other with courtesy and respect at all times. Thank you.

## Protection of War Memorials

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-01794, in the name of Meghan Gallacher, on better protection for Scotland's war memorials. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament notes the recent petition submitted on behalf of Dennistoun War Memorial, urging the Scottish Government to introduce stronger legislation, which would recognise the desecration or vandalism of war memorials as a specific criminal offence; understands that war memorials hold a very special place within the hearts of Scotland's communities; further understands that there has been an unprecedented increase in the desecration and vandalism of Scotland's war memorials since 2015, with some of those most recently targeted being the war memorial in the Duchess of Hamilton Park in Motherwell, the Carronshore War Memorial, the Boer War Memorial in Glasgow, the Spanish Civil War Memorial in Motherwell, the Kirkcaldy War Memorial, the Cowdenbeath War Memorial, and the Prestonpans War Memorial; notes calls to bring forward stricter legislation to ensure that war memorials are given special protection status; further notes the view that this would assist the authorities when prosecuting perpetrators of what it sees as these heinous crimes, and believes that war memorials are not representative of political or religious iconography, but are rather invaluable memorials to the young men and women who have paid the ultimate sacrifice for their countries, so that everyone today, irrespective of their background, can equally enjoy freedom from tyranny and oppression.

18:21

**Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con):** I am really pleased to bring to the chamber my first members' business debate, on better protection for Scotland's war memorials. I appreciate that I am cutting it a bit fine, as I go on maternity leave next week, but I am honoured to have the opportunity to raise such an important issue on behalf of veterans and community groups across Scotland.

Before I begin, I would like to mention the friends of Dennistoun war memorial group. Unfortunately, the group's members are unable to be in Parliament today, but they have been at the forefront of the campaign to introduce better legislation on our war memorials, so I thank them for all their effort and hard work.

Today is 15 June—a rather innocuous date. To many of us in the chamber, it is simply another Wednesday in the calendar. However, during the great war, 15 June resulted in 2,637 recorded casualties for Britain and her Commonwealth allies. That is 2,637 sons, fathers, brothers and husbands who would never come home. Most of those men still lie in foreign lands, where they went to serve and where they ultimately died. As the poem says,

“and now we lie,  
In Flanders fields.”

War memorials were commissioned throughout towns and villages in Scotland to commemorate the brave men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice so that we could live in a world that was free of tyranny and oppression. For many of the families and relatives, the memorials provide the only focal point for remembering. It is the names of their loved ones that have been etched on the hundreds of war memorials across the country. The memorials are emotive and are at the heart of our communities.

Many gather at these impressive structures at least once a year, on 11 November at 11 am, so that we can come together to remember all those who have been commemorated in stone. It is important that we continue to meet at those landmarks and that younger generations are educated on what those who are named on the structures fought and died for.

Since 1966, there have been 66 attacks on war memorials in Scotland. Although the number appears to be low, almost 70 per cent of those attacks have occurred within the past decade. That is a worrying trend. Data shows that most attacks have taken place across the central belt, in particular in the area that I represent. During my time as a councillor and now as an MSP, I have been made aware of several incidents in which war memorials have been damaged and vandalised.

The first incident, in 2019, involved the war memorial situated in the Duchess park in Motherwell. I was horrified by the wording of the graffiti that had been drawn all over the names of soldiers who fought and died for our country. Words such as “fascists” and “rats”, alongside the phrase—I apologise in advance for reading this out—“scum of the earth”, were written in red wax that had stained the stone. Although some community members attempted to clean it off, a specialist stonemason was required to carry out the repair work. Like many, I was grateful that the council acted quickly, and the memorial was restored in just a matter of days. However, I was disgusted that someone could be so cruel and disrespectful.

Following that attack, I have been involved in dealing with other incidents, including at the memorial in Coatbridge, the Spanish civil war memorial in Motherwell and the Holytown war memorial. I know that some of my central belt MSP colleagues—

**Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Meghan Gallacher:** Yes—certainly.

**Clare Adamson:** First, I wish Meghan Gallacher all the best for her upcoming maternity leave. I thank her for mentioning the Duchess park memorial—my great uncle's name is on that memorial.

Will she join me in thanking Mr McGowan and his son Steven, who cleaned the “Nae Pasaran” Spanish civil war memorial? They came across the graffiti and took it upon themselves to clean the memorial, which also had fascist symbols painted on it.

