



**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Meeting of the Parliament

**Wednesday 28 September 2022**

**Session 6**



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# Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 28 September 2022

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

## Point of Order

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** Good afternoon—

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** At least allow me to say “Good afternoon”, Mr Kerr.

**Stephen Kerr:** I did not want to miss my opening, Presiding Officer.

I have, I admit, asked this question before in the chamber. It relates to the inequalities that exist between the Executive and Parliament and how badly we need a Parliament that has the power to hold the Executive to account.

Members quite often get short shrift from ministers when we ask oral questions in the chamber—when they do not answer the question at all but simply read out a civil service briefing that happens to be there in front of them, regardless of the specific nature of the supplementary question that is asked.

Today, Presiding Officer, I am asking for your help and guidance in respect of the quality of the answers that I am getting as a member of this Parliament in response to my written questions. In February this year, I asked a question, which was designated S6W-06242. In response, I was told

“We are working closely with local authorities and are in planning stages of this commitment. We will report to Parliament in due course.”—*[Written Answers, 4 February 2022; S6W-06242.]*

Six months later I asked the same question again, because I had not heard anything in the chamber about the matter. That written question was designated S6W-10759. I was given exactly the same answer—six months later. That is just one example of something that is commonplace and has been experienced by many members across the chamber.

Presiding Officer, what can you do, on behalf of us, as members, to ensure that the Government even attempts to answer the written questions that we submit, as members, on behalf of our constituents?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Kerr—and thank you for advance notice of the point of order. However, you will be aware that the

content of written answers is not set out in standing orders. Therefore, that is not a point of order on which I can rule, I am afraid.

## Portfolio Question Time

### Covid-19 Recovery and Parliamentary Business

14:02

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** We move on to portfolio questions. I remind members who wish to ask a supplementary question to press their request-to-speak buttons during the relevant question. I would appreciate short questions and answers to match, in order that we might get through as many questions as possible.

#### Citizens Assemblies

**1. Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what progress has been made on the rolling out of citizens assemblies. (S6O-01380)

**The Minister for Parliamentary Business (George Adam):** The Scottish Government has committed to providing more opportunities for people to share their experiences and views and to influence Government decisions, including—but not limited to—citizens assemblies.

In March, the institutionalising participatory and deliberative democracy—IPDD—working group delivered its report, recommending that infrastructure and processes are required to deliver those commitments and to learn lessons from previous citizens assemblies. The recent programme for government committed to responding to the report. That response will set out steps for how we can routinely involve people, communities and children in democratic decision making.

**Rona Mackay:** Does the minister agree that, as we are in the middle of a cost of living crisis that is being exacerbated by Tory budget policies that benefit the wealthy, a citizens assembly forum on the issue is urgently needed?

**George Adam:** The cost of living crisis is an important issue for public deliberation, in helping to identify equitable ways, which have public support, to move through the crisis. At present, we are not in a position from which to run a short-notice citizens assembly on the issue.

However, we have set up a people's panel on wellbeing in 2022 and beyond, which has met three times so far. The cost of living crisis has been discussed with panelists to provide us with in-depth understanding of people's views on the crisis and of its current and anticipated impact on people's lives.

### Covid-19 Recovery (Programme for Government 2022-23)

**2. Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how measures set out in its programme for government 2022-23 will support Scotland's Covid-19 recovery. (S6O-01381)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney):** Recovering from Covid-19 remains a priority for the Scottish Government. The 2022-23 programme for government outlines the range of actions that we are taking to support that, and it addresses the impacts of the pandemic across our society, economy and health services. It sets out our investment for the next year through the Covid support fund, which assists those who are living with long-term effects of infection; outlines financial support that is available for local economies that are dealing with the impacts of the pandemic; and undertakes to eradicate healthcare waits of more than 18 months in most specialties.

**Jim Fairlie:** In relation to pandemic or disease resilience, in the Scottish Parliament's COVID-19 Recovery Committee evidence session on 8 September, Carolyn Low, who is the director of finance at NHS National Services Scotland, said that in the event of a future pandemic crisis that affected only Scotland, the funding would have to come from existing Scottish funding sources. Does the Scottish Government have the fiscal flexibility that it requires to respond to such a crisis?

**John Swinney:** Mr Fairlie will be familiar with the range of powers and responsibilities that the Government has within the parliamentary system. Of course, one of the key limitations is that we do not have the capacity to borrow for resource spending purposes, other than for very limited purposes in relation to financial management. Therefore, in the scenario that Mr Fairlie has put to me—a pandemic emerging that would require additional public expenditure within a financial year—in order to prioritise dealing with such a pandemic, the Government could provide support only by taking resources that are allocated to other areas of expenditure. Obviously, I would hope that if there were to be an event that happened at United Kingdom level, the wider workings that we saw during the Covid-19 pandemic would be relevant and would be applied. Obviously, the Government would co-operate with that in any future scenario.

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** One sector that needs help to recover from the pressures of Covid is the social housing sector. The Scottish Government's programme for government proposes a bill to freeze rents, although we have not yet seen that bill and, I

believe, are not to see it until shortly before we are due to debate it on Tuesday.

This week, I received a letter from Kingdom Housing Association in my region. In it, it expresses serious concerns about a rent freeze. It says that

“a rent freeze in the social sector is a serious threat to the Scottish Government’s targets on decarbonisation and affordable housing.”

The letter goes on to say that the freeze will lead to a reduction in the association’s delivery of new homes, as well as

“the deferral of planned maintenance works ... and ... a potential reduction in service delivery standards to tenants”.

How does the Scottish Government respond to those very serious concerns from social housing providers?

Although this is not directly relevant, Presiding Officer, I should remind members of my entry in the register of interests in relation to private rented property.

**John Swinney:** The issues that Mr Fraser raises on behalf of Kingdom Housing Association are all legitimate questions that Parliament will have to consider when it considers the proposed legislation, so it would be premature of me to give a specific response until the provisions are published. Adequate opportunity has been made available for Parliament to consider that proposed legislation.

The letter that Mr Fraser has quoted highlights the fact that there are really difficult choices to be made in this cost of living crisis. I suspect that we will have a lot of talk about that as I respond to questions this afternoon. There are very difficult choices that arise because inflation is putting enormous pressure on our budgets, and because individual householders face cost of living challenges. The Government has taken the decision that we need to protect people from rent increases for a limited period, given that such increases would exacerbate the effects of the cost of living issues.

Within all that, we will engage constructively with the social housing sector. However, I do not accept the idea that we can navigate our way through the cost of living crisis without difficult decisions having to be confronted. I have been completely open with Parliament about those difficulties; I gave a statement here three weeks ago on the difficulties in our budget. We will have more of those issues to wrestle with in the period to come.

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

**3. Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what it

anticipates the impact will be on its Covid recovery strategy of the reduction to the Covid recovery budget announced on 7 September as part of the emergency budget review. (S6O-01382)

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

The current fiscal environment presents real and significant pressures. Within the constraints of a fixed budget and limited powers, the Scottish Government is managing the nation’s finances while maximising the support that is available to those who are most affected by the pandemic and by the on-going cost crisis.

The emergency budget review is on-going and will assess all opportunities to redirect additional resources to those who are most in need as well as to reduce the burdens on businesses, stimulate the economy and support our wider recovery from the pandemic. Any changes to budgets that result from that will be formally set out to Parliament in the standard budget revision process.

**Douglas Lumsden:** Given the reduction in the budget, will the cabinet secretary give an update on ventilation in classrooms? Have classroom doors been cut along with the budget?

**John Swinney:** Frankly, I think that that question trivialises the difficulties that we face. It demonstrates where the Conservative Party is just now. The fact that on today of all days, when the United Kingdom’s public finances face absolute peril, Douglas Lumsden believes that he should use parliamentary time in such a flippant fashion, tells us everything. Mr Kerr has just been on his feet complaining about the quality of answers. Well, I am on my feet complaining about the quality of the questions from Mr Lumsden, who needs to up his game.

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** Is the reality not that the Deputy First Minister needs to tell Douglas Lumsden that we have a problem with pressure on the Covid recovery budget and all other budgets because we have a crazy UK Westminster Government that is cutting taxes, allowing the pound to collapse and pushing up energy import costs and everything else?

**John Swinney:** I agree unreservedly with John Mason’s analysis of the current situation and his characterisation of the United Kingdom Government’s behaviour as “crazy”. In its fiscal event on Friday, the United Kingdom Government announced measures that have recklessly undermined confidence in the public finances and the economy, and it did absolutely nothing to alleviate the suffering of individuals in our society, many of whom will be Mr Mason’s constituents.

The United Kingdom Government needs to concentrate on stabilising the public finances, on removing the ridiculous budget provisions that it

put in place on Friday and on addressing the serious issue, which I have put to it, that our budget is now, because of raging inflation in our economy, worth £1.6 billion less than it was when we set it. That is the real challenge that we face.

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** Earlier this month, the Scottish Government wrote to integration joint boards to inform them that they will have to return unspent Covid reserves. That is an extraordinary decision, given that the deadly virus has not gone away and that clinicians warn of a really challenging period ahead for the national health service and social care. Will the cabinet secretary explain why he is raiding the coffers of IJBs at a time when they need support to deliver vital health and social care services? Does he agree that, if it had been the UK Government clawing back money from Scotland, he would have been enraged, and rightly so?

**John Swinney:** The reason why that needs to be done is that we have to use all the means available to us to support public servants, many of whom work for integration joint boards, to deliver healthcare in our society following increased pay deals to deal with the consequences of inflation.

I do not need to explain this to Jackie Baillie, but I will, just for completeness. The Scottish Government cannot borrow for resource purposes, and we cannot change tax rates during the financial year, so unless the UK Government expands the resources that are available by changing the spending envelope, no extra resources will be available to us.

During my conversation with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on Friday, I took the opportunity to press the case for increases in public spending. He was entirely unsympathetic to my appeals for that step to be taken, so the Scottish Government must, because we do not have access to flexibility, look at various ways in which we can utilise resources in order that we can afford increased pay claims and address other pressures within the financial year. What Jackie Baillie cited is one example of the steps that the Government has to take.

#### **Covid Recovery Strategy (Cost of Living)**

**4. Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how the cost of living crisis is impacting its Covid recovery strategy. (S6O-01383)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney):** The Covid recovery strategy commits us to actions that support financial security for low-income households. The cost of living crisis represents an unprecedented challenge that is impacting people across Scotland and we are providing significant

additional support to help mitigate that situation. By March, we will have invested almost £3 billion in a range of measures for households, supporting energy bills, childcare, health and travel, as well as social security payments.

In our programme for government, we announced several further responses to maximise support for those in need, including a new winter heating payment, the doubling of our fuel insecurity fund to £20 million, £5 million additional funding for discretionary housing payments, and further action to reduce the cost of the school day for families.

**Stephanie Callaghan:** Last week, I met Matthew Cole, who is the head of the Fuel Bank Foundation, which is an organisation that mainly provides help for customers on pre-payment meters who are at real risk of having their energy supply cut off.

Given that the Tory United Kingdom Government has decided to prioritise the wealthy at the expense of ordinary families, what powers does the Scottish Government need in order to realise Scotland's energy potential and to ensure that nobody has their lights and heating cut off when they do not have the cash to top up fuel?

**John Swinney:** The type of powers and responsibilities needed would be the powers to reform the energy market and to apply a windfall tax to energy companies, which will profit enormously from the rise in energy costs. However, under the current UK Government proposals, the burden of paying for all that support will be added to the borrowing stock and obligations of future generations. Those examples show how getting wider powers for the Scottish Parliament would make a difference.

**Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD):** As Scotland's economy recovers from the Covid crisis, what can the cabinet secretary say to people who are facing a tough winter of skyrocketing energy costs, especially people, including many of my constituents, who are reliant on heating oil, for which there is no cap?

**John Swinney:** I have every sympathy with the point that Beatrice Wishart has raised. Indeed, the other week I had the pleasure of meeting Councillor Emma Macdonald, the leader of Shetland Islands Council, after she had published an analysis of the expected increases in costs for people in Shetland and the Orkney islands, which will be at an even greater level because of temperature and limited daylight over the winter.

I have every sympathy with the points that the member has raised and I assure her that we will continue to make representations to the UK Government to provide direct intervention. If we can try to offer support in other ways through

some of the financial schemes that the Scottish Government has available, I will ensure that that information is available to Beatrice Wishart's constituents, so that they might access such funds.

### **Covid Recovery Strategy (Dundee)**

**5. Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee City West) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what funding it has provided to Dundee to support the city's recovery from the pandemic. (S6O-01384)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney):** The Covid recovery strategy brings together more than 70 actions that will support people across Scotland by increasing the financial security for low-income households, enhancing the wellbeing of children and young people, and creating good, green jobs and fair work.

The strategy also focuses on renewing public services to ensure that they meet the specific needs of people and communities. For example, in Dundee, our best start, bright futures delivery plan, which will help tackle child poverty, is testing holistic support to help parents access work and increase their incomes.

Furthermore, Dundee City Council will receive £353.4 million to fund local services, which equates to an extra £27.8 million compared with the past financial year. That funding is in addition to Covid-19 funding of £50 million through the local government settlement, over and above regular grant payments.

**Joe FitzPatrick:** I welcome the additional funding, which has enabled the city's Scottish National Party council to implement the £800,000 fuel well Dundee scheme, which provides targeted support for energy bills, and to provide £400,000 for tackling food insecurity, £200,000 for money and energy advice and £500,000 for business recovery.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that, although those schemes are welcome and provide crucial support for my constituents, it is unfortunate that the lack of sufficient action from the Westminster Government in areas such as those, which are reserved responsibilities and, indeed, its pursuing of deliberately damaging policies, has required the Scottish Government and Dundee's SNP council to step in to support local people?

**John Swinney:** I welcome the steps that the Dundee City Council administration has taken to support people who face challenges at this time. I agree with Mr FitzPatrick that those interventions will assist individuals. I regret the fact that they have been necessary as a result of the lack of action from the UK Government. However, those interventions demonstrate the benefit of Dundee

City Council acting on behalf of the people of Dundee, as I would expect it to do.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We will have a brief supplementary from Mercedes Villalba.

**Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab):** Although the money that has been allocated to councils through the local authority Covid economic recovery fund is welcome, it does little to reverse the damage to local services that has been caused by a decade of cuts. The Scottish Government has cut real-terms—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I said "brief".

**Mercedes Villalba:** —cumulative funding for councils by 4.2 per cent, and we have heard that it is clawing back funding from the integration joint boards. Will the minister provide an assurance that councils will be able to use all the funding that is allocated to them through the economic recovery fund without fear of that being clawed back, too?

**John Swinney:** In my answer to Mr FitzPatrick, I pointed out that Dundee City Council had received £27.8 million more in funding from the Government than it did in 2021-22. That is in addition to the £50 million of Covid-19 funding that is being provided through the local government settlement.

The Government has been providing substantial support to local government and, in recent weeks, we have provided additional in-year support to enable the local government pay deal to be settled. The Government's making available those new, additional resources shows that it is doing its level best by local authorities in Scotland.

### **Covid Recovery Strategy (Fiscal Statement)**

**6. Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions have taken place with ministers across Government regarding the impact of the United Kingdom Government's fiscal statement on Scotland's Covid recovery strategy. (S6O-01385)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney):** Since the Covid recovery strategy was published, and particularly in recent months, rising inflation, the worsening cost of living crisis and the UK Government's inaction have made it even more critical for the Scottish ministers to focus our efforts on supporting those who are most in need.

We are undertaking an emergency budget review to assess any and all opportunities to redirect additional resources to those who are most in need, to reduce the burdens on businesses and to stimulate the Scottish economy.

**Bill Kidd:** The mini budget announced by Kwasi Kwarteng prioritises lining the pockets of the rich

through cutting corporation tax and cutting the 45 per cent tax rate that is paid by the wealthiest individuals in the UK. Does the Deputy First Minister agree that we need to focus on rebuilding our economy post-Covid, post-Brexit and in the current context of international uncertainty, rather than take unnecessary risks that will not protect people on low to average incomes?

**John Swinney:** Yesterday, I set out to Parliament the very significant concerns that the Scottish Government has about the measures that the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced on Friday. The concerns that were set out to Parliament yesterday by ministers have been amplified by yesterday's intervention by the International Monetary Fund, the commentary from ratings agencies and today's intervention by the Bank of England, which demonstrate that the announcements that were made on Friday were foolish and very damaging, and that they are causing significant financial volatility for the UK. That will have an effect on householders and the public finances into the bargain.

### **Covid Business Resilience and Support Directorate**

**7. Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on how the work of the Covid business resilience and support directorate is supporting its Covid recovery strategy. (S6O-01386)

**John Swinney:** The Covid recovery strategy is focused on reducing systemic inequalities and includes commitments to support the creation of good, green jobs and fair work in Scotland. Businesses play an important role in that aspect of recovery, and the Scottish Government has prioritised support for business. For example, in February 2022, the Scottish Government launched the £80 million local authority Covid economic recovery fund, which empowered local authorities to consider how best to support local businesses, communities and households through a focus on targeting support to maximise economic recovery in their areas.

All those steps have been assisted by the work that has been delivered by the Covid business resilience and support directorate.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston:** In June, Audit Scotland noted that it had taken too long to establish internal governance arrangements within the Scottish Government. It noted that it took until March 2021—almost a year after the start of the pandemic—for the business resilience and support directorate to be formed. All the while, there were significant delays in getting support out to businesses, and concerns remain about the fact

that significant funds that were allocated for Covid support remain unspent.

What lessons have been learned from the Government's response? What action has been taken to ensure that any underspend in budget is targeted at continuing to support Scottish businesses?

**John Swinney:** There were a number of interesting points in that. The Government acted with great urgency and speed to try to distribute funding support, because we recognised the gravity of the crisis that was faced with Covid.

I have read the Audit Scotland report on the funding. On the one hand, it was complimentary about how swiftly the Government moved. That is certainly feedback that I have had from many businesses in my constituency, which have told me that they would not be in business today had the Government not acted so quickly.

That was contrasted by the understandable demand for there to be proper governance around the arrangements. We have to be open about the fact that there is a challenge about the necessity to act with speed, to save businesses, and the necessity to have in place absolutely every check and balance that we would require to have.

Audit Scotland's assessment of inappropriateness in the distribution of finances in Covid business support was that, in essence, it was of a minimal level. That cannot be said for all funding across the United Kingdom, and there is huge concern from the Public Accounts Committee in the House of Commons about these issues and the Westminster Government.

There is a difficult balance to be struck, but I assure Mr Halcro Johnston that the Government has approached the issue with the imperative of supporting businesses when they needed that assistance, and to do that as quickly as possible.

### **Electoral Reform (Consultation)**

**8. Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its plans to consult further on electoral reform in Scotland. (S6O-01387)

**The Minister for Parliamentary Business (George Adam):** Work has been under way over the summer to prepare a public consultation and my officials and I have had helpful initial discussions with several interested stakeholders.

**Mark Ruskell:** I thank the minister for that very welcome news. Greens have campaigned for a long time for a truly residence-based franchise in Scotland, in which everyone who lives here, including 16-year-olds, has the right to vote and stand in elections.

I hope that the new consultation will go some way to fixing inequalities in our electoral franchise in relation to candidacy rights, although I want to see it go further in extending voting rights to people who are seeking asylum.

How will the consultation encourage particularly disenfranchised communities to respond?

**George Adam:** The consultation paper will be published by the end of this year. I have already met a number of key stakeholders in relation to possible consultation topics and I plan to continue that approach. I would be happy to consider any suggestion from the member and discuss further the issues that he has mentioned or any ideas that other members may have for the process.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** On that note, we will have two brief supplementaries, the first of which is from Stephen Kerr.

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** On that note, does the minister agree that the current modified D'Hondt system that we are using disproportionately rewards parties that do not stand candidates in constituencies? Should parties with candidates on the regional list ranking not have to stand candidates in constituencies for the system to be anything like fair and reasonable, rather than our having parties game the system?

**George Adam:** As always, Mr Kerr is quite entertaining and has plenty of ideas on this issue. I would say that today is possibly not the time to start talking about rewriting the Scotland Act 1998. It is possibly a discussion for us all to have in the future.

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** I will spare the minister my full slide show from a recent visit to observe the Swedish election, but since we are on the subject of gaming, would the minister look at the Swedish system, which is the ultra-proportional open-list system, with 28 regions and a national rebalancing mechanism, as a means to avoid gaming of the electoral system in Scotland?