**Meghan Gallacher:** Absolutely—I commented on that issue at the time. No memorial that has the names of loved ones on it should ever be defaced in such a manner, so I agree with the member's comments. I know that some of my Central Scotland region colleagues will go on to mention various other examples like the one that Clare Adamson mentioned.

Given the level of attacks on war memorials across Scotland, groups such as the friends of Dennistoun war memorial group have been formed to take direct action and to introduce better protections. They have organised a successful social media campaign to highlight the number of incidents, and they have brought together groups of people who care about our heritage, our history and our war dead. They have petitioned the Parliament on numerous occasions to ask that more be done to protect these sites from the mindless and abhorrent attacks on the memories of those who paid the ultimate sacrifice. It is a rather sad indictment that those petitions have so far been unsuccessful in achieving their desired outcome.

Furthermore, many of the leading veterans charities in Scotland have condemned the attacks. Poppyscotland and Legion Scotland have regularly condemned the attacks on war memorials, and they are especially concerned about the detrimental impact that such attacks have on the mental health of the veteran community that they so passionately represent.

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans and other ministers might suggest that we already have in place legislation to deal with cases of vandalism of our war memorials. They might tell Parliament that perpetrators of vandalism can face up to six months in prison or fines of up to £5,000 under current legislation that deals with the vandalism and desecration of statues and memorials, including war memorials. However, I do not feel that those laws are tough enough, and they do not provide the necessary deterrents to stop such events from happening in the first place. If the legislation was adequate, there would not be an increasing number of attacks on the memorials.

There is a massive difference between the graffiti and vandalism of a picnic table and that of a war memorial, yet under the current legislation both events are categorised in the same manner. That cannot be right. I therefore intend to introduce a member's bill so that we can finally provide stronger legislation to better protect Scotland's war memorials, as has already been successfully introduced by my colleagues in England and Wales via the United Kingdom Government.

I remind Parliament that armed forces and veterans week starts on Monday. It is an opportunity for local communities to come together to support our armed forces men and women and the charities and third-party organisations that work alongside veterans once they return to civilian life. I look forward to working alongside various groups as I begin to progress my bill through Parliament.

18:28

**Paul O’Kane (West Scotland) (Lab):** I thank Meghan Gallacher for bringing the debate to the chamber, and I wish her well for her forthcoming maternity leave.

I apologise to you, Presiding Officer, and to colleagues, as I will need to leave prior to the conclusion of the debate. I thank you for your accommodation in that regard.

I declare an interest as the chair of Neilston War Memorial Association.

I pay tribute to all those who have served and lost their lives and are recorded on our memorials across Scotland. I am thinking in particular of the Falkland Islands conflict, as we gather only the day after the 40-year anniversary commemoration of the conflict's conclusion. Forty years on, we remember the 255 British personnel who made the ultimate sacrifice, many of whom are recorded on memorials across the country.

It is quite simply appalling when a war memorial is vandalised or desecrated. Meghan Gallacher is right to say in her motion that

“war memorials are not representative of political or religious iconography”.

Instead, they serve an important purpose in Scotland. That purpose is bringing people together to remember.

I believe that it is right that we take remembrance seriously, especially considering that we have asked so much of our armed forces, and given the historic horrors of the first and second world wars, in particular.

War memorials should serve not as a glorification of war but, rather, as a reminder of

what happens when dialogue fails and we fail to respect our differences and find common cause in our shared home on this planet. It is with that in mind that I believe that the idea of making vandalism of a war memorial a specific criminal offence has considerable merit, and the proposal should be fully examined. As such, I look forward to seeing the outcome of the petition that has been submitted by the friends of Dennistoun war memorial group and to engaging with Meghan Gallacher on the proposals that she hopes to bring forward.

To make a real and substantial difference right now, the Scottish Government should support police and prosecutors to exercise the full force of the current law to deal with vandalism. In my village of Neilston, we take great pride in honouring the lives lost to war and the pain of a community left behind. In some cases, that pain continues to be experienced by families to this day.

The Neilston War Memorial Association, which I have spoken about before in the chamber, is run by local volunteers and has worked hard to place and maintain memorials throughout the local area. That includes the regular maintenance of our cenotaph and the erection of a series of benches and information boards telling the story of those who died in the Arctic convoys in the second world war and the shelter that was given in Neilston to hundreds of refugees whom those men died protecting. However, in recent weeks, that relatively new memorial was vandalised. My community and I were outraged by that and the behaviour that was associated with it. It made me think about what action our community can take to stop such acts from happening again.

I do not doubt that some people vandalise memorials with political motivation—there is, of course, evidence of that—but I believe that people can also carry out such acts out of ignorance. I am sure that many in the chamber will agree that the best way to overcome ignorance is through education. We must ensure that schools across our country teach lessons about, for example, the horrors of the first world war. We should hear about the stories and experiences of young people in our communities who never returned—young men who, very often, were just like the young people hearing those stories today. We must make those stories relevant rather than just relying on names etched in cold stone on our war memorials. It is only by educating young people about such horrors and the impact that they can have on people in their communities that we can make war memorials relevant to young people and give them a sense of ownership over them. I know that many schools in Scotland have done incredible work on that already by, for example,

arranging trips to places such as Flanders and Normandy.

I hope that, with a stronger focus from the Government on supporting groups such as the Neilston War Memorial Association, and by working with Police Scotland and our schools, we can end vandalism of war memorials and continue to promote their protection and enhancement in all of our communities.

18:33

**Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP):** I, too, congratulate Meghan Gallacher on getting this important subject debated in Holyrood, and I wish her well on her maternity leave.

I also commend the work that communities, volunteers, the British Legion, churches and councils across Argyll and Bute and the rest of Scotland do to keep war memorials in the heart of their communities in such wonderful condition. In St Andrews, as a brownie and as a girl guide, I took part in many remembrance day services in Holy Trinity church—the minute's silence, the parade to the war memorial and the wreath laying. I had been told about the wars and the sacrifice, but it was not until Easter 1982, when a family holiday to the battlefields of northern France coincided with the Falklands war, that remembrance day became much more meaningful.

I knew that six Minto cousins fought in world war one and that three survived—one of whom was my great uncle Rab, who, on his return, studied for the ministry. Of the cousins who did not come home, two are buried in different cemeteries in Poperinghe. One was from East Lothian and one was from Australia. They are closer together in death than they were in life. I was able to pay my respects to those two men when I attended commemorations on the 100-year anniversary of world war one in 2017 in Ypres and Tyne Cot. Families in those places joined together in remembrance of, as the motion says,

“the young men and women who have paid the ultimate sacrifice for their countries, so that everyone today, irrespective of their background, can equally enjoy freedom from tyranny and oppression.”

Like communities across Scotland and Argyll and Bute, Islay has its war memorials and Commonwealth War Commission graveyards—memorials in remembrance of locals who were lost and sailors who were washed up on its shores. One grave is of an American soldier named Roy Muncaster. In February 1919, when the troop ship *Tuscania* was torpedoed in the north channel between Islay and Ireland, almost 200 men were lost, with many being swept on to Islay. Those who did not survive were buried there. After the

war, those American soldiers were repatriated to their communities or to Arlington cemetery or were taken to Brookwood cemetery, south of London—all except for Roy Muncaster. His family wanted him to remain where he had been laid to rest. They knew that he would be looked after by the Islay folk, and he is. The Forest Ranger Service, which Roy had worked for in the United States, named a mountain in his memory in the Olympia national park—memorials take different forms.

Islay's war memorials commemorate the names of the fallen in world war two and other conflicts. In 2018, support from the Scottish Government allowed us to clean the war memorials and keep them in great form. In small communities, the memorials are personal. The surnames etched into the stone are still on the school rolls today—they are not simply names; they are family members who are recognised, remembered and respected. The stories of the battles, in the trenches or on the seas, are handed down, retold and learned about in school.

I struggle to understand why anyone would vandalise or desecrate a war memorial or a gravestone. Do we not do enough to ensure that the stories behind the names are told? The punishment should fit the crime, and I welcome that.

The history behind our war memorials needs to be handed down the generations—lest we forget. Debates such as this one, including the debate last week on 40 years since the Falklands war, led by my colleague Graeme Dey, are so important because they raise awareness.

Our war memorials belong to our communities. They represent the collective memories and histories of our communities. As others have said, they are beyond politics. They do not judge wars as just or unjust; they simply, but starkly, remind us of the high prices that communities pay when countries go to war, and they honour those of our own folk who made the ultimate sacrifice. They are too important to fall prey to thoughtless and ignorant vandalism.

18:37

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** It is a great pleasure to follow Jenni Minto's beautiful speech. All the speeches have been first class. I congratulate my good friend and neighbour Meghan Gallacher on securing this debate about Scotland's war memorials. It is a timely debate for the people of Falkirk, with the unveiling of the Bainsford war memorial on Friday last week and the rededication of the Grangemouth war memorial on Saturday.