**George Adam:** This is not to commit myself to anything at this stage, but I am quite willing to discuss that system with Mr Rennie and have a look at it, and we could possibly take it from there.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Deftly done. That ends portfolio questions on Covid-19 recovery and parliamentary business.

## Finance and the Economy

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The second portfolio is finance and the economy. Again, should members wish to ask a supplementary question, I encourage them to press their request-to-speak button during the relevant question.

## Impact of Pressures on Business

1. **Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has undertaken of the cumulative impact on business of the pressures of a weak currency, high inflation, rising energy costs and Brexit. (S6O-01388)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney):** The impacts of inflation are affecting businesses across Scotland and have been exacerbated by the United Kingdom Government's recent announcements, which have seen the pound fall to record lows, and the additional uncertainty that we have seen today.

That comes on top of Brexit. In the most recent business insights and conditions survey, 46 per cent of the businesses that are experiencing exporting challenges said that the end of the European Union transition period is the main cause.

The Scottish Government has engaged extensively with business and supports its calls to the United Kingdom Government for action. However, last week's mini-budget gives tax cuts for the rich and little for households and businesses that are struggling to pay bills.

**Paul McLennan:** We have had six chancellors since 2014. The pound was at \$1.64 in 2014 and is now at \$1.08 and probably falling. Annual inflation was 2.3 per cent; it is now 9.9 per cent, with forecasts of 22 per cent. The UK was in the euro in 2014; since leaving the EU, Scottish exports have decreased by 14 per cent. The energy price cap in 2014 was £1,100; it is now £2,500. We can add the comments by the International Monetary Fund and credit agencies today.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that the so-called stability of the UK economy, which is often mentioned by unionist politicians, is no longer credible in any way and that our businesses are being damaged?

**John Swinney:** We are experiencing an acute period of volatility and uncertainty, which was started by Brexit and has been exacerbated by the crisis around Covid, the war in Ukraine and, now, the recklessness of the new Conservative Government. The idea that somehow the United Kingdom can be described as a stable economy, in the light of all the chaos and damage that has been done to business, is a fallacy of the past.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We have two brief supplementary questions.

**Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP):** The Bank of England can only hope that its emergency and unlimited gilt buying operation will be a

temporary measure in the defences that are required against an incompetent Tory budget. Former monetary policy committee member Professor Blanchflower said that Kwasi Kwarteng has

“crashed the ... markets ... I've never seen such raging incompetence, ever.”

Does the cabinet secretary agree that Scottish people can simply no longer afford to pay the price of being attached to this failing UK state and that the UK Government must not impose swingeing cuts to Scotland's budget?

**John Swinney:** There are three points to make in that regard. First, one of the consequences of the chancellor's recklessness on Friday is the risk of very significant reductions in public expenditure to try to restore market confidence. That would be a disaster for Scotland.

Secondly, the cost of remaining part of the United Kingdom is now acute for people in Scotland, when we see the damage of Brexit and this fiscal mismanagement.

Thirdly, I am struck by the ridiculousness of the Conservative Party demanding that I replicate the changes that the chancellor made on Friday, when we look at the chaos that has been inflicted on all of us as a consequence.

**Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD):** What can the Scottish Government say to businesses in the islands, who already face higher costs than their mainland counterparts and fear for their viability as economic confidence falls and overheads and inflation continue to rise?

**John Swinney:** One of the issues about which I am most concerned is the scale of energy price rises, even with some of the measures that are now in place, for entirely profitable and sustainable businesses. I give Beatrice Wishart the example—which I have shared openly—of a farmer in my constituency. He explained to me that his energy costs are currently £50,000 a year and that he is being quoted £250,000. A difference of £200,000 is just impossible for that farming venture to find. An individual who is producing food for our domestic market faces the potential of not being able to continue to do so. Beatrice Wishart will have examples such as that one from her constituency.

We have to recognise the enormity of the risk that is faced. The scale of intervention has to be acute, to ensure that businesses that are perfectly viable in every normal circumstance can be assisted through this difficulty, as we assisted them in the context of Covid. However, we should not do that by saddling future generations with the level of borrowing that the United Kingdom Government proposes.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We are tight for time all afternoon. I must encourage more succinct questions and answers.

#### **National Planning Framework 4 (North-East Scotland)**

**2. Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how the national planning framework 4 will be equipped to attract investment to north-east Scotland. (S6O-01389)

**The Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth (Tom Arthur):** National planning framework 4 will set out clear national policy and spatial priorities for every area, including the north-east. Once adopted, NPF4 will form part of the statutory development plan, will be reviewed every 10 years and will be central to planning decision making locally.

The increase in local application combined with our long-term vision for Scotland in 2045 means that NPF4 will give greater clarity and confidence to people, communities and investors—for example, in actively planning and delivering the just transition from oil and gas to a net zero future for the north-east.

NPF4 will be closely aligned with other Government strategies and will be accompanied by a delivery programme to support better alignment and co-ordination of delivery partners and their funding sources. It is for all sectors and stakeholders to help to deliver NPF4.

**Audrey Nicoll:** Research by Scottish Renewables shows that the average planning decision for renewable energy projects can take around 772 days from submission, which is not compatible with meeting net zero by 2045. Renewable energy is key to tackling the climate emergency, securing Scotland's energy supply and dealing with the cost of living crisis. Will the minister outline how all that will be delivered, given the timescales that I have referred to?

**Tom Arthur:** We recognise the critical role of planning in helping to meet our net zero targets. Our package of planning reforms is focused on delivering clearer and quicker decisions to give greater confidence and predictability to those who plan to develop.

NPF4 will signal a turning point for planning, and we have been clear that responding to the global climate emergency and the nature crisis will be central to that, including by actively enabling appropriately located renewable energy developments. I am also working with the high-level group on planning performance to drive forward a programme to enhance resources and skills.

We have recently increased planning fees to enable additional resources for planning services, and we are preparing to recruit Scotland's first national planning improvement co-ordinator to support good practice among authorities and users of the planning system.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I have a number of supplementary questions, and I impress on questioners and the minister that everything needs to be brief from this point on.

**Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green):** The minister will be acutely aware of the importance of genuine community engagement for local and regional economic development. Indeed, that is a vital part of the Scottish Government's commitment to a just transition. Without listening to local voices, economic development cannot be just. How can we ensure that decisions on inward investment to north-east Scotland do not ride roughshod over the wishes and needs of local communities?

**Tom Arthur:** People rightly want to be involved, and we want them to be involved in the decisions that shape the places in which they live, work and play. Effective public engagement can lead to better planning decisions and more satisfactory outcomes. Our planning system includes statutory and non-statutory opportunities for engagement, including in the preparation of local development plans that set out the future use of land in the area and the new place plans that were introduced by the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019.

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** Will NPF4 provide greater flexibility for local authorities so that a community-focused approach to planning can be taken—for example, to tackle vacant and derelict buildings such as the Interfloor factory in Dumfries, which I am petitioning the council to take action on?

**Tom Arthur:** The member will appreciate that I cannot comment on specific cases, but we are carefully considering policies in the draft NPF4 on vacant and derelict land. We also undertook a consultation on new-style local development plans. New-style LDP regulations will be laid shortly after the new NPF4 comes into effect.

**Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con):** Last month, the Bon Accord centre in Aberdeen plunged into administration, sparking concerns about its future. Business rates are killing our high streets, so how will NPF4 not so much attract new investment, but allow us to keep what we have?

**Tom Arthur:** The draft NPF4 recognises that we need to preserve and reuse existing assets; that comes from our net zero ambitions and from recognising the importance of place and having thriving centres. There are specific policies on

centres in the draft NPF4, and we will bring a finalised NPF4 back to the Parliament later in the autumn.

### Scottish National Investment Bank

3. **Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government how many projects and what total value of loans the Scottish National Investment Bank has supported. (S6O-01390)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney):** The bank has made loan commitments of £103 million, and made fund and equity investments of £155 million across 20 companies and projects. Those investments have seen £482 million of co-investment of third-party capital. The investments have supported all three of the bank's missions on net zero, place and innovation and people.

**Brian Whittle:** Businesses, especially those in the green economy and renewables sector, report to me that accessing potential funding from the Scottish National Investment Bank is problematic and wrapped in red tape, and that the bank looks for reasons not to invest and is risk averse. Surely investing in innovation in the renewables sector is what the SNIB is for, so will the Deputy First Minister agree to review the way that the SNIB lends money to ensure that Scotland does not miss out on the significant economic opportunities that the renewables sector brings?

**John Swinney:** I am very happy to engage on that question, because one of the Scottish National Investment Bank's priorities is to lend to sustainable projects with growth potential in the net zero environment. I have a list of projects that have been supported to assist that objective. If there are particular examples that Mr Whittle is concerned about, I will happily look at them and explore them with the bank. Over time, we will look at the performance of the bank and determine whether there are any obstacles. However, I assure Mr Whittle and the chamber that the bank is keen to lend to projects in those key areas.

### Higher Property Rate

4. **Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the Scottish Retail Consortium's recommendation to accelerate the process of lowering the higher property rate. (S6O-01391)

**The Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth (Tom Arthur):** Decisions on non-domestic rates—including the poundage and any reliefs or supplements—are considered in the context of the Scottish budget and in line with other Government priorities.

The Scottish budget 2022-23 delivers the lowest poundage in the UK for the fourth year in a row,

ensuring that over 95 per cent of non-domestic properties in Scotland continue to be liable for a lower property tax rate than anywhere else in the UK.

**Jamie Greene:** I did not hear an answer to my question on what assessment the Government has made of the SRC's calls.

Back in 2017, the Barclay review, which was commissioned by the Scottish Government, called for the large business supplement to be reduced in order to make Scotland the best place in the United Kingdom to do business. Does the minister agree with the SRC that retaining a higher rate in Scotland is not a competitive approach, and will the Government look again at that policy in its forthcoming budget?

**Tom Arthur:** I am very grateful to the SRC for its submission. The point that I made in my original answer was that it would be premature of me to set out what the non-domestic rates policy will be ahead of the budget being delivered later this year. Of course, we very much welcome the submission from the SRC and we will give careful consideration to it.

#### 4 Day Week Global Pilot

**6. Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the findings of the survey of participants in 4 Day Week Global's pilot. (S6O-01393)

**The Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity (Lorna Slater):** The Scottish Government has a keen interest in the trial, and at the halfway point indicative results demonstrate positive experiences for employers and workers. There is no doubt that a four-day working week could bring environmental, health, wellbeing and productivity benefits, which is why ministers are committed to exploring the benefits further. Indeed, the programme for government restated our commitment to support research and advice to improve workplace productivity and wellbeing, including on the delivery of a four-day working week pilot, and we will bring forward specific proposals soon.

**Mercedes Villalba:** A four-day working week could save workers thousands of pounds in childcare and commuting costs. The Labour MP Peter Dowd has introduced a four-day working week bill to Westminster. Will the Scottish Government publicly back that bill?

**Lorna Slater:** Like Mercedes Villalba, I am a keen supporter of the four-day working week, and I am enthusiastic about the work that the Scottish Government is doing in this area. An example of that work is our new centre for workplace transformation, which will complement the existing

pilot trials that are under way by analysing where there may be gaps in existing literature or analysis to explore possibilities for an alternative working practice that delivers more inclusive balance between work and personal lives.

**Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP):** My declaration of interests records my attendance at the four-day week conference in Valencia, in May, and I shared insights with ministers on that.

As productivity is a persistent challenge for Scotland and the United Kingdom, and as productivity gains have proved to be a key benefit of four-day week pilots—as has recruitment and retention of talented and valuable staff, which is important in a tight labour market—can the minister reiterate the Government's commitment to a pilot? As the Portuguese Government has also announced that it will conduct four-day week pilots and is keen to learn from Scotland's work, will the Scottish Government also commit to engage with other Governments on that agenda?

**Lorna Slater:** Ministers remain committed to exploring the benefits of a four-day working week, which is why the 2022-23 programme for government includes a commitment to undertake research and advice to improve workplace productivity and wellbeing, including on the delivery of a four-day working week pilot. Our work will be informed by experience that has been drawn from similar programmes in other countries and elsewhere in the UK. Officials have already made plans to meet with the Valencian and Portuguese Governments next month.

#### Sanjeev Gupta (Meetings)

**7. Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government when it last met Sanjeev Gupta. (S6O-01394)

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney):** The Minister for Business, Trade, Tourism and Enterprise, Ivan McKee, last met Mr Gupta, on 15 August 2022.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** Their auditors have resigned, there is an investigation by the Serious Fraud Office and the promised 2,000 jobs are nowhere to be seen. Their owners have warned that the plants may, in fact, shut. Does the Government regret ignoring warnings from its own economic advisers about doing deals with GFG Alliance, the owners of the Lochaber smelter and the Lanarkshire steel mills?

**John Swinney:** The Government's intentions were clear. We were taking those steps to try to protect employment. There are families who are employed in the Dalzell steelworks and at the Lochaber smelter today who would not be

employed if the Government had not helped in that way that we did.

We are trying to ensure that we support employment in our society. There are commitments that GFG has to make to the Government. Those commitments are being delivered on in relation to the payments that are required as part of the financial arrangements that are in place. The Government will continue to monitor those issues and respond to any issues that are raised in Parliament.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** Has the Scottish Government had any contact with the Serious Fraud Office regarding the SFO's investigation into GFG's activities?

**John Swinney:** I do not think that I am at liberty to respond in detail to that question, but I will take advice and, if I am at liberty to do so, I will respond further to Mr Halcro Johnston in writing.

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** With everything that has happened recently, there is a clear risk that GFG and Gupta's financial empire will collapse. What is the total liability to the public purse if that were to come to pass?

**John Swinney:** That is a difficult factor to calculate, given the various scenarios that could take place, but I reassure Mr Johnson that the Government has in place arrangements that ensure that all of the payments that are required to be made to the Government are up to date and the asset value of the Lochaber venture is in excess of any liability that could be created in the scenario that Mr Johnson raises in relation to that individual site.

### **Retail (Cost Pressures)**

**8. Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government how it will address any concerns over cost pressures affecting the retail sector. (S6O-01395)

**The Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth (Tom Arthur):** As outlined in our programme for government, we will work with the business community to identify further measures that can assist in addressing increased costs and economic disruption. However, as the member will appreciate, the powers and resources needed to tackle this emergency on the scale required—access to borrowing, welfare, VAT on fuel, taxation of windfall profits, and regulation of the energy market—currently all lie with the United Kingdom Government. We have continually urged the UK Government to use all the powers and fiscal headroom at its disposal and we will continue to do everything within our resources and powers to help those who are most affected.

We have been calling for the UK Government to introduce a business energy cap for some time. I welcome that it has now done so, but without substantial reform to the energy market, there is a real risk that this temporary measure will prove to be inadequate.

**Maurice Golden:** Let us look at what the Scottish Government could do, with

"Potentially thousands of businesses facing closure next year."

That is the warning from the Scottish Grocers Federation over the proposed deposit return handling fees, which it warns will not cover retailer costs. Does the minister agree that it is worth at least having a review now, a year ahead of the launch, to ensure that retailers will not face serious losses?

**Tom Arthur:** I am very much looking forward to speaking at the Scottish Grocers Federation conference next week. We are committed to the launch of the deposit return scheme next year. It is an industry-led scheme, but we have been engaging with business and we will continue to do so, including with the retail sector.

**Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** The retail sector is facing substantial pressures as a result of the cost of living, not to mention Brexit. Can the minister provide any further information on the Scottish Government's latest engagement with the sector regarding meeting current challenges and building resilience for the future?

**Tom Arthur:** Yes, we have regular engagement with the retail sector and the wider business community. I co-chaired the first meeting of the newly inaugurated retail industry leadership group on 25 August. We discussed a variety of issues, including the implementation of our retail strategy—particularly developing a fair work agreement and commencing a skills audit, which are both identified as key priorities in the strategy. The next meeting of the group will be in early November and I am happy to keep members updated on its progress.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes portfolio questions. There will be a brief pause before we move to the next item of business.

## Ferries

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-06071, in the name of Graham Simpson, entitled “Scottish Government Handling of Ferry Contracts.” I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons now.

14:50

**Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):** Last night, BBC Scotland broadcast its latest “Disclosure Scotland” programme, entitled “The Great Ferries Scandal”. We learned some very worrying things about the way in which ferries 801 and 802 were bought. Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd broke its own tender rules, which say that there has to be a refund guarantee from bidders. There was not. Ferguson Marine (Port Glasgow) Ltd received a 424 page report to help its bid; a key section of its bid appears to have been cut and pasted from that. Ferguson’s was allowed to change its design and change its price after the deadline, and it received a confidential in-person meeting. Nobody else got that treatment—and all the while, CalMac Ferries Ltd thought a rival bid was better.

In short, it appears that Ferguson’s became an inside-track shoo-in for the job, unbeknown to any other bidder. Ferguson’s received special treatment from the Government, which was desperate to award the contract to the yard—and we know how that ended up.

Yesterday, John Swinney told us that the vital documents cannot be found, and he said that it will be left to the Auditor General for Scotland to look into the matter. The Auditor General does a great job, but the Scottish Government should not be hiding behind him on this matter. In any case, it routinely ignores anything that he says. The Scottish Government needs to come clean, and it cannot use those revelations to stall and deflect. The buck stops with ministers—and there are several of them. If CMAL did favours for Ferguson’s, it was because it was told to do so. This goes all the way to the top.

We could call what we saw on the BBC programme last night insider dealing, and it could leave the door open to costly legal action and add to the already astronomical cost of two ferries. Make no mistake—the Scottish National Party’s handling of the matter is a scandal.

However, while the First Minister was on her tour of the Edinburgh fringe festival this summer, we learned that she does not see it that way. Here is how it went with the respected broadcaster Iain Dale.

**Iain Dale:** You’ve been in power, the party’s been in power, since 2007, that’s ample time for that to have been sorted out. I mean there’s clearly a scandal over how the procurement was managed. Do you take responsibility for that?

**Nicola Sturgeon:** I take responsibility for everything that happens in government, whether I like it or not. The buck stops with me on everything. I don’t shy away from that. I take issue with your language there but there’s no point getting into that.

**Iain Dale:** What’s your issue?

**Nicola Sturgeon:** Well—‘scandal’. I don’t think it’s a scandal. I think there has been a situation with these two ferries that I don’t think is acceptable and we’re learning lessons from that and focusing on putting that right.”

The First Minister does not think it is a scandal; it is “a situation”. Maybe the “Disclosure Scotland” programme should have been called “The Great Ferries Situation”. It is a scandalous situation, and that means that we need a public inquiry and a police investigation to get to the bottom of it.

If people in the Government knew how to behave properly, heads would roll. Derek Mackay has gone, but so far, nobody has taken the rap. They never do. Remember, though, what the First Minister said:

“the buck stops with me”.

Let us see if that is true.

Derek Mackay says that awarding preferred bidder status was nothing to do with him because he was on holiday. He says that his then boss Keith Brown was responsible. We know that CMAL eventually wanted to retender because of concerns about the lack of a builders refund guarantee from Ferguson’s. We also know that it did not want the preferred bidder status of Ferguson’s to be announced in public. But why get in the way of a good photo op? Announced it was, by who else but the First Minister, on 31 August 2015. Mr Mackay awarded the final contract and accepts his share of the blame. He announced it in another photo op at the SNP conference on 16 October 2015.

Of course, none of that was political. Perish the thought. John Swinney’s mitts are all over this, too. He signed off on the payment, despite knowing that there were concerns.

Meanwhile, the Glen Sannox—the fake-windows ferry that was launched in another photo op by Nicola Sturgeon in 2017—is still not complete, and the 802 is even further behind. Furthermore, a letter today from David Tydeman suggests that there might be even more delays.

So many photos—so little to show for them.

If members want to hear about some more buck passing, they should just listen to what ministers are saying about Ardrossan harbour. That is

where the Arran ferry goes to, but the new Arran ferry—when it is eventually finished—will not fit, so work will have to be done to the harbour if the ferry is to dock there. The harbour's private owners are now getting the blame for the fact that there is no agreement yet on who will pay for that. It is extraordinary; it is always someone else's fault.

Derek Mackay has, at least, answered some questions, but he is no longer here. John Swinney, Keith Brown and Nicola Sturgeon—who says that the buck stops with her—are here, and it is they who should now walk the plank.

We must also think ahead and decide how we can best run the ferries. I first asked for sight of the project Neptune report in February, but Transport Scotland officials refused to release it until earlier this month. I welcomed its release, but I do not know why they dithered, because it does not tell us anything that we did not know already. We know that the clunky set up involving Transport Scotland, CMAL, CalMac and the minister does not work. It should be streamlined.