Scotland's war memorials must be defended. As the motion sets out, there has been an increase in

targeted vandalism on war memorials across Scotland. Those are shameless attacks not only on the physical memorials but on what those memorials represent. Millions across our United Kingdom and across Scotland made the ultimate sacrifice so that we can enjoy the liberties that are part of our everyday lives. We must defend that legacy.

When Flanders was mentioned, memories came back to me of a family trip to Ypres to visit the graves of our fallen, which are tended by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, and the Menin Gate. Everyone should see the Menin Gate, which displays the names of tens of thousands of young men—they were very young—who were lost and whose bodies were never found. Such memorials, whether in Belgium, northern France, or across all our communities in Scotland must be conserved. Members will not be surprised to hear a Conservative ask for something to be conserved.

Everyone across Scotland must have a local war memorial of which they can be proud. I live in the small community of Bridge of Allan, where the war memorial is the focus of our remembrance, across all parties and all types of people from across the town every remembrance Sunday.

At the remembrance day events in Grangemouth last year, several members of the public came up to me to express their sadness about the growing moss on the war memorial. Sharing the concern, I wrote to numerous bodies to ask them what could be done to remove the moss. I found out that a professional clean to remove moss and bacteria growth was last undertaken in 2017, but that moss was once again visible within 18 months. Although I was assured that the low-level removal of moss growth can be undertaken by park staff and by volunteers after appropriate training, I was disappointed to read that Falkirk Council had concluded that

“re-commissioning this cleaning work on a sufficiently regular basis for the memorial to appear clear of biological growth is not affordable within our current budgets.”

I do not wish to stray into party-political territory, but Falkirk Council has suffered cuts, and I fear for the future of budgets that exist to conserve Scotland's war memorials.

When preparing for the debate, I was struck by a quote from one of my political heroes, Winston Churchill, who said:

“We shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us.”

I reflect on that. I know that war memorials are not buildings, but they certainly shape us. I will never forget the impression that the war memorials of Belgium and northern France made on our children. Regardless of where we are in our United Kingdom, when we walk past a war memorial, we

can only remember the duty that was shown by our fellow countrymen and the sacrifices that they made.

As we in this chamber, and those across our United Kingdom, look forward to the future, we must ground ourselves by remembering all those who have come before us, the sacrifices that they made and the lessons that they continue to teach us. Our war memorials allow us to do that daily, and that is why we must be united and defend them.

18:41

**Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP):** I, too, thank and pay tribute to Meghan Gallacher for bringing this important debate to the chamber, and I wish her well in her maternity leave.

The motion is correct that

“memorials hold a very special place within the hearts of”

our communities, and I am sure that most of us in the chamber have paid tribute at such memorials to those who died fighting for their country. They are a reminder of what we lost and the sacrifices that were made.

I have had the honour many times of laying a wreath at the war memorial that is situated near the centre of Coatbridge, which Meghan Gallacher also talked about, and at the war memorials at Glenboig, Gartcosh and other locations across my constituency of Coatbridge and Chryston. I have laid the wreath at Coatbridge for six years as an MSP, and did so as a councillor before that. It goes back even further to when I was a young boy in the Boys Brigade and we went there on memorial day.

The Coatbridge memorial pays tribute to those who lost their lives in the first and second world wars. As the former MSP Elaine Smith said in the Parliament a few times, it was designed by Edith Burnet Hughes, who was an important figure in Scottish architecture, as she was considered to be Britain’s first practising woman architect. The memorial was first unveiled in 1924, which means that this special memorial is fast approaching its 100th birthday. I am sure that Meghan Gallacher and I, along with others, will be at events to commemorate that in a couple of years.

Clare Adamson mentioned a personal connection to the war memorial in her area; similarly, the name Joseph Simpson, who was my mum’s uncle whom she never met, is inscribed on the Coatbridge memorial. He would be my great uncle, and I am very proud that his name is inscribed there.

The motion, as Meghan Gallacher has talked about, is, sadly, about the vandalism that can sometimes occur to memorials. The memorial in Coatbridge has been subject to several acts of vandalism. During the six years that I have been an MSP, I have had to stand up during First Minister’s question time on a couple of occasions to condemn the vandalism. What was written on the war memorial was absolutely disgusting, and the local community and I were rightly outraged. Over the past couple of years, there has not been anything—I hope that that continues and that I do not find myself having to stand up in the chamber this year to condemn it. Attacks on any cenotaph are a direct attack on the memory of the men who fought and died for their country. They came from different backgrounds and were of all faiths and of none.