There is a mix of ferry services in Scotland: private, council-run, private hired by the Government, and just Government run. It is that last one that has the most problems. So, why rule anything out when we look at how we might run things in the future? Are we really saying that we want the west coast service to remain as one big monopoly, which would rule out council involvement and that of smaller local firms? We cannot let dogma get in the way of public services.

I speak to islanders regularly and hear the same stories every time. It was the same this week when I chatted to islanders from Arran and Mull. I heard about missed appointments, people not able to get to work, kids not getting to school and people moving away because the situation is too stressful. They fear that another winter of chaos, following a summer of chaos, looms. There is chaos upon chaos upon chaos, there is shambles and scandal, and now there is evidence that should merit a police investigation: we might go from the murky depths of the Clyde to a court of law. The situation is beyond shameful and it is islanders who are suffering. That must end—soon. And remember: the buck stops with the First Minister.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the long-awaited publication of the Project Neptune report on Scotland's ferries; believes that the report sets out viable alternatives to the current structure, which is not delivering for islanders; calls on the Scottish Government to set out an urgent plan for fleet procurement, manufacturing and operations; notes that the CalMac fleet has become increasingly beset by technical issues and cancellations and that these technical issues are leading to increasingly higher repair costs; further notes that island communities, who have faced significant disruption already, are concerned that a lack of

resilience in the fleet could cause further disruption this winter; expresses disappointment that, under latest estimates, vessels 801 and 802 will not be completed until May and December 2023, despite originally being due for completion in May and July 2018, and calls for a public inquiry into the matter.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I ask all members who wish to participate in the debate to check that they have pressed their request-to-speak buttons.

I call Jenny Gilruth, the Minister for Transport. You have up to six minutes, please.

14:59

**The Minister for Transport (Jenny Gilruth):** It was only a few short weeks ago that I made a statement to Parliament confirming publication of the project Neptune report. I made clear my intention to engage with all parties in the chamber. Having noted the detailed findings of that report, all MSPs should now have received an invitation to meet the report's authors, Ernst & Young.

I also made clear the need for consultation of stakeholders. Next week, I will meet CalMac and CMAL as we begin to develop the options and next steps for reform.

However, crucially—as Mr Simpson alluded to in his speech—our island communities must be part of the reform of governance structures in relation to delivery of ferry services on the Clyde and Hebrides network. Therefore, I am pleased that Angus Campbell, who is currently the chair of the ferries communities board, has agreed to lead our community consultation work on project Neptune's next steps. I will meet Mr Campbell next week.

In my statement to Parliament, I was clear that things have to improve for our island communities. I know that there is a need for pace on next steps. That must be coupled with respect for the staff involved. I undertook to return to Parliament to debate fully the next steps for project Neptune, and I hope that the consensual tone that was struck in responding to that parliamentary statement will be reflected in contributions today.

As the Conservative motion notes, project Neptune sets out the

“viable alternatives to the current structure”.

I will work with all parties to secure agreement on a streamlined approach that will better deliver for islanders.

**Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** Does the minister agree that in order to ensure that the next steps are the right ones, there should be an inquiry into the ferries fiasco to find out what went wrong, so that it can never be repeated?

**Jenny Gilruth:** I remind Mr Kerr that we have had an inquiry by, I think, the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee in the previous parliamentary session and an inquiry by Audit Scotland. We have had project Neptune and we will have inquiries from the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee and the Public Audit Committee.

**Liam Kerr:** I mean a public inquiry.

**Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** Will the minister give way?

**Jenny Gilruth:** I would like to conclude my point before Mr Mountain pops up. I understand the point that Mr Kerr is alluding to, but there have been a number of inquiries. In relation to the suggestion that I think Mr Kerr is alluding to, the Auditor General is looking at that in more detail. Therefore, at this time, I think that it would not be appropriate for me to prejudge the outcome of his further deliberations.

**Edward Mountain:** First, as the convener of the REC Committee when it produced the report, I can say that the committee certainly was not aware of all the information that is currently being put in the public domain. To say that all that information was available to us and that we could draw conclusions from it is, frankly, wrong.

Secondly, as I understand it, the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee is not going to be looking at the procurement of vessels 801 and 802, but at future procurement of ferries and the ferries plan, which the minister has not updated for a considerable time.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Minister, I will give you an extra minute for taking the two interventions.

**Jenny Gilruth:** Thank you. That brings me neatly to my next point in relation to investment.

As the motion calls for today, and as Mr Mountain asked for, the Government has committed to a long-term plan for investment in vessels and port infrastructure, which we will publish later this year as a key component of the islands connectivity plan. That will build on the investments that are being delivered in the infrastructure investment plan, which committed to £580 million of investment to provide new vessels and port upgrades.

I will reflect on some of the progress to date. We have secured the MV Loch Frisa and have her operating on the Oban to Mull route. We have been through the procurement process for two new Islay vessels, which will significantly increase capacity on the Islay route and accelerate replacement of the fleet. I am pleased to confirm that we expect the first steel to be cut on those vessels next week—on time and in line with the

programme for delivery of those ships. Work is also on-going on replacement vessels for the Isle of Mull, the MV Lord of the Isles and up to seven vessels in the first phase of the small-vessel replacement programme.

However, I know that additional tonnage is needed in the CalMac fleet; we discussed that when I gave my statement to Parliament two weeks ago. Officials are at present urgently prioritising options for ministers; and I hope to be able to say more about that in due course, while noting the commercial sensitivities that are at play.

**Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Jenny Gilruth:** I have already taken two substantial interventions.

I want to talk to the issue of winter resilience, which is also highlighted in the Conservative motion, because islanders might be anxious about the coming months. In January and February alone this year, 92.75 per cent of cancellations on the Clyde and Hebrides ferry service—CHFS—network were due to the weather or Covid. Therefore, to help to reduce the number of delays and cancellations related to the weather, we have committed to expanding to third-party ports funding for tide and weather monitoring equipment, which is currently in place at CMAL ports.

As part of the consultation on the islands connectivity plan, measurable performance indicators are also being developed. They will be distinct from contractual targets and will better reflect the real experience of passengers. They will be visible and published targets, against which we can monitor performance, which is hugely important.

It is also worth saying that this year the Government is supporting CalMac to invest an additional £5 million to improve fleet sustainability and to provide a more resilient service for passengers and communities.

Dry dock this year will be extended, which will reduce the level and risk of unplanned disruptions that communities are faced with. CalMac has also made changes to some vessel deployment plans in order to prioritise reliability and improve the quality of the service on certain routes. For any period of prolonged disruption, I will convene resilience groups with the ferries communities board, CalMac and local partners, as I have done since my appointment in January.

I will come on to talk about the ports for 801 and 802. I know that, today, Ferguson's has provided an update to the NZET Committee, which the Government will want to respond to in further

detail. However, I will now respond to some of the points that Mr Simpson raised in relation to the ports, because they are important.

Ardrossan has not been upgraded because of delays with the private owners of the port. However, that overlooks the significant investment that has taken place to ensure that vessels can operate from upgraded facilities at Troon. Troon has received £3.2 million of Scottish Government support, and it will be secured as an alternative port for the Arran service in the longer term.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Minister, you have 30 seconds left.

**Jenny Gilruth:** In addition, the investments in the ports on the Skye triangle means that they will be ready for 802 following the second closure period for the works at Uig.

Just weeks ago, I spoke of the need for constructive working across the chamber in relation to ferries governance and next steps. We owe it to island businesses, children and young people and everyone else who depends on those lifeline services to get it right. I look forward to hearing suggestions from members today to that end.

I move amendment S6M-06071.2, to leave out from “long-awaited” to end and insert:

“publication of the Project Neptune report on the governance of Scotland’s ferries; notes that ministers are engaging with affected communities, staff and all stakeholders on the options for reform; recognises that over £2 billion has been invested in the support of lifeline ferry services since 2007; welcomes the commitment to publish and consult on a long-term vessel and port investment plan as part of the Islands Connectivity Plan; recognises the concerns of island communities, and that ministers continue to work closely with them during periods of disruption; agrees that ensuring accurate reporting is key to avoiding unnecessary impacts on those economies, and notes the ongoing work to deliver the vessels under construction at Ferguson Marine, the positive relations between management and unions, and the protection of hundreds of jobs at the yard, including supporting over 50 apprentices, along with many more jobs in the supply chain.”

15:06

**Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** Scotland’s islanders have an unreliable ferry service because Scotland has an unreliable ferry fleet. In relation to the project Neptune report, Scottish Labour welcomes the Scottish Government’s commitment not to unbundle the Clyde and Hebrides network and not to privatise it. Therefore, we would welcome further clarification from the minister that there will be no costly tender process because, if there is, privatisation is evidently still possible.

We need a review of governance and structures, but we cannot be—

**Graham Simpson:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Neil Bibby:** I would like to make some progress.

We cannot be distracted from the fact that it is the failure to replace an ageing fleet that is the root cause of this ferries fiasco. In the short term, the Scottish Government needs to acquire ferries to help the situation in the here and now and to minimise disruption this winter. The recent statement from the Government on the future of Scottish ferries, which the minister referred to, did not give islanders one single Scottish ferry more. Although I believe that Ukrainian refugees should be housed in homes rather than on ferries, that situation proves that the Scottish Government can charter ferries at short notice. Ferries should have been chartered for Scotland’s islands long before now.

It is islanders, as well as every taxpayer in Scotland, who have been paying the cost of one of the biggest public infrastructure disasters in the past 20 years. We need to fully understand what has gone wrong and set out a plan for the future.

The “Disclosure” documentary that aired on BBC Scotland last night raises very serious questions of illegality in relation to the tender process for the Glen Sannox and vessel 802. One of those questions relates to the copy of the CalMac statement of operational and technical requirements that was provided to Ferguson Marine Engineering Ltd by the technical consultancy firm that produced it, which gave FMEL a huge advantage, with FMEL copying and pasting vast chunks of it into its bid.

Given the unfair advantage, we need to know why CMAL and CalMac allowed the bid to be marked highly in the tender scoring rather than immediately halting the tender process at that point or making scoring adjustments. That and many other serious questions must be thoroughly investigated without delay. They must be investigated independently because this Government simply cannot be trusted to investigate itself and its agencies. We need openness and transparency; we cannot afford secrecy and cover-up.

I support Audit Scotland’s efforts to get to the truth. If it chooses to investigate the matter further, it will need full access to all the systems, documents and emails that can help it in that endeavour. The Government should make clear that that will be the case. That has not happened to date—we have had a drip, drip of new emails and documents over the past few months. To date, no one has been held accountable, and the Government’s talk of collective responsibility is meaningless.

I believe that a public inquiry is inevitable but, even now, the Government still refuses to initiate such an inquiry. It should do so this week because the longer it delays, the more it will cost, the longer it will take to get to the truth and the more it will look like the Government has something further to hide.

There is a lot of blame to go round, but the one group of people who remain blameless throughout the fiasco are Ferguson's workforce.

GMB Scotland's Alex Logan and John McMunagle provided damning evidence in the "Disclosure" documentary. When concerns were raised, they were told:

"That's the plan, that's the drawing. You just build, you're no here to think. You just build."

It is clear that the workforce's concerns were ignored time and time again. Perhaps if their views had been listened to at the beginning, we would not be in the mess that we are in now. That can never happen again. If we want to build a functioning ferry network and support Scottish shipbuilding jobs, we need to listen to them now.

I represent the lower Clyde and many of those workers. I stand behind all those who want to breathe new life into the industry. I again call for a national ferry building replacement programme to support the sector. Scottish Labour's ambition is to modernise the CalMac fleet, with a fair share of new ferries being built on the lower Clyde. That will bring resilience to our ferry network and create new opportunities for the workforce.

As GMB Scotland has argued, the ferries do not need to be complex and use the dual-fuel ferry designs that Ferguson's is building. Simpler contracts for simpler ferries do not need to go overseas to places such as Turkey; they can be done easily at Ferguson's.

We need to get to the bottom of what went wrong to fix the problems in the long term. We need to create a pipeline of work and ensure that the lower Clyde gets its fair share of that work and that islanders get the ferries that they deserve.

I move amendment S6M-06071.1, to insert at end:

“; welcomes the commitment to not unbundle the ferry network, and to maintain the Clyde and Hebrides network under public control; believes that the unreliability and long-term unsustainability issues are contributing to the growing depopulation of the Scottish islands, and further believes that the future procurement of ferries must be used to support Scottish shipbuilding jobs and help restore the reputation of the Ferguson Marine yard.”

15:11

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** I congratulate the minister on getting through her

whole speech without once mentioning the enormous elephant in the room: last night's television documentary.

We were told that everything was published, that the Government was an open book, that there was nothing to hide, that it had investigated every single inch and every dark corner, that there was no corruption here and that critics were exaggerating.

Yet, last night, seven years on—five years after the ferries were supposed to be sailing—and numerous investigations later, the BBC presented quite devastating new information that it had discovered.

Ferguson's had been given a document that no other bidder had received and it had been allowed to submit a new bid. No one else was allowed to do that. It had a confidential meeting with CMAL. No other bidder was offered that. It was given a pass on the builders guarantee. No other bidder was given that right.

Ferguson's won the contract on a lower cost and a new lighter design with their new bid, using the document that nobody else had seen and with the advantage of a confidential meeting that no one else was offered.

We saw highlighted page after highlighted page of the bid that copied the document that no one else had seen. Jim McColl from Ferguson's admitted that he had an advantage. That is the man who the SNP asked to take over Ferguson's.

However, John Swinney was surprised about the BBC's new evidence. At his deflecting best, and as if it were nothing to do with him, he said that he took the matter very seriously and, with a scowl, said that the matter would be investigated without delay. That is despite Scottish National Party ministers boasting to their conference that they had awarded the contract to Ferguson's, despite Nicola Sturgeon turning up at the yard to tell the workers that they still had jobs, and despite ministers—even today—telling us that the yard would not have won the contract without them.

Join the dots. It is simple. The SNP is the reason for the scandal. It did not just happen to be in charge at the time; it caused the chaos. In any normal Government adopting international norms, ministers would resign without delay. Not this Government. According to it, it is everyone else's fault; it asks how we could doubt ministers; and it says that they were trying their best.

Let us look at what the Government's best means. It means that the ferries that were supposed to be built five years ago are still stuck in the docks. The best that the nationalists have to offer means wasting £150 million in the middle of a cost of living crisis. For islanders, that means

7,431 cancelled sailings so far this year. Hospital appointments have been missed, children are missing school, and shops and businesses are missing supplies.

Its best means that the reputation of the good workers at a Scottish shipyard has been trashed—so trashed that the yard did not even bid for the next ferry contract. That ferry contract has been awarded to a yard in Turkey. Its best means Audit Scotland stating that there was a

“lack of transparent decision making”.

Its best means a new investigation by Audit Scotland into the evidence that was presented by the BBC last night. Its best means launching a ferry with painted windows on the sides. If that is the Government’s best, please save us from its worst.

We cannot carry on like this any more. Whatever the outcome of the BBC investigation, everyone has seen enough. Taxpayers’ funding has been wasted.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Rennie, you are over your time. Could you please bring your remarks to a conclusion?

**Willie Rennie:** The workers at the yard have been let down.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Rennie, please conclude your remarks. Thank you.

**Willie Rennie:** The islanders have been taken—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Rennie, please take a seat.

**Willie Rennie:** —for granted for years.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Rennie! Mr Rennie, please take a seat.

Mr Rennie, I asked you to bring your remarks to a conclusion, which you appeared to ignore. I believe that that is showing discourtesy to the chair. We will move on, because time is short.

Members, I suggest that some respect and courtesy is shown to other members and to the chair.

We move on to the next speaker in the debate. I call Edward Mountain. He will have up to six minutes, in line with the preserved allocation of speaking times for the Scottish Conservatives in this debate.

15:16

**Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** Thank you, Presiding Officer. I am pleased to be able to rise to speak in this debate.

I will try to address the matter and put some flesh on the bones, because I spent a huge amount of time as convener of the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee in session 5 looking at the procurement of vessels 801 and 802. I also had the privilege—if you can call it that—of having seen most of the documents on which the BBC based last night’s programme.

I will start off by talking about the contract bid. Let us be clear about this: CalMac gave its requirements to CMAL. They were quite considerable requirements, running to some 400-odd pages. They were not all perfect; in fact, some of them were strange. For example, CalMac asked for passenger cabins on the ferries, when there were to be no passenger cabins on these boats—but there they were, in the document.

That document was then distilled down into a 350-page document that formed the basis of Ferguson’s bid. Interestingly, if you look through it—or if you were able to flick your eyes quickly over it as the BBC were showing it—you will see that single words had been changed. For example, the word “should” had been changed to “will”. CalMac said that it “should” have something, while Ferguson’s said that it “will” have it. That is not really very clever.

What is also not clever is duplicating the errors in the original contract. For example, it was put in that there would be passenger cabins on the ferry, although we know that they were never part of it. We also found out that, as part of the tender process, the boat that was put forward by Ferguson’s was overpriced and overweight.

What I do not understand—and what I will fail to understand until the day I die—is why no one picked that up. Why did no one see that the biggest part of the document, which was about what the ferry would consist of, was pure duplication? The Government is telling us that it did not know, but I am not sure that I can go with that.

Let us look at the builders refund guarantee. In December 2014, Ferguson’s said that it would be incapable of producing a builders refund guarantee. It gave two reasons for that: it was a new business, and it had not developed a relationship with a bank. It said to CMAL in December that it could not do it. That was in the middle of the process, and yet Ferguson’s was able to continue with the process and was eventually awarded the contract—with no refund guarantee.

What does it mean to have no refund guarantee? It means that if everything goes wrong, one person has to pick up the costs. There is only one person who can pick up the costs for that, and it is not CMAL—it is the Scottish

Government. If you are telling me that the Scottish Government did not know that it was going to be the lender of last resort when it all went wrong, I, frankly, do not believe you.

I also point out that CMAL was particularly nervous about that, and I am sure that it mentioned the issue to the Government, because it suggested that, as Ferguson's bought the parts, they would become the property of CMAL and would not belong to Ferguson's at all. As CMAL paid during the contract, it was taking control of the parts. That is an odd thing to do, so nobody should tell me that CMAL did not warn the Scottish Government. I believe that it must have done.

Then we got to the stage of the retender. Quite simply, the boat that was put forward was the wrong size—it was too heavy and cost too much. What did CMAL do? It said, "Well, you mentioned another boat and said it was no good, but we think it's an excellent boat and we'd like you to tender on the principle of that." That is what happened, and that is the boat that ended up being designed. Are people telling me that the Scottish Government did not know that? I do not believe that.

We started off with 15 staged payments and ended up with 18. When there are more staged payments, it probably means that the business that is getting the payments is in trouble and is financially unreliable. What happened then? In March 2017, the yard was nearly bankrupt, so CMAL said that it would release only part of the staged payments to the yard and that, when the yard could prove that the contractors who were owed money had been paid, CMAL would give a bit more of the staged payments. CMAL was trying to deliver the money to the yard and to make sure that the contractors were paid so that the yard did not go into receivership. However, at the same time, Derek Mackay was round the back with a van shoving £15 million into Ferguson's and then another £30 million, making a mockery of that.

The Government can claim that it did not understand that the yard was close to being bankrupt. I would ask why ministers did not know that, but ministers cannot claim that they did not know that their Government was dishing out unsecured loans to Ferguson Marine.

I am running out of time, but I will look briefly at Tim Hair, who cost us £2 million and was interviewed on the telephone. He came to the business with a lot of knowledge—he had been an engineer on a cruise liner for a couple of years and had never built a ship in his life. It is always said of turnaround directors that, for the first six months of a contract, they are part of the problem and, after that, they become the problem. That is what happened, and that is why we are seeing the

delays to the ferries that we are seeing at the moment.

In summary, we understand that crucial financial requirements were waived to allow only one bidder. The tender specification documents were given to only one bidder. The chance to retender and reduce the price was given to only one bidder. The tender happened to be awarded to a loyal Monegasque supporter. Staged payments were adapted to allow money to go into the yard—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Mountain, you are 15 seconds over your time. Could you please bring your remarks to a close?

**Edward Mountain:** —and unsecured loans were agreed.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You are over your time by 15 seconds. Please bring your remarks to a conclusion.

**Edward Mountain:** Thank you, Presiding Officer. I will bring them to a conclusion.

I do not believe that the Government did not know what was going on. It knew fine well what was going on, and the Parliament has been misled, not only in the committees but in the chamber.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Mountain. You are over your time.

**Edward Mountain:** We need a public inquiry.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you. We move back to back-bench speeches of up to four minutes.

15:23

**Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP):** I welcome the publication of the project Neptune report and the fact that it sets out viable alternatives to the current structure. As I have said in previous debates, there are strong views in Argyll and Bute about the split roles of CMAL and CalMac. I need to be clear that this is about the structures and not the employees of either organisation. We need to recognise the important work that CalMac staff do, both onshore and aboard vessels, to make people's journeys as safe and trouble-free as possible. I also suggest that among that group, as in communities, there is an untapped sea of valuable knowledge that could be used to improve the current situation.

The Minister for Transport has given a commitment to reform how we deliver ferry services, with the guiding principle that our island communities have to be part of that. We should also recognise that the Scottish Government's investment in ferries has brought new routes, new vessels and upgraded harbour infrastructure as

well as the roll-out of significantly reduced fares through the road equivalent tariff.

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

**Jenni Minto:** I am sorry, but I have a few things that I want to say.

I should say that, in Argyll and Bute, we have the MV Loch Frisa, the two new boats for Islay and the boats for the Dunoon-Gourock-Kilcreggan triangle and Mull, as well as investments in pier infrastructure.

I would like to share my thoughts on the current community consultation, specifically around winter timetables. It goes without saying that, every year, there will be a winter timetable to allow vessels to go for their annual overhauls. Those have been lengthened this year, which, I hope, will reduce the number of technical issues that were referenced earlier.

However, I struggle to understand why there appears to be a level of secrecy about what the timetables will look like. Communities are consulted and asked for their thoughts, and then there is silence. In June, I led a meeting on Mull at which I believed that there had been an agreement that the winter timetables would be shared and discussed with the ferry committee on the island, but that did not happen. Instead, last week, the minister was required to call a meeting to resolve the situation. A constituent who wrote to me said:

"I too wish that we had been a meaningful part of the consultation process from the beginning, and that the process had been transparent about the issues that we were facing."

As I am sure other members do, I receive similar correspondence from all ferries groups in my constituency.

As I have said before, we need to recognise the importance of involving islanders in the decision-making process. It is those of us who live on islands who can provide useful intelligence about what our communities need. Some sailings are more important than others, and that should be taken into account when planning for disruption in order to maintain lifeline services.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Jenni Minto:** I am sorry, but I would like to continue.

On Mr Bibby's point, I am not sure that commercial vehicles would fit on a cruise liner. That is why we need local knowledge.

I welcome the minister's statement that she has instructed Angus Campbell from the ferries

community board to visit, take forward the next steps and engage with communities. Those engagements must be open and honest. Trust needs to be built, and all stakeholders need to engage. Folk need to understand the needs of other islanders and peninsula communities. We have a responsibility to support that, and the meeting with EY is a start.

In closing, I make two suggestions. First, when the minister reviews the structure of our ferry services, we need to look at including a review of the ferry routes that are operated by our local authorities and others. The Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee heard some evidence on that today. Secondly, whatever happens to the structure of our ferry services, the head office should be established truly within the community that it serves. We all recognise that the issue is not just transport performance; it is delivering the confidence that is needed to sustain our island populations.

15:27

**Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab):** I welcome this timely debate and the long-overdue publication of the project Neptune report. The further very serious revelations in the "Disclosure" programme that the Scottish Government did not stick to its own rules need to be responded to. A huge amount of public money has been squandered, and, of course, it is the taxpayer, islanders and people who rely on ferry services who are paying the price of the Scottish Government's poor decision making and delays.

More than a decade ago, CalMac advised the Scottish Government that it would need to build a ferry every year just to stand still. That did not happen and, as a result, we have an ageing fleet that is increasingly unreliable. Sadly, the situation will only get worse. We need an emergency procurement plan from the Scottish Government. Despite repeated debates in the Parliament, a plan with an adequate ferry replacement programme has still not been presented.

I welcome that the Scottish Government has ruled out unbundling and privatisation, but it has not committed to an in-house permanent operation, and retendering still seems to be a possible route. I would be very grateful if the cabinet secretary would confirm whether that is the case, because decisions need to be made about tendering and the procurement of new ferries. Such issues were absent from the project Neptune report, and a clear direction of travel is needed urgently from the Scottish Government.

We know that our fleet is ageing. More than half of the 31 CalMac vessels are more than 25 years

old, which is the age that ferries are expected to last.

As representatives in the Parliament, we know that it is the people who rely on those services and the communities in which they live that are paying the price every week.

**Graham Simpson:** Is it Labour's position that the ferries should be entirely Government run, as they are now?

**Katy Clark:** We do not believe that the problem is ownership, and we do not believe that a competitive process on lifeline services will be the solution to the challenges that we face. We believe that we are in this situation now not because of the ownership model but because of a failure to recognise over a lengthy period—indeed, since the creation of the Scottish Parliament—that it is necessary to repeatedly procure new vessels. The Parliament needs to learn that lesson, and we need to accept our responsibility to ensure that the vessels are procured.

CalMac has looked at more than 130 vessels around the world with a view to bringing them in second-hand. It is clear that that is not the solution. We need a procurement policy that builds in Scotland, develops our industrial capacity and delivers for communities that rely on ferry services.

15:31

**Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP):** I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in the debate. It is clear how important ferries are to the communities that they serve and what they mean to the economy and general wellbeing of such communities.

First, we must acknowledge that, since 2007, £2 billion has been invested in service contracts, new vessels and infrastructure and that, in the current five-year period, a further £580 million has been committed.

**Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con):** Will the member take an intervention on that point?

**Paul McLennan:** I am sorry; I have only four minutes and I will not have time.

The Scottish Government's commitment to publish the islands connectivity plan by the end of 2022 is welcome. As we know, the islands connectivity plan will replace the current ferries plan and will consider aviation, ferries and fixed links. Jenni Minto has underlined that the involvement of local knowledge in discussions is incredibly important; the plan will enable us to consider other potential viable options in consultation with islanders.

I want to focus on a few key issues. First, the priority is the delivery of vessels on time, so that we can ensure reliability when it comes to lifeline services for our islands. It was good to hear the minister talk about extra tonnage as we move towards winter.

Secondly, as a few colleagues have touched on, the Scottish Government remains fully committed to supporting the Ferguson yard to secure a sustainable future, including a pipeline of future work.

**Sue Webber:** Will the member take an intervention on that point?

**Paul McLennan:** I am sorry; I have only four minutes. I do not have time.

The Scottish Government continues to work closely with the yard to ensure that it becomes globally competitive.

Thirdly, the Scottish Government remains open to feedback regarding areas for improvement, which has been committed to.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston:** Will the member take an intervention on that point?

**Paul McLennan:** I am sorry; I have only four minutes.

On 8 September, the Minister for Transport made a statement on the future of Scottish ferries and published the project Neptune report. As was made clear in the statement, the project is a complex piece of work that will require further engagement with all stakeholders. We have talked about the importance of CalMac and CMAL staff in ensuring the most efficient and best value arrangement for future ferry governance structures.

Project Neptune will consider recommendations for improvements in the current arrangements for delivering ferry services in the west of Scotland. Much in the current arrangements delivers well, but there are clearly actions for the Scottish Government. The report also sets out longer-term options, on which no decision has been made other than on the options that have already been ruled out around privatisation or the unbundling of the CalMac network.

Finally, I want to touch on the issues that were raised in the "Disclosure" programme. The accusations are serious and they are being taken seriously. As he stated this morning and in the programme last night, the Deputy First Minister has concerns over them and, through the permanent secretary, has asked the Auditor General to investigate, which is the best way to investigate the issues and report to Parliament.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston:** Will the member take an intervention on that point?

**Paul McLennan:** No—I am sorry.

Tory calls for the Scottish Government to bring in the police are wholly inappropriate. That is a role for police alone; it is not for the Government to instruct.

**Liam Kerr:** Will the member take an intervention on that point?

**Paul McLennan:** No—I am sorry.

It has been a tough few years for some of our island communities due to adverse weather, Covid and, of course, technical and delayed orders. Lessons need to be learned; our island communities need to be reassured and fully consulted; and we need a thriving shipbuilding industry.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr McLennan. *[Interruption.]* Excuse me, members. Could we have some quiet, and some decorum, in the chamber?

I call Ariane Burgess, to be followed by Emma Roddick. *[Interruption.]* If members wish to make a point of order, they are very welcome to do so. Failing that, I would like to move on to the next speaker, and I would like the next speaker to be extended the courtesy of members listening.

15:35

**Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green):** I welcome the on-going Scottish Government engagement with affected communities and stakeholders on the options that are contained in the project Neptune report, and I am keen to ensure that the Scottish Government continues to fully engage with all our island communities on those lifeline services.

The Scottish Greens have long called for a commitment on long-term investment, as well as a full fares review, as part of the islands connectivity plan, and I look forward to the publication of the Scottish ferries plan in December. It is vital that we listen to the voices of those people who are often excluded from such conversations, especially those of young people and women, so that we create a ferry service that is representative of the people it serves and that provides more opportunities for young people from islands and remote rural areas to thrive.

I very much hope that ministers recognise the concerns of island communities and the need to continue to work closely with them during periods of disruption. Accurate and timely communication is key to avoiding unnecessary impacts on island economies, of which ferries are the lifeblood.

As a Highlands and Islands MSP, I hear and feel the profound impact that the on-going ferry disruption has had on my constituents. It is vital to

centre them in this debate and in all our plans to improve ferry services. Our islands are not museums; they are living, breathing communities that have ferries as their vital arteries. Every cancelled ferry trip for islanders is an appointment missed, a job unfinished or a shop unstocked.

Lifeline ferry services are essential to community life, so it is only reasonable that they should be governed by those same communities. As we have heard, local people understand the nuances and the connections that the ferries have with their communities, and they are best placed to support the replacement and upgrading of Scotland's ferries.

**Edward Mountain** *rose—*

**Graham Simpson:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Ariane Burgess:** I see from looking at the clock that I will not be able to.

Earlier this year, I welcomed the plans to expand the current fleet to build in redundancy over the winter and to add capacity in the summer, but I continue to urge that those new vessels be low carbon, like the electric ferries that run on renewable energy in places such as Sweden and Denmark. We also need to decarbonise our existing vessels. Retrofitting an electric motor cuts pollution, emissions, noise and running costs.

To upgrade and decarbonise the fleet, we need a strategic long-term plan, but that remains challenging when CalMac must bid for the contract every six years, at great expense. It would help to end the competitive bidding process and to make interisland ferries part of a publicly owned Scottish national infrastructure.

I ask the Scottish Government to consider the importance of fixed links as another important part of islands transport infrastructure, particularly where such links could provide cost-effective long-term solutions to meet the needs of island communities such as Yell and Unst in Shetland, where there is strong support for that approach. That would make sense, given that Yell is now part of the carbon-neutral islands pilot.

It is crucial that we unlock the potential of our island communities and help them to reverse depopulation trends by delivering a resilient ferry network that will secure Scotland's future as a thriving island nation.

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

15:39

**Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** As many in the chamber will know, I, like

many of my constituents, rely on public transport to get around. Given that I am a representative of the Highlands and Islands, that transport frequently includes ferries. On a personal level, therefore, it is very important to me that ferry services get the right amount of attention and funding from the Scottish Government.

I understand the Tories holding the Government to account when there are shortcomings and asking questions about instances in which ferries have not run or when communication has not been what it ought to have been. However, the needs of islanders must be at the heart of any debate on ferries, whether that debate be about procurement, shipbuilding or managing the services. Exaggerations—and, in the case of recent claims about freight not being moved, outright lies—in the national news do not help islanders. It does not help anyone if my constituents—

**Jamie Halcro Johnston:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Emma Roddick:** I will take one intervention, so it had better be a good one.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston:** I cannot promise that, but, as an islander, I probably have a bit of perspective.

One of the issues that we are facing is an Audit Scotland inquiry into the matter. Can the member confirm that Audit Scotland has no role in a criminal investigation, cannot compel witnesses and cannot interview individuals under caution, whereas a public inquiry or a police investigation can? Does she not recognise that what we need to get the information—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I think that that has been quite a lengthy intervention, Mr Halcro Johnston.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston:** —and to get the answers that have been held back so far is that investigation?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Emma Roddick, I think that you have enough information to respond to Mr Halcro Johnston's point.

**Emma Roddick:** That was more of a speech.

I recognise that I have no place in criminal investigations—and neither does the Scottish Government—so I echo earlier comments by saying that it is not appropriate for me to claim that there is a need for one.

Going back to my point about exaggerations, I do not think that it helps anyone if my constituents hear such things in the news and think that there is no point in going to the shops, because there will be no food, when there is, or that they have to cancel an appointment, when they do not. It is

unacceptable that, thanks to Conservative MSPs, that is exactly what is happening.

My advice to members is to approach this issue genuinely. *[Interruption.]* No, I am not giving way. There are genuine points to be made on behalf of the islanders whom members claim to speak for, rather than members focusing on whose head should roll and which synonym is being used to describe the situation today.

I, like any Highlands and Islands representative, deal regularly with casework on ferries, but in the past three months, more people have complained to me about misinformation—most of it coming from members on the Conservative benches—than have complained about last-minute changes to services.

Nobody—and I include the Scottish Government in this—is saying that there is not work to be done on ferry services. I would not stand here and claim that. The situation is not good enough; there are big issues and a lot of effort will be needed from a lot of people to improve things. However, I am reassured by the tone of the minister's contribution this afternoon. To me, the quotes from the First Minister that were read out earlier are not the quotes of a person pretending that nothing has gone wrong either.

On the issue of scrutiny, this is far from the first debate on ferries that we have had in the chamber since I was elected last year, and there is also great committee interest in what happens next. Indeed, the documentary that many have mentioned also focused on an inquiry that was held by the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee in the previous session. It is insincere to claim that scrutiny is being avoided or is not occurring.

The aims of project Neptune, which are to improve services and support island economies, are bang on. The involvement of local communities, whose voices are the most important here, is the right way to go about this. My colleague Jenni Minto made some very good points on that and, like her, I will be watching carefully as more detail emerges.

The vast majority of ferries run on time, and listening to the Tories will not give an accurate picture of what the real issues are or allow us to move forward in the right way. The only way to do that is to scrutinise the report and the Scottish Government's actions on their own merits.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move to closing speeches. I call Rhoda Grant to wind up on behalf of Scottish Labour.

15:43

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):**

In the midst of this mess are people, as Katy Clark has pointed out: people who are trying to live their lives, work and run their businesses. It is almost impossible for them to do that with ferry services that are not working.

When the Lochboisdale ferry business impact group looked at the economic effect of losing the Lochboisdale to Mallaig ferry services for a short period and surveyed business regarding losses, it concluded that, in 14 days, there had been an estimated loss of £658,000 to the local economy, with no compensation. That is just what happened over 14 days, on a route that tends to be the first sacrificed when there is disruption.

We have to look only at the level of disruption on all the west coast routes to understand the economic damage that is being done to fragile island communities. Yesterday we debated depopulation—we need look no further to see the reasons for that.

We want these routes to remain in public ownership, as my colleague Neil Bibby has said. We believe that people should come before profit on lifeline services. However, that does not mean that we believe that this Government is doing a good job—far from it. The Scottish Government needs to confirm that there will be no more expensive tendering processes on the island routes. Years of failure on the part of the Scottish Government are coming home to roost, and the Government needs to find a workable solution now.

There has been a drip-drip of scandal about what went wrong with the Arran and Harris-Uist ferry procurement process. It beggars belief, yet we are no closer to understanding what happened. That procurement needs independent scrutiny of every detail of the process. Willie Rennie is right—no one is taking responsibility. At best, this is an incompetent Government; at worst, it is dishonest.

Our amendment talks about the workforce at Ferguson's, who, sadly, have also been let down, as Neil Bibby has said. The Government must support the Ferguson's workforce to rebuild its reputation and grow in confidence.

What is also unbelievable about all this is that the Government fines CalMac when services are cancelled and unreliable, although the Government itself is responsible. Maybe the Government should use some of those fines to compensate businesses and the people who face the cost of cancellations.

Katy Clark has said that we need urgent action, but the minister says that she cannot act because she needs to consult islanders. However, the

minister's Government failed to consult initially. We all know that islanders wanted smaller and faster boats, with more sailings and more flexibility in the fleet. They did not get that.

There must be an independent inquiry. We have little confidence that the Scottish Government will furnish Audit Scotland with the information that it needs to investigate. We know that in the past the Government has withheld information, making it impossible for Audit Scotland to do its job.

The winter is coming, when disruption is at its highest. Islanders cannot wait for action. The minister blames weather, but frankly the issue is not the weather, but the wrong ferry on the wrong route in the winter. This is Scotland, after all—we expect bad weather in the winter.

Islanders need good, reliable boats to serve communities, so that people can work, build businesses and get to family and health appointments. Islanders have suffered too long. This incompetent Government needs to act now.

15:47

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

In my response to the urgent question from Graham Simpson yesterday, I acknowledged the significance of the issues that were raised in the BBC "Disclosure" programme. Having watched the programme last night, I reiterate my concerns about the issues that it raised. Graham Simpson asked me yesterday what the Government is doing about that, and I responded by indicating that we had taken the step of asking our permanent secretary to raise with Audit Scotland the issues that were put to us at the end of last week. I welcome the statement that the Auditor General for Scotland made yesterday afternoon that Audit Scotland will consider whether further scrutiny work is required. As I confirmed yesterday to Parliament—I hope that this reassures Mr Bibby—the Government, CMAL and Ferguson's will fully engage with and support any work that Audit Scotland undertakes in that respect.

In relation to the procurement of vessels 801 and 802 and their delivery, I have accepted in Parliament and say again that I accept my share of collective responsibility for the fact that the vessels have not been delivered on time and on budget. I deeply regret that. I regret it for the impact on the reputation of Ferguson's. I regret it for the impact on islanders, because—again, in relation to Mr Bibby's points—had the ferries been delivered, we would have had two newer vessels at an earlier stage, providing resilience in the network, which would have given us the ability to have reserve vessels available, in the way that we used to have with the MV Isle of Arran. That would

have given us capacity, particularly in the context of winter resilience.

**Willie Rennie:** Will the minister comment on the letter that the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee has received this afternoon, which indicates that Ferguson's will delay vessel 802 for another quarter? What are the implications of that for the island communities that the vessel would have served?

**John Swinney:** I am aware of the letter that Ferguson's sent to the committee today. The Government will interrogate the report that has come from Ferguson's, with appropriate due diligence, to determine our response to the points that it raises.

I stress—I will come on to this in a moment—that there is a necessity for sustained investment in the ferry network, and the Government has, of course, committed to that in other respects.

**Edward Mountain:** We all know that delays cost money, but there is no mention of the extra cost in the letter to the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee. Is the Government worried about that, and what will it do in response?

**John Swinney:** That is precisely what I addressed in my response to Mr Rennie; we will carry out due diligence on the points that Ferguson's raises with us and the update that has come forward. Obviously, I want to minimise any further cost to the public purse as a consequence.

Before I leave the question of the procurement of 801 and 802, I take the opportunity to place on record my deep personal appreciation for the contribution of Alex Logan and John McMunagle, who appeared in the "Disclosure Scotland" programme last night—two fine individuals whom I met many years ago, before Ferguson's got into difficulties in 2014. Throughout that time, they have been faithful servants to Ferguson's, and I thank them for their contribution and the generous welcome that they have always extended to me in my associations with them.

Over the past 10 years or so, the Government's investment in ferries has increased from £140 million in 2013-14 to £315 million in this financial year.

**Katy Clark:** Will the member take an intervention?

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

**John Swinney:** I am afraid that I have to watch my time as I have some ground to cover.

That indicates the significant investment that the Government has made in ferries. Commitments to new routes, such as Mallaig to Lochboisdale and Ardrossan to Campbeltown, and extra sailings to

Colonsay and to Coll and Tiree have been delivered. A host of elements of the ferries plan have been implemented as we expanded services. We have procured 801 and 802 as well as the two Islay-class ferries that will be delivered in 2024-25. The network has been expanded and invested in.

In relation to performance, any ferry cancellation is inconvenient to islanders or to other members of the public, whatever their reasons for being in the islands. I point out that in 2021, only 1 per cent of services were cancelled because of mechanical issues; three times as many were cancelled because of weather conditions. There has also been disruption to the network because of Covid infections spreading.

I close on an interesting element of the debate that is emerging on project Neptune, on which the transport minister briefed Parliament three weeks ago. It was also raised by Katy Clark in her contribution, although I was not able to follow all the elements of what she referred to. She raised the importance of there being no unbundling, which the Government agrees with, and no privatisation, which the Government also agrees with, and I welcome the opportunity to place that on the record.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Deputy First Minister, I am afraid that you are over your time.