I know that the situation is different from the one that Stephen Kerr spoke about, which was about moss, but I have to say that North Lanarkshire Council reacted very quickly—as it did in the situation in Motherwell that Meghan Gallacher spoke about—and cleaned up the graffiti on the memorial. I pay tribute to the council for doing that.

I will spend the rest of my time talking about two local men who have contributed greatly to ensuring that the war memorial pays tribute to everyone who lost their life. Jenni Minto made a point about people being reminded of the value and importance of such people. In the previous session of Parliament, I spoke about both those men in a members’ business debate.

Les Jenkins, who is a former teacher—indeed, he was my history teacher just a couple of years ago—first had the idea around 35 years ago of a project to mark the centenary of the end of the conflict. He involved his history pupils at Coatbridge high school, and completed it in his retirement. He compiled the stories of all 863 first world war fallen who are on the Coatbridge cenotaph. Les’s biographies of the Coatbridge soldiers are contained in a series of folders that members can access in the local studies room at Airdrie library, if they are interested.

The other gentleman whom I will talk about is John McCann. John has a website that is the culmination of more than a decade of research. He travelled across Europe to piece together scraps of information that were recorded about the brave fighting men from Coatbridge who lost their lives during the great war. When Mr McCann learned that no research had been done on the men whom the memorial commemorates, he decided to collect information himself, and his website now lists all the names. There has been a lot of support from family and friends of the fallen who have found out information about their loved ones. I am

sure that members will agree that that is incredibly important work.

I hope to meet John soon—he now lives in Northern Ireland—and Les Jenkins and I are looking to set up a meeting. When we get it set up, I would be happy to extend an invite to Meghan Gallacher to come along to it, if she can fit that in, given her maternity leave.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr MacGregor.

**Fulton MacGregor:** I will leave it at that, Presiding Officer.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That is great, thank you.

18:47

**Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con):** I join my colleagues who have spoken in thanking Meghan Gallacher for securing this important debate, which is the first members' business debate that she has secured, and for giving all of us the opportunity to speak about the importance of having better protection for our war memorials.

In the summer of 2018, which was the year in which we marked 100 years since the end of world war one, I visited all 50 war memorials and Commonwealth graves in Aberdeenshire West. Visiting the memorials to pay respects to those who gave their lives in the great war was deeply moving. It was a stark reminder of not just the violence and atrocities but the solidarity, sacrifice and bravery that many showed.

War memorials serve as a symbol to respect those who gave their life for the greater good. I support my colleague's calls to introduce stronger legislation that will ensure that war memorials are protected and recognise the vandalism of memorials as the heinous criminal act that it is.

During my visits to those war memorials and graveyards, I was very disheartened to see that many of them were no longer being maintained properly. Headstones and memorials serve to honour people's sacrifice and bravery, and they should be well maintained. Several constituents have contacted me about the state of those graveyards.

I understand that it is the Scottish Government's practice not to directly fund war memorials. However, I was assured previously that, a number of years ago, it introduced a fund to help to maintain and improve war memorials where required. That was operated through Historic Environment Scotland's War Memorials Trust grant scheme. I would be grateful to hear from the minister whether that fund is still in operation or

whether any other systems are in place to support the maintenance of war memorials.

Cemeteries fall under the responsibility of local authorities. Obviously, Covid restrictions impacted on landscape service teams, but normal service has not been resumed following cuts to their budgets—I should say that that is often with the excuse of increasing wildlife habitat. Therefore, communities have started to take matters into their own hands, including the friends of Ellon cemetery group, which was started by Councillor Gillian Owen after seeing the success of the friends of Turriff cemetery.

As if budget cuts were not bad enough, I read just today in *The Press and Journal* that the friends of Ellon cemetery, who were appalled at discovering graves of loved ones covered in cut grass, have now been banned from clearing the mess themselves due to health and safety rules, unless they get special training. One cannot help but think what those who are remembered by such graves would make of how we define risk today.

I ask the Government to recognise this important issue and to consider providing direct funding to community councils or other local groups to ensure that all graveyards and memorials can be well kept, including cutting the grass and maintaining structures to enable people to show their respect for many more years to come.

I finish by thanking those who have fought for us and those who continue to serve. In current times, we are reminded of the bravery of those who make the world a safer place, and we are forever grateful and thankful for their service.

18:50

**The Minister for Community Safety (Ash Regan):** I, too, extend my thanks to Meghan Gallacher for providing an opportunity to highlight and discuss the importance of preserving and protecting our war memorials, and thank the other members who have contributed to tonight's debate—in particular, Jenni Minto, who made a thoughtful contribution.