**John Swinney:** I am on my final sentence, Presiding Officer.

Graham Simpson, on the radio this morning and in his speech in the debate, made it clear that the Conservatives are interested in privatising the CalMac network. I put on the record that the Government will have nothing to do with that.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Jamie Greene to wind up the debate on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives. You have up to seven minutes, Mr Greene.

15:53

**Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con):** It feels like 100 years since I gave my maiden speech in the Parliament in May 2016. As with most maiden speeches, as is tradition, I spoke about the great beauty of my area and the local issues that local people face on a daily basis.

Specifically, and unapologetically, I addressed the issue of connectivity and strong transport links to our communities, and that includes our island communities. Sadly, since I gave that speech, things have gone from bad to worse for our island communities. The situation is best summed up by the BBC programme that members have spoken of in the debate. The programme finally gave the wider public visibility of a situation that has played

out in this building for many years. Our islanders are in a truly dire situation.

What I am talking about? Ferries—ferries, ferries, ferries, and then some more ferries. Did I mention ferries? I hope that I made that clear enough for Mr Wishart if he is tweeting about today's proceedings. We make no apologies for raising the issue of ferries in our debating time, and it is frankly shameful that the Government does not do so more often.

I do not need to repeat the endless conversation about the murkiness around the awarding of the contracts to Ferguson's, but I will note that Mr Swinney, the Deputy First Minister, was very keen to stress in the media that not a single Government minister put a single ounce of pressure on anyone in CMAL to award the contract to Ferguson's. He made that claim and I hope that it is true, but if it transpires that the award process was irregular, improper or even illegal, the truth must emerge. It begs the following questions: who was driving all of that, and who was really in charge, calling the shots and making decisions? All that we have heard so far is endless buck passing, excuse making and finger pointing. Not a single head has rolled for any of this, and it is a scandal.

If the situation had involved a company in the private sector, the police would have been called yonks ago. It is unbelievable that no one has sought to get to the truth of the matter. Last night, the whole country heard about what ferry failures look like in real life—something that our islanders have known for a very long time.

Paul McLennan said that it has been a "tough few years" for our islands. Yes, it has. I am going to nominate him for the award of understatement of the year at tonight's *Holyrood* awards. This is what tough looks like. Tough is businesses factoring in cash-flow problems and writing off the bottom line in their profit-and-loss statements because of ferry problems. Tough is the young student on Iona who lost up to a third of his schooling because of ferry problems. Tough is the ferry group that had to beg its community to fund an investigatory feasibility study for a vessel that they had to find themselves, only to be knocked back by Government agencies. That is what tough looks like for our island communities, and it comes as no surprise given that the average age of a CalMac vessel is 24 years. Is it any wonder that we have ended up here?

I have some statistics for Emma Roddick. On the Arran route, there were 373 delayed sailings in the whole of 2007, but by July of this year—half way through the year—that number had tripled. The number of technical faults—unrelated to weather—have gone up by 81 per cent in the past four years. All of that comes at a cost—a financial,

operational and, as we hear too often, human cost.

The SNP's 2007 manifesto promised a fairer deal for our islands. That promise was repeated in its 2011 manifesto, in which the SNP stated to voters, "Elect us and we will place the needs of our island communities at the centre of the Government's agenda." What a shallow promise that turned out to be.

We had the flagship blueprint for ferries in 2012—the "Scottish Ferry Services: Ferries Plan (2013-2022)"—in which Keith Brown proclaimed:

"We are fully committed to delivering first class sustainable ferry services to our communities, stimulating social and economic growth across Scotland."

That plan included six new ferries, but the Government has not even delivered two. Ten years on from that plan, there is no new plan, or even a hint of one.

Although project Neptune is welcome, it focuses on governance structures and it is not a comprehensive ferry replacement and procurement plan. We are still missing hulls 801 and 802. They may eventually come into service, but they are only two vessels—just two—and 16 of CalMac's vessels are more than 25 years old. We have learned today, as we have been speaking, that there is even more slippage in the programme, and significant risk, more delays and potentially more costs remain. In an ironic twist of fate, the reality, which many of us warned about, is that the Glen Sannox may only sail on one fuel type. The so-called liquid natural gas dual-fuel model—the green solution to marine transport and the cause of so many problems in the ferry-building process—might not even be used.

Let us go back to the 2012 plan from those who sit on the centre benches. The SNP promised that there would always be sufficient capacity on routes to meet demand. What a joke that is, because when one boat breaks down, the SNP takes one from another route. The SNP takes the boat from one island and gives it to another, pitting island against island. It is no wonder that the Arran Ferry Action Group described the situation as "the island wheel of misfortune". That group, along with many others, is genuinely worried about the forthcoming winter. There is a disgraceful inevitability about this: they are staring down the barrel of an ageing fleet—a fleet that is breaking down and letting them down.

Last winter, entire routes were cancelled, travellers were stranded, people genuinely struggled for supplies and medical appointments were missed. The misery went on and on, and this year's CalMac winter timetable is late, too. It is that lack of consultation and listening that has got us to where we are today.

We are listening to communities and they are saying what a disastrous mess the Government has made of the ferry network. The Government should be ashamed. Minister, do not get me wrong—[*Interruption.*]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Greene, please resume your seat for a second. Members, could I please ask that there not be shouting across the chamber?

Mr Greene, please continue.

**Jamie Greene:** The current transport minister is the fifth such minister in as many years, and of course she was not responsible for these decisions. However, she must be accountable for, and take responsibility for, the actions of her Government, because no one else seems to be.

The lads in the Port Glasgow yard summed it up nicely. On the telly last night, they said to the nation, "It's never been about the workforce; it's all about the leadership." I agree, and that starts with political leadership, but today we have seen very little of that—no leadership and no accountability. That has to change, and it has to change now.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes the debate on Scottish Government handling of ferry contracts. I will allow a brief pause to allow front-bench teams to change position.

## National Health Service Waiting Times

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-06073, in the name of Sandesh Gulhane, on addressing NHS waiting times.

16:01

**Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con):** One year ago, on 22 September, we debated a motion on taking action on a crisis in the Scottish Ambulance Service and the worst accident and emergency waiting times on record. Given the reality of staffing levels on the ground, I implored the cabinet secretary back then to let our hard-working national health service staff and the Scottish people know what to expect as winter approached. Here we are again, still spiralling out of control. In the week ending 19 September 2021, 74.4 per cent of patients at A and E were seen within four hours; a year later, last week, that figure had dropped to 63.5 per cent—the worst on record.

Elsewhere in the system, cancer waiting times are also at their worst on record, with the number of people meeting the target going from 84 per cent in June last year to 76 per cent now. So much under the Scottish National Party Government's control is going from bad to worse. Vulnerable children are unable to access mental health services, with over a quarter not being seen by a specialist within 18 weeks. Waiting times for routine treatment are mounting—over 10,000 Scots have been waiting for two years for treatment, which is an eight-fold increase on last year. Hospital delayed discharges are at a record high. Ambulance waiting times of over two hours have increased nine-fold in four years and yet the cabinet secretary was patting himself on the back just yesterday.

We understand that the pandemic has had a significant impact on the delivery of health services, but the fact is that the situation has been getting worse in 2022, not better, despite the pandemic receding. Many issues also predate the pandemic, such as staff shortages which are the result of successive years of poor SNP workforce planning.

One year on from our September 2021 debate, our amazing nurses, doctors, allied healthcare professionals and paramedics remain overworked and undervalued, and are at breaking point. Yet, one year on, the same SNP minister remains in charge, clinging on to his flimsy NHS recovery plan. The stats do not lie. This is a record-breaking cabinet secretary—SNP delivery personified. However, what does the cabinet secretary do when faced with hard facts? He might selectively

compare stats from health services elsewhere to provide what the First Minister calls “context” or he might pass the buck and imply that shattered front-line workers are to blame for A and E waiting times, seriously undermining staff morale. I am afraid that any backtracking statement that is sent out later is akin to sticking a Band-aid on an unwashed, gaping wound. Patients who need treatment in Scotland do not want context; they want competence. However, if the SNP Government insists on context, how about this: nearly 70 per cent of nurses in Scotland feel that patient care was compromised on their last shift due to staffing levels.

Yesterday evening, I spoke to Norrie. Norrie’s mother is 96 and has pneumonia. Norrie’s mum was taken to an A and E department in an Ayrshire hospital last Thursday at 8 o’clock. The department was incredibly busy—too busy. Still, Norrie’s mum was triaged within 90 minutes. The staff were clearly doing their very best but, let us face it, they cannot conjure up more nurses or hospital beds, and there were no spare beds—none at all. Norrie’s mum spent 40 hours on a trolley in a busy corridor. She was cold and was beside automatic doors that opened and closed every couple of minutes. She was frightened and crying. She was breathless and disorientated, and all alone, because her family were not allowed to be with her. On Saturday afternoon, 40 hours after she first presented, she was moved to the clinical assessment unit where she is now. She is beginning to feel a bit better.

Can any of us imagine how we would feel if that had happened to our own granny or mum? Norrie really knows about healthcare. He has been a general practitioner for 40 years, and he cannot accept that that is what awaits his patients and his family. However, Norrie says that, sadly, his mum’s experience is not an exception. He says that it is not the fault of front-line staff, who go above and beyond.

Health is a devolved matter. The SNP has been in government for 15 years. The people of Scotland deserve to have dignity and respect while they are vulnerable. Mindful of last Thursday’s First Minister’s questions, I asked Norrie whether it gave him a measure of comfort to know that Scotland’s waiting times were better than elsewhere. His response—well, I cannot repeat the word, so let us just say that comparisons like that are meaningless and unhelpful for the people of Scotland who are suffering.

Norrie has a question for the cabinet secretary and the First Minister. He asks: do they agree that in Scotland today it is morally abhorrent for his 96-year-old mother to lie on a trolley in a cold corridor for 40 hours?

**Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP):** Would the member welcome the fact that there has been an immediate improvement in waiting times since the data was published?

**Sandesh Gulhane:** The SNP is patting itself on the back because there has been a 2.5 per cent improvement—2.5 per cent was the improvement in A and E waiting times. That is what the member wants to stand up and proudly declare, when the figure has come down from 74 per cent. The target is 95 per cent. My word! That is disgraceful.

Our cabinet secretary is the fifth SNP minister to be in charge of health. There has been a straight line of SNP MSPs since Nicola Sturgeon held the position from May 2007. After years of SNP mismanagement, dedicated NHS staff are burning out. Workforce planning is so poor that nursing vacancies are up by 25 per cent in a year, and they now stand at over 6,000. In the past year, around 15,000 workers left the NHS, which is the highest number in a decade. The root cause of many of the issues with A and E and routine treatment lies in the lack of flow of patients through hospitals.

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

**Sandesh Gulhane:** There is a lack of beds in NHS Scotland. There are 716 fewer than there were at the peak in 2014-15. Urgent action is required. The NHS recovery plan is failing to have a demonstrably positive effect on waiting times. It is not working. Let us admit that and rewrite the plan ahead of this winter.

I declare my entry in the register of members’ interests, as I am a practising NHS doctor.

I move,

That the Parliament is concerned by the length and scale of NHS waiting times; notes that A&E, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), cancer and routine treatment waiting times are well short of where they need to be; recognises that the root cause of this problem is a lack of beds in NHS hospitals; regrets, therefore, that the Scottish Government is focussed more on structural reform than building greater capacity into the social care system; notes that the NHS Recovery Plan is failing to have a demonstrably positive impact on waiting times, and calls, therefore, on the Scottish Government to rewrite its NHS Recovery Plan ahead of this winter.

16:09

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Humza Yousaf):** I welcome the opportunity to discuss the challenges that our health service continues to face and to speak to elements of the recovery that we are seeing across health and social care.

Before getting into the detail, I want to thank our NHS front-line staff and other social care staff for

the incredible efforts that they make day in and day out. I see them on a more than weekly basis in the job that I am in and am able to thank many of them personally, but I take this opportunity to say to those who I do not get to see that the Government and I are eternally grateful for their efforts.

From the outset, I say that this debate can hope to be constructive only if the Opposition does not deny the reality of the context in which we operate. Looking at Sandesh Gulhane's motion, I see that there is not one mention of the pandemic or Covid—not one mention of the biggest shock that our NHS has ever faced in its 74-year existence. To deny the severe impacts that the pandemic has had and continues to have on our health systems is, frankly, to deny reality.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Humza Yousaf:** I will not, if the member does not mind.

In his opening speech, Sandesh Gulhane referenced where we were a year ago. He forgot to mention that there have been three waves of the pandemic in the subsequent year: the omicron wave; the BA.2 wave; and the BA.45 wave, which we have just exited.

We should, of course, challenge ourselves to do better and I fully accept that the A and E waiting times statistics for the week ending 11 September were simply not acceptable. I have said as much, as has the First Minister. That is why I am pleased that we have seen an immediate improvement. I accept that we are far away from where we want to be, but there was an immediate improvement, which included a 20 per cent reduction in eight-hour and 12-hour waits.

Of course, context is important. I accept that it is cold comfort for people who are waiting excessively long times for A and E treatment, but this is not a uniquely Scottish problem: health services across the world are facing this challenge. Scotland's A and E performance continues to be the best in the United Kingdom not by a small margin but by quite a margin. However, again, I accept that more has to be done. That is why Kevin Stewart, who will close the debate for the Government, and I are working hard with health and social care partnerships up and down the country to reduce those delayed discharges. If we can do that and get some movement in the right direction, which I accept is not happening at the moment, that will free up capacity in our acute sites, which currently face an extreme challenge.

I do not accept that simply creating more beds in the system is a panacea. I think that preventing people from having to come to the front doors of our hospitals will dramatically help.

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** Last night, I spoke to a deep-end general practitioner who said that the health service is designed on a demand basis, not a need basis. With regard to the cabinet secretary's point about prevention, does he agree that it is time that we took an approach to healthcare that involves preventing people's health problems becoming acute in the first place, which is what adds to our A and E times?

**Humza Yousaf:** I agree with that point in its entirety. The more we can prevent admission and ease demand on the system, the better. Our hospital-at-home model is a great example of how we can do that. Similarly, out-patient parenteral antimicrobial therapy—OPAT—which involves delivering antiviral treatment to patients at home or close to home and has saved 45,000 hospital bed days this year, is a key plank in our efforts to reduce that demand.

On planned care, there have been elements of a recovery. There has not been a full recovery—I am not going to suggest that, because our recovery plan covers the course of the parliamentary term—but statistics that were published last week, which Sandesh Gulhane and the Conservatives have not yet commented on, show that, for most of our out-patient specialisms, two-year waits either have been eradicated or are experienced by fewer than 10 people in those specialisms where those waits exist.

**Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP):** On Brian Whittle's point about demand, is the cabinet secretary as worried as Dr Jennifer Armstrong from NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde is about the fact that the cost of living crisis will increase demand on the NHS?

**Humza Yousaf:** The cost of living crisis, which was created by—and is now being worsened by—the incompetent Conservative Government, is a public health crisis. If people have to choose between heating and eating, that will have a direct impact on their health.

We will continue to try to expand our workforce, and I will give more details on that next week. However, it is the case that NHS staffing in Scotland is higher per head of the population than it is in any other part of the UK.

Next week, I will give more details of how we are matching up against that recovery plan and what our winter contingency plans will be. Although I absolutely accept that we still face challenges due to the effects of the pandemic, I praise our NHS and social care staff for the incredible and compassionate care that they provide the people of Scotland with day in and day out.

I move amendment S6M-06073.3, to leave out from “is concerned” to end and insert:

“recognises the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on health services and thanks Scotland’s frontline health and care staff for continuing to deliver high-quality care in spite of pressures associated with the ongoing pandemic; understands that these pressures are being experienced in health services across the UK and beyond; notes that, in 60 days, the number of people waiting longer than two years for an outpatient appointment was reduced by almost a quarter and that most specialisms have no waits of this length; welcomes that, since the start of the pandemic, NHS staffing is up by almost 9%; notes that child and adolescent mental health services began treatment of 5,200 children in the most recent quarter, the highest number ever recorded for the second quarter in a row; commends the dedication of Hospital at Home staff, whose work has avoided or saved bed days equivalent to that of a large district general hospital, including increased capacity for Outpatient Intravenous Antimicrobial Treatments, remote monitoring for COVID, and Respiratory Rapid Response services, which has already saved 45,000 hospital bed days in 2022; regrets the impact that Brexit and the UK Government’s anti-immigration rhetoric have had on recruitment in care services, and welcomes that over £1.6 billion of Scottish Government investment is being provided for social care and integration in 2022, and that, by the end of this parliamentary session, investment will increase by at least £840 million to improve services through the creation of the National Care Service.”

16:15

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** It is almost 500 days since the cabinet secretary took office. Unfortunately, in that time, his performance has been woeful, and the consequences have been devastating for our NHS, the hard-working staff and its patients. Our NHS is literally on life support, and I fear that the SNP Government is shamefully complacent and not up to the task of fixing that. Of course, Covid exposed the weaknesses in the NHS, but we know that the problems predate the pandemic. There were already 420,000 people on waiting lists before the pandemic. That number now sits at 750,000, which is one in seven Scots.

What has the cabinet secretary been doing? I will hand it to him—he has been a record breaker. Last week, A and E waiting times were at a record high, as were delayed discharge numbers and delays to elective surgery. The list goes on and on, but the consequences are devastating: 7,174 excess deaths, most of which were not due to Covid. Using the same estimates as the Royal College of Emergency Medicine, potentially, 1,400 people lost their lives or had much worse outcomes because of delays at A and E.

I am struggling to find anything substantial that has got better under his watch. I accept that all that work takes time and that it will not happen, to quote him, “in a matter of weeks” or, indeed, “months”, but the cabinet secretary has had almost 500 days in which to make a difference.

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Jackie Baillie:** No, I will not.

In May 2021, when he took over, pandemic restrictions were still commonplace, but 86 per cent of people were treated within four hours of waiting in A and E. That figure is now 63 per cent, so the number of people who wait more than 12 hours has risen by a stunning 1,012 per cent under his watch.

**Humza Yousaf:** I wonder whether Jackie Baillie wants to take an intervention.

**Jackie Baillie:** No, I do not. I would rather that the cabinet secretary listened.

In May 2021, more than 94,000 people were waiting for elective surgery; the number is now almost 140,000, which is a 27 per cent increase. More than 35,300 bed days were lost to delayed discharge; that figure is now almost 56,000, which is a staggering 58 per cent increase. A shocking 685,000 bed days have been lost since the cabinet secretary came to office. None of those measured figures are getting better—they are getting worse. New figures, which were published just this week, show that performance against the 62-day cancer waiting times target has plummeted to the lowest point since records began. More people will die of cancer because of that. That is dangerous incompetence on the part of the SNP Government, which has been in charge during years of poor workforce planning, the cutting of the number of hospital beds and training places for nurses and the underfunding of the NHS and social care. It is all coming home to roost.

An array of experts in their field—including those from the Royal College of Nursing, the British Medical Association, the Royal College of Emergency Medicine, the Royal College of General Practitioners and the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons—have tried to offer advice, but the cabinet secretary is not listening. Instead, he is presiding over an exhausted and demoralised workforce. Our NHS staff are going the extra mile to care for us, so they deserve our undying gratitude, but they need more than warm words from the cabinet secretary. They need a recruitment policy worth its name, action to retain staff who are leaving the service early because they have had enough, and decent pay for the whole workforce. Staff are the beating heart of our NHS so, if we are to recover, we need to support them and, with a winter crisis looming, there is no time to waste.

When a health board is failing, it is put in special measures. The NHS cannot wait any longer; it needs urgent help and, if the cabinet secretary is incapable of delivering, it is high time that he is put in special measures.

I move amendment S6M-06073.1, to insert at end:

“, deliver a real cancer catch-up plan, and invest in social care to tackle delayed discharge.”

16:19

**Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** It is my pleasure to rise to speak for my party in this important debate, which I thank Sandesh Gulhane for securing.

Before I move on to my substantive remarks, I must reflect on the cabinet secretary's speech. Had he taken my intervention, I would have reminded him that every time he leans into saying that the pandemic is the cause of all this, a fairy dies. It happens all the time, and he is making not only Opposition parties in the chamber but hard-working NHS staff angry. He is revealing the blinkered nature of his Government's attitude to the alarm bells that NHS staff have been sounding for years, some of which the Government has attempted to address through legislation and other ill-fated strategies. He cannot keep leaning on the fact that we had a two-year pandemic when things were demonstrably bad—as they still are—before that pandemic. He needs to reflect on that.

It is plain to see that our NHS is being stretched beyond breaking point. Patients are being abandoned in waiting rooms.

**Gillian Martin:** That is nonsense!

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** What do you mean that it is nonsense? I hear SNP members saying from a sedentary position that people are not being left in waiting rooms and are not being left on gurneys in our A and E departments.

**Gillian Martin:** You said that they are being abandoned.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** They are being abandoned by this Government.

**The Presiding Officer:** Sorry, Mr Cole-Hamilton. I would very much like to hear contributions in this debate. I also remind all members to speak through the chair at all times.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** I apologise for not speaking through the chair on this occasion, Presiding Officer. SNP members know exactly who has abandoned our patients: this Government and not our hard-working clinicians, who are crying out for help and looking to members in the chamber for answers.

It is estimated that one in seven Scots is on a waiting list for some kind of treatment. That is a shocking statistic. Everywhere we look, the situation is getting out of control. That is even before we get into the teeth of what will possibly be the hardest winter that our NHS has ever

faced. We see backbench MSPs celebrating tiny improvements in hospital waiting times while we still have people waiting for hours in pain and desperation.

Over one weekend in September, only 63 patients were dealt with within the four-hour target period. The availability of child and adolescent mental health services continues to be dire, as well. The need for services was illustrated starkly and tragically by a recent study that told us that a quarter of all deaths among five to 24-year-olds are from suicide. That is a shocking statistic.

This week, we saw the worst cancer waiting times on record for the third quarter in a row, with just one health board meeting the Government's target. We know that early diagnosis and treatment are vital to survival in cancer care.

The Royal College of Emergency Medicine has said that waiting time delays have contributed to hundreds of avoidable deaths each year. Those people could still have been alive today. With things that bad, it is frightening to think what it might take for the Government to finally get to grips with the crisis. The stakes are incredibly high, and continued failure is simply not an option.

We must not forget the issues at GP surgeries, as well. Patients have got used to having to wait weeks for an appointment. To illustrate just how bad things are, I will tell members about a case that I heard about last week. A Ukrainian refugee had waited so long for a GP appointment that she was forced to travel back to Ukraine to get the medicine that she needed. How shocking is that?

It is not only patients who are suffering; NHS staff are reaching breaking point. Inadequate pay and poor conditions are affecting staff recruitment and retention, while there are currently more than 6,000 vacancies in nursing and midwifery alone. That puts a huge strain on the staff who are already there.

With the very short time that I have left, I will make three suggestions to the Government: it must take immediate action to address NHS staff recruitment and pay; it must adopt the Scottish Liberal Democrat plans for a burn-out prevention strategy; and it must carry out our proposals for more counsellors in schools and a single point of contact for CAMHS waiting lists. We cannot wait for that; we have been round the houses with this debate time and time again. It is time that the Government listened.

I move amendment S6M-06073.2, to insert at end:

“; notes that the increasing problems with NHS staff and recruitment, with 6,010 nursing and midwifery vacancies alone, will have a direct impact on waiting times; believes that staff should not face unsafe staffing levels on any shift; deeply regrets the impact of waiting times on both patients

and staff, and calls on the Scottish Government to set up an urgent inquiry into avoidable deaths linked to the emergency care crisis, following estimates from the Royal College of Emergency Medicine that long waits have contributed to hundreds of avoidable deaths in 2022.”

16:24

**Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con):** For months, the Scottish Conservatives have said that people are paying the price of Humza Yousaf’s mismanagement of Scotland’s NHS. Earlier this month, A and E waiting times hit their worst level on record. The figures that were released yesterday are only fractionally better.

The sobering reality, which the vice-chair of the Royal College of Emergency Medicine emphasised last week, is that emergency department delays are associated not just with patient harm but with increased mortality.

I will put that into perspective. For the 3,400 patients across Scotland who spent more than eight hours in A and E a couple of weeks ago, 40 additional lives could be lost in a single month. That is why those statistics really matter.

Let me be clear: the buck stops at Bute house. NHS staff the length and breadth of Scotland have worked tirelessly to treat their patients in recent years, often at the expense of their own wellbeing.

In July 2022—almost a year after the NHS recovery plan was unveiled—one in every 25 patients waited more than 12 hours to be seen in A and E departments across Scotland. That was the worst month since records began.

What were Nicola Sturgeon and her SNP colleagues doing in July? They were refreshing the case for separation, with the launch of the SNP’s second independence paper. That is a massive distraction from our NHS’s recovery and hardly the “sharp focus” that the First Minister pointed to during First Minister’s question time last week.

In August, the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh’s A and E department was over capacity every day—not just by a handful of patients but by dozens of them. That has implications for the safety of patients and staff. However, in August, Nicola Sturgeon appeared not once or twice but five times at Edinburgh’s fringe to hobnob with Hollywood actors and polish her public relations. That tells us exactly where the First Minister’s priorities lie.

Those appalling waits occurred during the summer months, well before the pressures of winter and colder weather pile on to our NHS. In my region, the medical director for acute services at Aberdeen royal infirmary said in August that

“the system is not working because it’s not fit for purpose.”

Ambulances are already stacking outside ARI because the hospital simply does not have the capacity. Paramedics and their patients are waiting hours outside A and E, meaning that ambulances cannot be deployed elsewhere. People in the north-east are being told to present to ARI only if their condition is life threatening.

Figures that were published yesterday show that, for the quarter ending in June 2022, NHS Grampian failed to meet the 62-day standard and the 31-day standard for cancer waiting times. In addition, there are long waits for magnetic resonance imaging scans, colonoscopies and access to psychological therapies.

Meanwhile, Montrose minor injury unit has closed in Angus; Aboyne community hospital has been shut because of staffing shortages; Friockheim health centre has closed its doors because of lack of doctors; and primary care across the north-east is under impossible pressure. Many NHS services are being centralised by stealth with NHS 24 acting as the gatekeeper, with lengthy waits to speak to an operator.

Quite simply, Presiding Officer—

**Humza Yousaf:** Will the member give way?

**The Presiding Officer:** No. The member must conclude.

**Tess White:** I am nearly finished. I wish that Humza Yousaf would listen to what people are telling him. His NHS recovery plan has not worked. Things have gone from bad to worse. That is no wonder, given that Audit Scotland has said:

“There is not enough detail in the plan to determine whether ambitions can be achieved in the timescales set out.”

The health secretary will be appearing before MSPs in the chamber next week to address those issues. I know that he wants to mention them now, but I ask him to please listen—I am nearly finished. I sincerely hope that he will address the issues. After months of excuses, this is an opportunity to rethink his failing recovery plan and to tell front-line staff and the public what action he will take to reduce delayed discharge, increase the number of beds, improve workforce planning and focus on staff retention.

Everyone has had enough of SNP soundbites. Humza Yousaf and his colleagues need to step up—[*Interruption.*]—and get a grip. Too much is at stake.

16:29

**Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP):** This is a timely debate, and I am glad that we are

having it. The fallout from the Chancellor of the Exchequer's statement last Friday is reaching into every aspect of our lives—not least, into devolved areas including health services.

I will not have been alone in being completely stunned by some of the public comments that we are seeing from the sort of respected people who normally keep their own counsel. Not least, last night, as I was preparing for this debate, I read the words of former deputy governor of the Bank of England Sir Charlie Bean. He said that Kwasi Kwarteng's measures "could finish"—I repeat, "finish"—"the NHS". Wow! That warning should strike fear into every single one of us across England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. We all have our own national health services, but they are all at the mercy of decisions that are being made by a reckless UK Government, which today we know has ignored the warnings of its own officials.

This is not a good week to be a Tory. It is even harder to be a Scottish Tory in this Parliament, leading a debate on the security of the NHS in Scotland, the importance of investment in clinical and social care staff, and measures to bring down waiting times and secure patient safety. Before I heard his speech, I felt sorry for Sandesh Gulhane. However, he ignored the impact that his party's reckless decisions are having on the funding and operation of the national service, which I know he cares about.

The motion rightly asks questions about actions that we took to protect patient safety, improve patient flow through hospitals and make our care sector sustainable. All those areas require scrutiny, our attention and sustaining of the highest levels of funding that the Scottish Government can manage within the grant that it has. However, although I really do try to temper my emotions when I talk in the chamber, I cannot hide my utter distress and, to be frank, my anger. I cannot hide my anger at the Conservatives, whose actions last week have caused immediate financial pain to our NHS—[*Interruption.*]—and are set to make the mental and physical health of our citizens even worse. Week after week—[*Interruption.*]—the Tories are on their feet telling patients' stories—

**The Presiding Officer:** Ms Martin! I am sorry, Ms Martin—if you would just give me a second.

If members want to make a contribution you can, of course, stand and ask to make an intervention. I would prefer it if we do not just have constant comments when a member is speaking. Thank you.

**Gillian Martin:** Week after week, the Tories are on their feet, telling patients' stories—we have heard one today—and some of them are very

distressing. How will we make sure that every patient gets the health service that they deserve and a long and healthy life? Is it by crashing the pound? Is it by giving more money to the super-rich, while asking the poorest people either to heat or eat? Is it by letting inflation run wild and decimating budgets, from household budgets to Government budgets? No, it is not.

The Tories are demanding that we give the richest Scots in our society the same tax breaks as have been roundly condemned by the International Monetary Fund. A range of financial experts, and many people in their party, disagree with them. Those tax cuts would leave the Scottish Government with less money to fund health and social care, in addition to all the other assaults on those areas. The rising costs of heating our care homes and hospitals and the impact of the cost of living on mental health have an impact on the mental health of our own NHS staff, which is another important aspect.

On the other hand, here are the Tories in this chamber, making all the demands that we heard in the opening speech. A child of 10 could point out the hypocrisy. They complain about our publicly funded NHS, when their mismanagement of the economy takes money away from the NHS in real terms and increases the causes of ill-health in our population.

I come back to Charlie Bean's comment. Is our NHS finished? No—here in Scotland it is not, because the majority in this Parliament know that the way to protect the NHS in Scotland is to never have Tories anywhere near the decisions that affect it, whether here or at Westminster. I say to Tess White that only in an independent Scotland could we ensure that the reckless incompetence of Liz Truss and all her far-right hedge-fund lobbying pals—

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

**Gillian Martin:** —and those who come after her can never get their hands on—

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

**Gillian Martin:** —anything that affects our NHS.

16:34

**Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab):** As we can see from the contributions so far, the topic of the debate is very important to the public. It is at the forefront of the public's concerns month after month, year after year. There is a reason for that, which is that people truly value our NHS and want it to succeed. They understand that it is our most valuable asset, as a country, and that if the NHS is running well, the country is on the right track.

That is why my party, and I am sure many members in the chamber and people in our communities, cannot understand why, when we are going into a winter that will undoubtedly see a significant increase in fuel poverty and malnutrition, as well as increased concerns about spiralling mental health due to the state of the economy, we are not having a serious rethink of the NHS recovery plan here in Scotland.

The fact is, that the SNP-Green Government has shown itself to be wholly incapable of taking responsibility for the scale of the crisis that is engulfing our health and social care service. I want to speak to SNP back benchers as well. It is our responsibility to scrutinise what is being done here in Scotland by the Scottish Government. We are discussing a serious point that has to be taken on board. No matter what the problem is, there is always an excuse from the Government. All the while, patients and staff want solutions and a sense of on-going progress.

**Gillian Martin:** Yesterday, Carol Mochan heard Dr Armstrong of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde say that £19 million is having to come out of her budget to pay for increased fuel costs. How can the Scottish Government possibly mitigate that?

**Carol Mochan:** I will tell the member how that can be mitigated: it can be done by voting Labour at the next general election.

When visiting hospitals in my region, I have seen hard-working people struggling to do an impossible task with too few staff, fewer resources and constant pressure. With that, and the worst cancer waiting times on record, how can we in this Parliament, and as a people, say that what we are achieving is good enough? It is time to take responsibility. I ask the Government, please, to take responsibility, and I ask the Government back benchers to put some pressure on the front bench to take responsibility. When we take responsibility, we can have a serious discussion about how we help to take away the pressures on the NHS. I am one of the first in this chamber to take on the Tories and debate what we need to do about the Tory Government.

In the short time that I have, I would like to highlight the unacceptable length of waiting times in women's health services. Women are being forced to wait for dangerously long periods for gynaecological treatment. The data for April to June this year, which was published yesterday, highlights that only just over half of eligible referrals for cervical cancer started treatment within 62 days. That means that nearly half of those who were eligible did not start cancer treatment within two months. That is a shocking statistic and is a key breach of the Government's pledges.

Those are serious issues that cannot be left for so long without serious risk to life and long-term health, yet it sometimes seems that, because the issues relate to women's health, they are more likely to take a back seat. What makes me say that? After repeated promises in the chamber to have a women's health champion, and despite being told more than once in the chamber that an appointment would be made in the summer, we are now approaching October and we still have no women's health champion.

I say to the Government, to the Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport, and to the First Minister that they must meet their commitment to Scotland's women and get this done.

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

**Carol Mochan:** To conclude, I say that we need solutions, and we need them now. Only if we are serious will we get the necessary things done to make sure that staff and patients have a better-performing NHS in Scotland.

16:38

**Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP):** I recently stood in the chamber and said that I was "fed up" with mitigating Tory policies from Westminster. The term "fed up" does not do justice to the anger that I and so many others feel at the absolute chaos that the Westminster Government has brought to our communities. We should remember the phrase on the side of a bus about £350 million a week going to Europe and the words

"let's fund our NHS instead".

As Ms Martin pointed out, Sir Charlie Bean has said that a failure to reverse the tax cuts for the wealthy could result in the end of the national health service. We should let that sink in: it is about the end of the national health service. That is how far the obsession with Brexit ideology has taken us in just a few short years.

On reading the Conservatives' motion, people would think that they are in favour of investment in public services, but a party that demands that the Scottish Government follow the Chancellor of the Exchequer's new fiscal measures cannot credibly claim to care about our public institutions or, indeed, the public whom they serve.

Our NHS faces unprecedented pressures that have been caused by the global pandemic. NHS workers are exhausted, but they continue to work on the front line in the most challenging circumstances to deliver the Government's recovery plan. They should have our support, our respect and our thanks.

The Tory motion mentions hospital beds, but not the fact that out-patient antimicrobial therapy services allow patients to be seen at home, which will save 45,000 hospital bed days this year alone. That is one example of how service restructure is working.

**Sandesh Gulhane:** What does the member say about the fact that such services were available in Raigmore hospital in 2015 but, apparently, took seven years to roll out?

**Clare Adamson:** Tory members never say, "Yes, we've rolled it out. It's working. It's good." They always say, "Why did it take so long?" Why can they not just get behind the NHS as it makes improvements?

Our NHS continues to outperform services in the other UK nations. Our A and E department waiting times are not acceptable, and there is much more to be done to get waiting times down for key services, but the NHS and the Scottish Government are addressing that issue.

Brexit has exacerbated recruitment challenges and has had an impact on health and social care recruitment. That has led directly to increased times in hospital for patients, which has put further pressure on our hospitals.

Undoubtedly, we need to continue to invest in front-line health and social care. The Scottish Government is already acting by backing such investment with a £1 billion NHS recovery plan, £500 million in urgent and unscheduled care collaborative funding and £40 million in additional CAMHS revenue. The Scottish Government cannot borrow money to give away to its wealthy friends. It is working with a fixed budget and is doing the best that it can, working with NHS colleagues, to improve the situation.

I am angry today. My staff had to intervene to get help for a young family that was left with no food over the holiday weekend as a result of failure in the universal credit system and failure by the Labour-Tory administration in the local council to administer a crisis grant in a timely manner. People, including children, are at risk of malnutrition now and will be at risk of hypothermia as the days shorten. Health inequalities, including those relating to mental health, are exacerbated by poverty and stress. The UK Government is inflicting poverty on many more people, including hard-pressed families, pensioners and those who are most vulnerable, yet it says that we are obsessed with the constitution and independence.

While trashing the economy and causing the pound to crash, the Westminster Government is reviewing all retained European Union law on the statute book. That law relates to clean beaches, product safety and food standards.

The UK Government also seems to be obsessed with bringing back imperial measurements. Maybe the Scottish Conservatives will understand that they do not have an ounce of credibility, an ounce of empathy or an ounce of shame in bringing their motion to the chamber.

16:43

**Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green):** This remains an extremely difficult and demanding time for our health and social care systems, which is why the impact and legacy of Covid should never be underestimated. Months of delayed appointments, cancelled procedures and the frustrations, worries and problems that they bring cannot be fixed overnight. We should not forget that, for many, the pandemic is not over. It is likely that Covid will have an impact on all manner of care this winter, which is why we need preventative action.

Those who are eligible for vaccination must be encouraged to come forward, and people need to know their rights and what they should expect. We must ensure that there are long-term, sustainable improvements to waiting times. Tackling waiting times requires action to keep the population well and prevent people from having to attend hospital in the first place. We must also ensure that we minimise other factors that disrupt hospital capacity.

Normality seems very far away for our wonderful health and social care staff, whom we must keep well to ensure that we minimise disruption this winter. While the rest of society has been able to take a breath, our NHS and social care staff simply have not had that chance. For that alone, we should be endlessly grateful for their fortitude. Behind every waiting time statistic is a team of clinicians, support staff and social care workers who are trying their best. We must listen to what they need and support them when they ask. Without their hard work, determination and expertise, there is no NHS. Keeping them well is not simply about mitigating and protecting against Covid; it is also about taking other measures and making changes to terms and conditions.

The cabinet secretary, Jackie Baillie, Alex Cole-Hamilton and I attended a meeting earlier this year with the RCN to hear from nurses. One thing that came out clearly was the impact of the lack of flexible working patterns on nurses, who then leave NHS employment. In many instances, the situation results in nurses taking retirement only to return to work in better shifts as bank cover, often in similar roles to the ones that they have just left. At the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee yesterday, I was pleased to hear from Alex McMahon that work on the matter was in progress,

and I would be grateful for any update that the minister has on the issue in his closing speech.

Although such steps are welcome, we need to hear from other health professionals about what they need, and to address how to prevent others from being in the same position as the nurses from whom we heard at our meeting with the RCN. We need to ensure that the safe staffing legislation is implemented.

We must also ensure that any patients who are impacted by cancellations are kept as fully informed as possible, and that they receive appropriate support and help to keep as well as possible while they wait for their operation—I raised that point yesterday at the committee. The cumulative effect of the pandemic and those factors, among others, cannot be ignored.

I want to end with a reflection on the impact that the cost of living crisis will have on our NHS and waiting times this winter. Over winter, we will see the acute reality in our hospitals of the absolute mess that the reckless UK Government has caused. We will see people presenting at A and E with malnutrition and conditions that are associated with it, and we will see people with chronic illnesses and disabilities facing massive debt for running the machinery that keeps them alive and facilitates their everyday lives. Despite all that, all the UK Government does is hand out tax cuts to the wealthiest and lift the cap on bankers' bonuses.

**Carol Mochan:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Gillian Mackay:** I am just about finished—I am sorry.

We know the long-term impacts of wealth inequality. There are children today who will see their health impacted well into adulthood by the cruel Tory regime and the decisions that it is taking now. We know the impacts that Tory policies had in our communities during the 80s, and here we are again. UK Government ministers should be ashamed; instead, they are doubling down with lines in the media such as

“You won't like this budget if you”

support

“the poor”.

We need to tackle waiting times, delayed discharge and other issues at the acute end as best we can but, with this UK Government, we are doing that with one hand tied behind our back. All the while, the UK Government continues to implement despicable policies that will impact families across Scotland for generations.

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

16:48

**Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** As a preliminary, let me record my huge admiration for all who work in whatever capacity in the health and care sectors. Nothing brought home to me how much theirs is a vocation than their commitment during that two-year-long pandemic. The pandemic is where I will start.

Throughout the UK in the devolved health services and beyond, to Europe, the pressures, the wearing of personal protective equipment and the restrictions dramatically disrupted the usual business of our GP surgeries and hospitals. The aftermath of that situation is seen in the delays and in our playing catch-up with treatment.

I recall Borders general hospital dividing itself into two treatment areas—one for people with Covid, and the other for emergency treatments. I recall how the chief executive, along with colleagues, had to learn to adapt to that fast-evolving, global virus.

Other health treatments were postponed of necessity. Access to GP services was, and remains to this day, limited. To this day, of necessity, our GP and ambulance staff and staff in our hospitals are still taking precautionary Covid protections, which all add to delays.