We have taken this time to reflect that memorials such as the ones that we are discussing are not there to glorify war. Instead, they are there to recognise the sacrifices that were made to protect the freedoms that we enjoy today. War memorials across Scotland give friends, families and the public important and poignant focal points for paying their respects to the many young men and women from our country who did not return from conflicts around the globe.

Memorials also play a vital role in raising awareness of past conflicts among those who are

too young to remember them. They help us to remember the hardships that were endured, the courage that was displayed in the face of adversity and the ultimate sacrifice that was made during times of conflict.

I have been lucky enough to see some of the outstanding work that is being done in our communities across the country to honour those who fought and continue to fight for the liberties and peace that we so often take for granted, and I am grateful for that. We will forever hold an honoured place in our hearts for the commitment and sacrifices made by veterans, as well as those made by our active servicemen and women. Their legacy is deserving of the utmost respect.

Therefore, it is easy for us to appreciate how distressing and abhorrent it is when war memorials and statues that are connected to past conflicts are the target of wilful vandalism. I am pleased that the Scottish Government plays its part in ensuring that war memorials are looked after to the highest standards through the Scottish Government's centenary memorials restoration fund. Historic Environment Scotland provided support totalling £1 million to the War Memorials Trust, and that money was used to aid repairs to war memorials throughout Scotland from April 2013 until March 2018. The programme supported the repair and conservation of about 125 projects in total.

The support did not end there. In 2019-20, Historic Environment Scotland also awarded the War Memorials Trust a grant of just over £91,000 to fund 50 per cent of its grant programmes and conservation programmes. I am pleased to be able to say that, this year, Historic Environment Scotland has awarded a further £88,000 to fund the War Memorials Trust conservation programme and 50 per cent of its grant programme in Scotland for the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2025.

**Meghan Gallacher:** I welcome the minister's announcement, but will she acknowledge that the current legislation does not act as a deterrent, which is why we have seen vandalism of war memorials increase in the past decade?

**Ash Regan:** I take the member's point. I have some statistics, if I have time to find them. It seems that the crime rate is very low. The information that I have received from the War Memorials Trust says that 0.04 per cent of war memorials are damaged in the way that Ms Gallacher has described. However, I also accept that it is a particularly distressing crime. I will go on to speak about the legislative approach in a moment.

I turn to the distressing subject of vandalism, including the incidents that have been referred to

already. The recent petition that has been submitted on behalf of the friends of Dennistoun war memorial urges the Scottish Government to introduce stronger legislation that would recognise the desecration or vandalism of war memorials as a criminal offence.

I hear the heartfelt concerns of the group and, indeed, of some of the speakers this evening. I reassure members that the Scottish Government continues to recognise the importance of Scottish war memorials in ensuring that those who gave their lives in conflict are not forgotten.

Vandalism is a crime, regardless of the motivations for it, and the Scottish Government condemns all acts of malicious vandalism and graffiti. Such behaviour is unacceptable in modern Scotland and those indulging in it can expect to face criminal charges.

I will say a little more about the current legal provisions that relate to vandalism. Under the vandalism provisions that are contained in the Criminal Law (Consolidation) (Scotland) Act 1995,

"any person who, without reasonable excuse, wilfully or recklessly destroys or damages any property belonging to another shall be guilty of the offence of vandalism"

and liable to a fine of up to £1,000. Furthermore, the Antisocial Behaviour etc (Scotland) Act 2004 enables the police to issue on-the-spot penalties to people who are suspected of lower-level offences such as graffiti.

Additionally, depending on the circumstances, a common law charge of breach of the peace could be used to deal with those who are involved in the desecration of statues and monuments. Such individuals may also fall foul of the Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Act 2010 if they are involved in threatening or abusive behaviour that causes fear or alarm, for which an individual can be fined or receive a prison term of up to five years.

The Scottish Government supports police and prosecutors in using the existing powers that are available to them in dealing with incidents of vandalism that affect war memorials. However, we are open to considering the matter further, including whether it would be appropriate to introduce additional legislation to protect war memorials.

I thank Meghan Gallacher for bringing the debate to the chamber, and I welcome the views that have been expressed from members of all parties, which have been helpful in raising the profile of an important issue. I will reflect on the points that have been made tonight, and on those made in the petition from the friends of Dennistoun war memorial.

*Meeting closed at 18:57.*



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