Those years caused a backlog in treatments. Of course, delays in individual cases are dreadful—I have heard about them myself—but we must put them in the extraordinary context of the pandemic. I had never known a pandemic previously but, apparently it is yesterday's news for the Opposition. It is not, and that context is fundamental. I say to Ms Mochan that the pandemic is not an excuse, but an explanation—there is world of difference.

The Conservative motion does not mention that, yet the continuing impacts of the pandemic—the fact that protections are still required; that staff in the health and care sectors are still having to take sick leave because they contract Covid; that ambulance drivers not only require the Covid protections but must sanitise their ambulances after each patient journey; that wards require extra cleaning; that GPs are limiting face-to-face consultations; and that even dentistry is trying to catch up—are all for the same reason: Covid is still among us.

All of that is fundamental to where we are today. The root cause, as of now, is the necessary postponements when Covid was at its height, the

catching up that needs to be done and the continuing protections. That is corroborated by the fact that the positions in the English NHS and the Welsh NHS are worse, although I take no pleasure in saying that, because each individual—rightly—is a priority for treatment, wherever they live.

However, the NHS is working through the situation and, as in “normal times”, certain treatments and certain emergencies must take priority. I say to Jackie Baillie that, today, NHS Borders confirmed that 100 per cent of patients in the Borders who are diagnosed with cancer receive their treatment within the Scottish Government’s target period of 31 days, and that almost 97 per cent of eligible patients who are given an urgent suspicion of cancer referral have received their first treatment within the Scottish Government’s 62-day target period.

**Jackie Baillie:** Will Christine Grahame give way?

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

Therefore, I commend NHS Borders.

The motion does not even dip its toe into the waters of Brexit, as a consequence of which we lost staff in the health sector and especially the care sector. That brings me to the need for us to have some honesty in this debate. Let us have more light and less heat. All Governments have struggled with the pandemic in the health and care sectors, from the early lockdown days until now. The fact that vaccines have to be delivered on a mass scale places a huge demand on NHS services.

The problems of Covid and Brexit have now been compounded by reckless Truss economic policies, which will impact on the health, the wellbeing and the safety of people in Scotland. There has been not a whisper about any of that from the Tories; I wonder why.

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

16:52

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** How can I follow those intellectual gymnastics of Christine Grahame, who created a new thought experiment in dancing on the head of a pin by explaining to Carol Mochan that what we have heard from SNP members all afternoon has been explanations, not excuses? First, it was Covid. [*Interruption.*] Try explaining that to the nursing profession, which begged the Parliament to pass the safe staffing bill some 10 years ago because of a problem of the Scottish Government’s creation.

We were then told about the Tory tax cuts. I find them as horrifying as the next person, but they

have not even happened yet. SNP members cannot use other people’s mistakes to excuse away the inadequacies of their Government after more than a decade of mismanagement, and shame on them for trying to do so.

**Clare Adamson:** Will the member give way?

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** I do not have time.

Last week, I met an intensivist in a major Scottish hospital who told me that, when he goes to work, it is unsafe on every shift, because his hospital is down to the tune of 80 nurses on every shift. That is astonishing. He spoke about the fact that, even though intensive care was short staffed, staff sometimes had to be slipped from intensive care to other wards where, if a member of staff was not slipped in that way, there would be no nurses on the ward at all. We are in a state of abject crisis and it is only the policies of the SNP Government that are to blame.

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

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** I do not have time; I have only four minutes and I must make progress.

That intensivist talked about the data incident reports that he had to do about adverse experiences on wards, such as injury or death. He used to do only 20 a month, but he now does 50 a month. That is the measure of the lack of safety in our wards and in our hospitals.

The situation that we are in is down not to the excuses that we have heard today, but to a range of things. It is down to active policy decisions, such as the decision to cut 300 places from nursing and midwifery training and the decision to create advanced nurse practitioners, which fixed one problem but created another. Although advanced nurse practitioners were needed, it was not recognised that lots of people who were in wards that were under pressure and understaffed would find the quickest way out, which was to take an advanced nurse practitioner role, so that they would not have to stay in an unsafe ward. Those are real problems that we are hearing about. Intensivists and other clinicians would not be coming us to complain if the Government was listening to them and acting on a day-to-day basis on the problems that they raise.

We have heard a lot in the debate about waiting times in accident and emergency, our Ambulance Service and emergency care. However, those waits are not the fault of emergency care, and it is absolutely critical that we say that.

Ambulances cannot get to people in time because they cannot discharge their patients into A and E departments when they arrive. They are waiting in queues outside A and E. Why? Because A and E departments are entirely full. Why are A

and E departments entirely full? It is not because they are not treating people. They are treating people, but they cannot discharge them into the wider hospital. Why is that? The hospitals are full. Why are the hospitals full? Patients cannot get a bed because of the more than a thousand people who, on any given night, are languishing in Scottish hospitals well enough to go home but too frail to do so without a social care package. This is a crisis that is causing an interruption in flow throughout the whole of our national health service.

The SNP should be focusing on that, not the ill-fated bureaucratic exercise of creating a national care service, which will strip power away from the people in social care who know how best to use it and deliver it into the hands of ministers who have shown nothing but disinterest in the problems that they have been told about, year after year.

This is a crisis of the SNP's own creation. I have no skin in the game of protecting the Conservatives regarding what they are doing in terms of tax cuts, but it is an insult to everybody who is currently lying on a trolley in a hospital ward or an A and E department to say, "This isn't on us. It's on faceless bureaucrats at Westminster." Of course it is on the SNP. It has been in charge for 15 years now—it should start acting like it.

Our NHS staff do an incredible job. They are always here for us. It is not the job of doctors and nurses to address the woeful mismanagement of this Government. That is the job of ministers, and they should start acting like it is.

16:56

**Paul O'Kane (West Scotland) (Lab):** In rising to close the debate for Scottish Labour, I want to genuinely recognise the outstanding work that is done by everyone working in our NHS: staff who go out every single day on to the front line to look after all of us—staff who we clapped for every week during the pandemic, who now feel dejected, burned out and undervalued by this SNP Government.

The NHS is this country's greatest institution—realised by a Labour Government, which rebuilt this country from the ashes of war. Let me say to Gillian Martin and others that I share their anger over the Tories' economic policies, which is why we need a Labour Government across the UK, with the plan outlined by Keir Starmer this week in Liverpool to reverse the economic disaster that has been created by the Tories.

When Carol Mochan answered the cabinet secretary, he said that it was embarrassing. I will tell him what is embarrassing. In my lifetime, I have never seen the NHS in Scotland so unwell. I

have never seen the people who work in it so demoralised. I have never seen people languishing on waiting lists and in A and E departments in the current state that they are in. The cabinet secretary should be embarrassed by that.

Many of the people who work in our NHS are our friends, family and neighbours. They are people who love the bones of our NHS but are totally broken. That is what 15 years of SNP mismanagement and a record of failure has done, as outlined by my colleague Jackie Baillie in her opening remarks.

This is at the door of the cabinet secretary.

**Emma Harper:** Will Paul O'Kane take an intervention from a member of the NHS?

**Paul O'Kane:** I would like to make some progress.

The cabinet secretary has been in post for almost 500 days. People say that he is missing in action, but he is not even missing in action—he is just missing. It is time for him to own his record. He must listen and engage with what staff are telling him. In his speech, the cabinet secretary said that we should be grateful that two-year waits have been eradicated. Is that the sum total of his ambition for the NHS? Is that what he stands behind?

This week, it was revealed that hundreds of surge beds that were made available last winter to cope with additional patient numbers are still occupied.

Let us reflect on the views of doctors working in our NHS, as highlighted by Alex Cole-Hamilton and others. John-Paul Loughrey, the vice-president of the Royal College of Emergency Medicine Scotland, said that the latest delays could lead to 40 deaths in the following 30 days. He said:

"Every hospital in Scotland just now is under the cosh."

As we have heard, just last week, 1,200 people spent more than 12 hours waiting in emergency departments in hospitals across Scotland. It is worth hearing that again, because we need to let it sink in. That is the reality in our hospitals right now.

We know that part of the solution to getting people out of hospital requires well-supported and valued social care.

**Emma Harper rose—**

**Paul O'Kane:** I will give way to Emma Harper.

**Emma Harper:** I appreciate the member giving way; my intervention is on that point.

The issues are complicated. The Health, Social Care and Sport Committee heard yesterday from the chief executive of NHS Dumfries and Galloway, who said that Brexit is part of the problem when it comes to recruitment. Does the member acknowledge that the chief exec of NHS D and G said that?

**Paul O’Kane:** Of course I acknowledge that Brexit is part of it. However, what we hear from the Government is excuse after excuse. If it is not the pandemic, it is Brexit. If it is not Brexit, it is how we operate care homes. If it is not that, it is procurement. Excuse, excuse, excuse. Where are the solutions?

Actions speak louder than words. If this SNP-Green Government respected care workers, it would offer them more than the derisory pay rise that it has offered them. Our care workers deserve better. That is why Scottish Labour has consistently called for care workers to receive an immediate pay rise to £15 per hour.

NHS staff are working tirelessly to provide exceptional care, but they are being let down by the inaction of this Government and this cabinet secretary. The SNP cannot shirk responsibility for the current crisis. I noticed that many SNP back benchers did not even want to mention the NHS for which their party is responsible.

The crisis is the result of 15 years of sustained failure by this Government—a Government that is out of touch, out of ideas and unwilling to take responsibility. I challenge the cabinet secretary to step up, show leadership and do whatever is necessary to avert a coming humanitarian crisis in our hospitals this winter.

17:01

**The Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care (Kevin Stewart):** We have heard a lot today about pressures in the system, the impact on people who access health and care services and what we are doing to support improvements for winter and for the future.

As the health secretary said, none of this is easy, especially in times of financial austerity. However, we are confident that we are providing as much support as we can within our control. In Scotland, we have higher staffing per head than NHS England has; we have already delivered a record number of GPs working in Scotland, with more GPs per head than is the case in any other country in the UK; and front-line health spending is 4.6 per cent—or £143—higher per head in Scotland than it is in the UK as a whole. That level of commitment will help us to minimise the impact on people during this difficult time.

Like Gillian Martin, Clare Adamson, Gillian Mackay and Christine Grahame, I think that it is crucial that we frame today’s debate in terms of the cost of living crisis and the effects that that will be having on the mental and physical health of people across Scotland. We know that poverty is the single biggest driver of poor mental health. This crisis will not be affecting people equally, just as, during the pandemic, existing inequalities are being exacerbated.

There is no aspect of this crisis that is without implications for mental health. There are likely to be implications at all levels of need, from rising levels of worry and anxiety to increased levels of distress, increased demand for signposting and community support and a rise in demand for specialist mental health services. We are working across Government and with key partners to look at what we can do, within the limited powers of this Parliament, to support people through this crisis. Probably the only folk who will not be accessing such services will be the likes of the bankers, whose bonus cap has been removed, or the ultra rich, whose taxes have been cut—that is the Tory way.

**Brian Whittle:** I want to try again to talk about the inverse care law. A deep-end practice GP told me last night that about 20 per cent or so of the people who are furthest removed from society do not access NHS services, although they are the people in the most need. What will we do to stop the problem of demand outstripping need?

**Kevin Stewart:** We stop the problem by investing in more outreach—something that we cannot do if our budgets constantly get cut because Tories cut taxes rather than invest in our public services.

Dr Gulhane’s motion mentions CAMHS waiting times. As mental wellbeing minister, I want to use some of my time today to focus on that area, which is just one area in which the Government is taking forward significant improvement work. I whole-heartedly agree that it is crucial that the right mental health help is available in the right place and at the right time, and I will focus on what we need to do.

I know that waits for mental health services are unacceptable, and we are working to ensure that we meet the standard of 90 per cent of people starting treatment within 18 weeks. That is why the Government has heavily invested in CAMHS over the past year and past months, and we are now beginning to see the impact of our investments. *[Interruption.]* The Tories do not like to hear this, Presiding Officer.

Our investments in CAMHS have meant that, according to the latest national performance data, more than 5,200 children and young people began

treatment in the last quarter. That is a record, and it is the highest sustained level of activity. Boards and those on the front line are working hard to reduce backlogs and treat people, with those who have waited longest being treated first.

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** Will the minister give way?

**Kevin Stewart:** No; I have had enough of Tories today, thank you very much.

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

**Kevin Stewart:** We can see signs of progress. There has been an 8.6 per cent decrease in waiting times over the past 18 weeks. Let us look at CAMHS staffing.

**Stephen Kerr:** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Does what we just heard from the minister comply with the standards of respect that are expected from members?

**The Presiding Officer:** I am sure that all members are aware of my insistence that we adhere to the code of conduct when debating issues in the chamber. I remind members to treat one another at all times with courtesy and respect. I ask the minister to conclude his remarks.

**Kevin Stewart:** Perhaps some of the personal remarks that were aimed at the cabinet secretary earlier fall into that category as well, because they were very personal indeed.

We will do all that we can to protect our people and our NHS from brutal Tory policies and their tanking of the economy.

17:07

**Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con):** If anyone wanted to see the arrogance and complacency of the SNP Government, we saw it there.

The storm clouds that loom over the horizon are bringing a winter crisis that the SNP Government is ill prepared for. Even before those storm clouds arrive, our surgeries, hospitals and care homes are on life support. Routine operations are being cancelled, elderly people are being left in hospital beds unable to be discharged, cancer patients are waiting too long for diagnosis and treatment, ambulances containing the sick and dying are queuing outside hospitals and patients are waiting hours and sometimes days for life-saving treatment. Nursing and care shortages are undermining patient care. Hard-working and committed GPs are leaving the NHS in record numbers.

The picture is bleak, and earlier this month—

**Kevin Stewart:** Will Mr Hoy give way?

**Craig Hoy:** I will not give way.

Earlier this month, accident and emergency waiting times reached their worst level on record—Mr Yousaf, their worst level on record on your watch; this is personal, because you are the minister responsible.

**The Presiding Officer:** Mr Hoy, speak through the chair, please.

**Craig Hoy:** The minister sits there with his fingers crossed, hoping in vain that the crisis that his Government created will be averted. As we have heard in the debate, the situation is urgent: the NHS urgently needs resuscitation and a proper recovery plan.

**Kevin Stewart:** Will Mr Hoy give way?

**Craig Hoy:** I will not give way at the moment.

The NHS needs a proper cancer plan, a proper workforce plan and a Government with the competence to deliver them. Yesterday, the minister congratulated himself on A and E waiting times, but what is there to celebrate? A third of people are still waiting for longer than four hours to be seen in our emergency departments, and any minor improvement on a record low is hardly something to be proud of.

**Kevin Stewart:** Will Mr Hoy give way?

**Craig Hoy:** Not at the moment.

The minister all too often pats himself on the back when he should be getting his finger out. If the SNP wants to remind patients of its record, here it is: the longest cancer waiting times ever; the longest ambulance waiting times ever; the longest diagnostic waiting times ever; and the highest number of beds occupied due to delayed discharge ever. But from Humza Yousaf, all we get are empty promises and hollow words, because he is an inaction man. This winter, his inaction will cost lives.

As Tess White warned, 40 additional lives could be lost in a single month as a result of A and E waiting times.

In my own health board area, Edinburgh royal infirmary's A and E department was over capacity every hour of every day in August by an average of 80 people, but the Government's failures extend way beyond our A and E units.

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

**Craig Hoy:** I will.

**Kevin Stewart:** Mr Hoy has just talked about failures, but I wonder if he could talk about the failures south of the border, because Scotland's core A and E waiting times were 9.5 percentage points better than those in England. Is that failure, Mr Hoy?

**Craig Hoy:** I remind the member that I stood for the Scottish Parliament to hold the Government to account, and that is what I intend to do.

Do not take my word for it. Cancer Research UK warned that more than three quarters of patients who require an urgent cancer referral started treatment within 62 days during this quarter, which is well below the target and the worst since the start of the pandemic.

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

**Craig Hoy:** I will not.

Before the minister uses Covid as an excuse, let us not forget that the 62-day target has not been met since 2012, and it is not just our NHS that is in crisis—and perhaps Mr Stewart might want to listen to this, as he is the minister responsible—it is social care too. Make no mistake—the plan for a national care service in Scotland is a dangerous power grab. Many of the Government’s failures in our NHS are made worse by failures in social care.

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

**Craig Hoy:** No, I will not give way—I think that we have heard enough from the SNP for today, thank you very much.

**Kevin Stewart:** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Is that a breach of the code of conduct or are Tories allowed to say those things, but SNP members are not? They have set an example.

**The Presiding Officer:** Can we be serious for a moment, colleagues? I remind the chamber that we must all take the code of conduct seriously, at all times, and if we are addressing each other in terms that are not courteous or respectful then we need to question that, so please treat one another with courtesy and respect at all times. The debate will be all the better for it.

**Craig Hoy:** I understand why Mr Stewart did not want to hear this, but he will hear it. Despite saying that it would eradicate delayed discharge, the SNP has made it worse. Care at home is in crisis; the workforce is demoralised, and rather than fixing the current crisis the SNP now proposes a wholesale restructuring of the entire social care system. The deck chairs are being rearranged on the Titanic. Minister, that move will waste scarce resources and it could cost lives. Those are not my conclusions; they are the conclusions of key stakeholders. West Lothian integration joint board said:

“The implementation of the Bill is likely to cause significant disruption and uncertainty to service delivery and staffing.”

The Scottish Ambulance Service said:

“There is genuine concern that this will have a negative impact on communication, continuity of care, duplication of effort and also the ability for staff within SAS to be able to communicate effectively”

and COSLA warns that the plans risk

“repeating the cycle of successive reorganisations”

and

“come with a significant opportunity cost and disruption – but fail to address the fundamental and deep-rooted changes needed to integrate services at the front line.”

Minister, this is a disaster waiting to happen.

Let us not lose sight of why some in the SNP Government have taken their eye off the ball—as we read in the *Herald on Sunday* at the weekend. It is because the prize of independence is, in the SNP’s eyes, a bigger prize than fixing the crisis in our NHS. This is Government complacency on a scandalous scale.

The Government is failing patients across Scotland. It is failing on A and E waiting times. It is failing on cancer treatment targets. It is failing on ambulance waiting times. It is failing on routine waiting times for elective surgery. It is failing on NHS dentistry. It is failing on child and adolescent mental health. It is failing on delayed discharge. It is failing on workforce planning. When patients die this winter, it will be Humza Yousaf who must take responsibility for the stark result of those failures, because the problems that we see across health and social care are problems created—and ignored—by the SNP Government. It is a Government distracted by the wrong priorities. It is a Government that, sadly, and to its shame, cares more about dividing our nation than healing its people.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes the debate on NHS waiting times.

## Point of Order

17:14

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. It has been intimated to me that I should apologise for a discourtesy to the chair during my contribution to this afternoon's debate on ferries. As my conduct in the Parliament is important to me, I apologise to the chair and the whole chamber.

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** Thank you very much, Mr Rennie.

## Business Motions

17:14

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-06087, 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 4 October 2022

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)

*followed by* Stage 1 Debate: Cost of Living (Protection of Tenants) (Scotland) Bill

*followed by* Financial Resolution: Cost of Living (Protection of Tenants) (Scotland) Bill (if required)

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: Health and Care Recovery and Winter Planning

*followed by* Committee Announcements

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

6.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Wednesday 5 October 2022

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:  
Rural Affairs and Islands;  
Health and Social Care

*followed by* Committee of the Whole Parliament —  
Stage 2 Proceedings: Cost of Living  
(Protection of Tenants) (Scotland) Bill

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Approval of SSIs (if required)

6.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 6 October 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:  
Social Justice, Housing and Local  
Government

*followed by* Stage 3 Proceedings: Cost of Living (Protection of Tenants) (Scotland) Bill

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

6.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 25 October 2022

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)

*followed by* Stage 1 Debate: Hunting with Dogs (Scotland) Bill

*followed by* Committee Announcements

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Wednesday 26 October 2022

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:  
Constitution, External Affairs and Culture;  
Justice and Veterans

*followed by* Scottish Labour Party Business

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.10 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 27 October 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* Stage 1 Debate: Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 3 October 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 of business is consideration of business motion S6M-

06088, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on stage 1 extension.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Hunting with Dogs (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be extended to 28 October 2022.—[George Adam]

*Motion agreed to.*

## Motion without Notice

17:15

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** I must advise members that we are currently experiencing a difficulty with the remote video platform. On that basis, I am minded to accept a motion without notice, under rule 11.2.4, to move tonight's decision time to another day.

*Motion moved,*

That, under Rule 11.2.4, Decision Time shall be moved to tomorrow.—[George Adam]

**The Presiding Officer:** Are we all agreed that decision time should be moved to tomorrow? [Interruption.] It sounds as though we are not all agreed. I will ask the question again, for clarity. Are we agreed?

*Motion agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you. That being the case, we will move on to members' business.

## Research Excellence Framework Results 2021

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** The final item of business is a members' business debate, on motion S6M-04407, on congratulating Scottish universities on the Research Excellence Framework 2021 results. The debate will be concluded without any questions being put.

*Motion debated,*

That the Parliament acknowledges the results of the 2021 Research Excellence Framework, which it understands states that 84.86% of the research submitted by Scottish universities is considered "world-leading" or "internationally excellent" in its quality; considers that Scotland is a world-leading research nation; recognises what it sees as the contribution that this research has made to social and economic challenges faced in the UK, including in the West Scotland region, and abroad; welcomes the reported growth and investment arising from this world-class research, and considers that Scotland should capitalise on what it sees as the massive potential created by Scottish universities to improve sustainable economic growth.

17:18

**Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con):** I am honoured to hold my second members' business debate on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives, and to be celebrating Scotland's status as a world-leading research nation.

I thank Universities Scotland and Scotland's Rural College for sending briefings ahead of the debate. I also to congratulate the University of St Andrews on its ranking at the top of *The Guardian's* 2023 university guide and on being named Scottish university of the year in *The Times's* good university guide 2023.

When I lodged the motion, I was delighted to learn that around 85 per cent of research that is submitted by Scottish universities is considered to be "world leading" or "internationally excellent" in quality. It is particularly impressive that every one of Scotland's universities was found to be undertaking world-leading research. The research power behind Scotland's universities is immense. It is the driving force behind many policy developments that help to identify and respond to socioeconomic challenges that face Scotland, the United Kingdom and the world.

One example is the partnership between Scotland's Rural College and the University of Edinburgh, which retains its position as the strongest provider of agriculture, food and veterinary sciences in the UK. All 11 case studies that were submitted to the Research Excellence Framework, eight of which involve SRUC, were considered to be "world leading". They range from

topics including refined greenhouse gas reporting to barley disease management, all of which promote sustainable growth for Scotland's natural economy.

It is not only the UK that stands to benefit from Scotland's research contributions. As convener of the cross-party group on India, I have learned a great deal about international research collaborations. The University of Dundee, the University of Glasgow and the City of Glasgow College are all involved in the "clean Ganga" case study, which involves mapping and monitoring water quality in the River Ganga. That research will not only make a fantastic contribution to the environment in India, but will create transferable knowledge that can be shared and learned from at home and across the globe.

Let us not forget that research helped us to get through the pandemic and that, every day, it helps to cure diseases, as well as to identify new ones. Research finds solutions to problems and problems to solutions.

It is estimated that, for every £1 million of public investment in Scottish university research, £8 million is generated in economic output. Whether it is generated through creating growth in emerging industries, through job creation or through attracting foreign direct investment, it is clearly an attractive area of investment.

Universities Scotland has a bold ambition to take innovation partnerships with small and medium-sized enterprises across the UK to the next level. That is a necessary step for businesses responding to unpredictable or slow-growth markets, but it is also a must for sustainable economic growth.

There is an appetite for Scotland's world-leading research capabilities, but we must capitalise on them; we cannot let them be a missed opportunity. The SNP-Green national strategy for economic transformation, "Delivering Economic Prosperity", claims to want to transform the economy, but that message is not being translated into action yet.

There have been cuts to funding, including a 31 per cent real-terms cut in the research excellence grant since 2014-15, a projected 37 per cent real-terms cut to the teaching grant by 2024 and a £2,325 drop in funding per Scottish student since 2014. With such statistics, Scotland is losing its competitive edge on English universities. In contrast with Scotland, it is forecast that England's quality research grant will increase by more than 10 per cent in cash terms between 2021 and 2023.

Universities are increasingly being asked to do more with less; the university funding model is on its knees. It is set to become more reliant on international tuition fees than it is on the SNP

Government, which is a high-risk strategy. If the Scottish Government wants to see true transformation and growth, it needs to acknowledge that we need investment. To lose our competitive edge in research and development would be to lose one of the most attractive areas of investment in our economy.

Despite our reigning status as a world-leading research nation, the financial constraints that are facing universities risk stunting growth. The SNP Government must find a way not only to support but to champion our academic research. I, like every other member in the chamber, am keen to work across the parties towards a solution.

I hope that the Scottish Government will consider the asks from bodies including Universities Scotland and that it will look toward the economic return from the investment that is requested.

As the saying goes:

"No action without research; no research without action"

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

17:25

**Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP):** I thank Pam Gosal for allowing Parliament, through her motion, to reflect on the remarkable success of Scottish universities.

In contributing to the debate I will highlight, in particular, the successes of the University of Glasgow and the University of Strathclyde, which are located in my Glasgow Kelvin constituency.

Glasgow university has been ranked 13th and Strathclyde has been ranked 33rd in the Research Excellence Framework's rankings of 129 institutions. Those are highly creditable rankings, and both universities should be proud of their performance, which has been achieved through intense focus and effort on the part of the staff, who also have busy teaching timetables and student welfare responsibilities. The University of Glasgow's achievement is particularly exceptional, so I pay tribute to the university's leadership team for its vision and commitment, and to the researchers who have delivered that result for the University of Glasgow and Scotland.

Before the summer recess, I visited the breathtaking new Mazumdar-Shaw advanced research centre, which is known as the ARC. The new building is central to Glasgow university's research strategy. Moreover, the unique concept of creating world-changing research that contributes to solving global challenges is a huge credit to the institution and its academics.

As members might know, the advanced research centre brings together more than 500 leading researchers in a building that was specifically designed to break down organisational structures, to facilitate collaboration and to provide true societal impact. By housing diverse teams in the same building, the ARC exposes individuals and research areas to one another so that they can collaborate, which increases opportunities for interdisciplinary working on global challenges. The building has exceptional features and accommodation. I encourage everyone to go and visit it, because the ground floor is open to the public at all times.

The fact that Glasgow university has achieved that remarkable ranking is all the more impressive because it has done so while also widening access for students from Scotland's most deprived areas and achieving a ranking of 19th out of 1,046 international institutions in the world for its positive impact on society in the *Times Higher Education* impact rankings earlier this year.

I note, too, the quality of Strathclyde university's research and its impact, which has been recognised by the Scottish Government's significant investment in university ventures, including the advanced forming research centre and the Centre for Continuous Manufacturing and Advanced Crystallisation. It is also reflected in Strathclyde university's leading role in national centres, including the National Manufacturing Institute Scotland and the medicines manufacturing innovation centre.

I will sound a note of serious concern. Brexit might not yet have dealt a "hammer blow" to research in Scottish universities, but we read earlier this year that one of Scotland's top cancer experts is considering moving a major research project abroad, amid political turmoil and warnings that a Brexit-linked impasse over European Union funding will starve universities of talent.

In July this year, *The Herald* newspaper reported that Dr Payam Gammage, who works at the Cancer Research UK Beatson institute in Glasgow, warned that the UK's departure from the £80 billion horizon Europe programme is accelerating Britain's decline from being a global centre for scientific excellence. He also said that the development would significantly reduce Scotland's appeal to overseas researchers and stressed that it is already proving to be impossible to attract applications from individuals in EU states.

That is not what Scotland voted for, but I will close on a note of hope that Scotland will return—sooner rather than later—to the EU's valuable collaborative institutions, and that we will safeguard the ongoing excellence of our universities' research input and output.

17:30

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** We should measure what Kaukab Stewart has said against the actions of the SNP-Green Scottish Government. Before I get to that, I congratulate Pam Gosal for bringing the debate to the chamber. This is the first time that I have had the privilege of addressing the chamber in my new capacity as my party's education spokesperson.

As was noted by Pam Gosal, there is world-leading research and development right here in Scotland that helps Scotland and the rest of Britain to tackle the real social and economic challenges that we face in this dynamic and changing world. That is why protecting and growing Scotland's research capabilities should be of utmost importance to everyone in this Parliament. The SNP and the Greens may talk in a way that gives the impression that they understand that importance, but the reality of their actions shows us that they do not.

Ahead of today's Education, Children and Young People Committee meeting, Universities Scotland submitted evidence that said:

"By 2024/25, universities' teaching grant will have been cut by 34.7% in real terms over 10 years and the research budget will have been cut by 41%."

Let those numbers sink in. By 2024-25, our

"universities' teaching grant will have been cut by 34.7% in real terms over 10 years and the research budget ... cut by 41%."

The Scottish Funding Council submitted evidence to the same committee, highlighting that

"the average annual research funding gap in Scotland from 2015-16 to 2018-18 was £328 million."

There is a gap in SNP-Green credibility when they talk about excellence in our universities and in our research capabilities.

Analysis of the UK Research and Innovation industrial strategy challenge fund shows that

"only 6.5% of the funding went to Scotland",

with

"44.2% going to London and the Southeast of England".

That is another commentary on things as they are today. Collectively, the evidence shows that the success of research at Scotland's universities, as is highlighted in the motion, is not because of Scottish Government policy, but despite it.

**The Minister for Higher Education and Further Education, Youth Employment and Training (Jamie Hepburn):** Mr Kerr referred to the amount of money that is drawn down through UKRI. Will he also reflect on the fact that Scotland's universities won about 13 per cent of the UK's project-based research funding with only

about 8 per cent of the UK population? Given that he thinks that more money should be invested, will he tell us precisely where in the Scottish Government budget that money should come from?

**Stephen Kerr:** To help the minister to understand where I am coming from, I am supporting a motion that compliments and praises the research capabilities and performance of Scotland's universities. However, I hope that I am very clearly saying that the SNP Scottish Government has much to answer for in its stewardship of Scotland's university research funding.

**Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):** The minister will be well aware that, in 2014, Scotland captured up to 15 per cent of UKRI funding, so that figure has dropped by 2.5 per cent in the interim as a direct consequence of the funding gaps that Mr Kerr is highlighting.

**Stephen Kerr:** I am grateful to Michael Marra for bringing those facts to our attention.

World-leading research and development spurs innovation, invention and improvements in the Scottish economy. It is only a few months since the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy, Kate Forbes, launched a transformative plan for Scotland's economy. At the centre of that plan are the centres of excellence in Scotland's universities that will create high-paid jobs, sustainable economic growth and a competitive advantage for Scotland. By cutting Scotland's research budget, the SNP not only puts Scotland's world-leading research at risk, but cuts opportunities to create high-paid jobs and sustainable economic growth, and cuts opportunities to give Scotland a competitive advantage in the global economy. I simply ask whether that is what it calls being "stronger for Scotland". I do not think so.

Rather than continuing with its financial cuts to research, which put the sector at risk, the SNP should acknowledge the mistakes that it has made. Rather than continuing to cut opportunities, it should be developing an ambitious plan that puts Scotland at the forefront of research and development in various fields including pharmaceuticals, industrial machinery, computer technology, agriculture and green energy. The funding that the Scottish Government provides must match the ambition of the plan. We cannot become complacent.

I can see that I am testing the patience of the Deputy Presiding Officer, who thinks that I have taken enough time. I probably have.

To conclude, I say that Scottish universities' research deserves better than it gets from the SNP Scottish Government.

17:36

**Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP):** This place has a tradition of members' business debates that are not overtly political and, rather, focus on agreement and celebration of shared cross-party interests. That is what I intend to do in my short remarks.

Scotland's universities have achieved so much that is internationally excellent and world leading, which brings significant benefits for society.

I have an active long Covid community group in Falkirk East, and the international study into long Covid that the University of Glasgow led with the World Health Organization is likely to be of practical benefit to our understanding of the complexity of the condition. One of the characteristics of university research that is sometimes overlooked is the extent to which it involves working with others, as the University of Glasgow working alongside the WHO demonstrates.

The University of Stirling, in particular, deserves great praise, not least because it is close to my constituency and many of my constituents have benefited from undergraduate and postgraduate studies there. Indeed, some of its postgraduate research students contribute directly to its research excellence, and I know that Evelyn Tweed, the local MSP, is disappointed that she is currently unwell and missing the debate. I note in particular that the university's institute of aquaculture is ranked first in the UK for impact, with 100 per cent of its research achieving the highest possible rating. It, too, has had huge links to other organisations in search of impact. After 30 years at the institute, the late Professor James Muir moved to a post with the United Nations, and in one of his last international assignments he reviewed the Benguela Current Convention, which is based in Namibia—a testament to both his and the university's global standing.

I also have a connection to the University of Stirling, in which regard I must point to my entry in the register of members' interests and my role as a director of the humanitarian organisation Revive Campaign. Two University of Stirling postgraduate students are conducting research for us. One is considering the impact of the war in Ukraine from a humanitarian standpoint, and the other is researching how humanitarian policies interact with the UN's development goals.

In so many ways, our university research capability has profound practical benefits for society. As we look to the future, my contention is that the role of university-based research will be of even greater importance. The world in which we live is changing faster than ever. Most of the scientific and technological changes have been

reliant on university research, and such changes have had impacts on our wider social and cultural lives. In the future, research-based change will be even faster.

The late Professor Tom Stonier, whom some dubbed the professor of the future, pointed out in the 1990s that, in the past 25 years of the 20th century, more people will have worked in front-line research than in the entire earlier history of the world, fuelling accelerating change.

Things have continued to develop, making research the most fundamental need for any society with ambitions to make progress. Scotland needs to hold fast to her ambition and continue to invest in our university research base, despite taxing economic times. Our very future depends on it.

17:39

**Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab):** I thank Pam Gosal for bringing the motion before us. It is a pleasure to follow Michelle Thomson's contribution, and I echo her final words about the importance of research for the future not just of Scotland but of the whole planet. It is in research where so many of the answers that we are desperately seeking, and about which we sometimes shout in the chamber, might be found—in a possibly more rational location—by those who apply their minds.

University research in Scotland is world leading—we have heard that. Every £1 million that the Scottish Government invests in university research generates a return of £8 million. Indeed, the return on every £1 million of UKRI funds is £12 million. The results for Scottish universities, which are based on 21,256 research outputs from 8,675 academic staff at 18 institutions, speak for themselves. We have heard that, across all areas of submitted research activity, 41 per cent of our research is 4\*, world-leading research and 44 of it is 3\*, internationally excellent research. Fifty per cent of our research is judged as world leading or internationally excellent, which demonstrates excellence across our country.

However, when it comes to hard realities, what does that mean? For the chamber's information, there are, apparently, 31,097 universities and higher education institutions across the world. The USA has 3,216 of those; Australia has 190; Canada has 387; China has 2,564; and across the United Kingdom, we have 280. What does that look like for people who get up in the morning and go out to work? Here in Scotland, the University of Edinburgh's world-leading research led to a change in the age of criminal responsibility in Scotland, and we now have the lowest number of young people in prison since 1972. At a UK level,

University of Edinburgh research saved the national health service £2 billion over six years by improving stroke prevention. Around the world, the university's research has saved a million children's lives from pneumonia and led to a ban on corporal punishment in schools in several South American countries. Apparently, 175 million smartphones are faster, greener and ready for the complex demands of tomorrow and 5G because of University of Edinburgh research.

However, the difference in excellence between Scotland and the rest of the UK is narrowing, and that challenge needs to be addressed. There are funding pressures. Despite a sector-best performance, eight universities in Scotland saw their research funding cut this spring, following the Research Excellence Framework results, due to insufficient investment in the research excellence grant allocated by the Scottish Funding Council. Four of our highest-performing universities experienced cuts of more than £1 million. Professor Iain Gillespie, principal and vice-chancellor of the University of Dundee, writes:

"So where did this leave the University of Dundee, as a mid-sized Scottish research-intensive university? The answer is in the 'squeezed middle', that group of institutions which, despite excellent overall results in the REF, including outstanding results in some areas, have received a significant reduction in REG funding from the SFC."

That is a challenge going forward. It is a challenge for this SNP-Green Scottish Government, because the challenge that we heard about from Michelle Thomson is that, if we do not fund research—applied research to move things forward as well as the blue-sky thinking that is needed—Scotland's future will look grim, as will the UK's and the world's. That is because, without our researchers—our scientists, engineers and technologists and indeed the whole teams who gather together to solve some of the hardest problems that we face and some who truly think the impossible and then make it possible—we will have a very dim future.

17:44

**Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):** I thank Pam Gosal for securing the debate in the chamber. It is right that we have the opportunity to celebrate the research culture and outputs of our universities. As Martin Whitfield rightly highlighted, the university sector is an ancient and enduring strength of Scotland. We should hold our universities as a delicate treasure of our country. I am proud to represent a region that has four particularly outstanding universities: the University of Aberdeen, Robert Gordon University, Abertay University and the University of Dundee.

Before I talk about projects and general issues, I will mention the professional staff who work in the

universities for whom the REF process as they know it is, frankly, a nightmare. The process is not enjoyable and it takes many hours of filling in complex case studies and producing evidence in order to be assessed. We owe them our thanks for our universities' fantastic standing and the fact that we are all here to celebrate that.

Those universities and individuals do not do any of that work alone. Research in universities is, fundamentally, a collaborative process. It is done with partners and other institutions across the UK and internationally. We do not have to look further than the work that was done in our universities during the Covid pandemic to rapidly produce vaccines, when people could collaborate across borders. Some of the barriers to that collaboration were taken down—I hope for ever—in that process in areas such as pre-print publications and the rapid dissemination of test results. That meant that there could be human benefit, rather than simply the production of intellectual property, as a result of the outputs of our publicly funded institutions.

Kaukab Stewart was right to highlight Brexit, which has been a fundamental attack on the culture of collaboration. We should not walk away from or dismiss the challenges that Brexit brings—I do not think that anyone in the chamber would do that—and the barriers that have been put up to the access to European institutions, with their fantastic resources and different cultures of research, as a result of Brexit. Collaboration is about sharing knowledge and making sure that there is open access to information.

I know colleagues across universities whose careers have been fundamentally damaged by the Brexit process. They were funded by European projects, which is a different track of funding and a different way to gain resource. Having that removed has ruined some careers in Scotland and right across the UK. Frankly, that is shameful. The sooner we get it right in terms of full access to those collaborations, the better.

Kaukab Stewart and Scottish National Party members have to reflect on not putting up barriers to collaboration. In the spirit of Michelle Thompson's point about not being too political, I will not go too much further in that respect. However, if we are going to make sure that we have continued collaboration, that has to be at the forefront of the minds of SNP members so that they can make sure that barriers are not put up to how we work across our islands, either. It does not serve the Scottish Parliament well not to highlight the challenges that we have. I know that the minister will respond to that point in his closing remarks.

At a meeting of the Education, Children and Young People Committee this morning, Professor

George Boyne, principal of the University of Aberdeen, drew attention to the long-term trends of decline. In the REF figures that we are celebrating, English universities, Welsh universities and universities in the rest of the UK have improved their performance at a faster rate than Scottish universities have. As a Parliament, that is the challenging truth for us. As parliamentarians, if we are going to safeguard the ancient and fantastic culture of research that we have in Scotland, we have to do better. We need to have a long-term, hard look at how we make sure that those trends do not scupper our universities in the years to come.

17:48

**The Minister for Higher Education and Further Education, Youth Employment and Training (Jamie Hepburn):** I thank Pam Gosal for lodging the motion and for securing the debate. It has been a useful opportunity for us to reflect on and celebrate the many successes of Scotland's academic institutions and their research strengths. We know that we have a world-class research base in Scotland and that the new knowledge and insights that the sector produces are fundamental to our on-going economic recovery and growth.

Like Pam Gosal, I congratulate the University of St Andrews on the news that it has received in recent days. I thank members for their contributions—I will try to respond to as many of them as I can. Mr Kerr's contribution this evening gives me the opportunity to welcome him to his new role as the Conservative education spokesperson. I look forward to his on-going constructive contribution to the discourse on all matters educational. I am sure that I can rely on him in that regard.

Returning to this evening's subject matter, the recent Research Excellence Framework results fundamentally demonstrate that there is much to be celebrated in Scottish research. Our success does not rely only on a few institutions—Scottish university research is world class across the board. There is evidence of world-leading research in every single university in Scotland. We should laud, celebrate and make every effort to highlight that. Martin Whitfield laid out some of that in detail, so I will not re-rehearse what he said.

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

**Jamie Hepburn:** Absolutely.

**Martin Whitfield:** I want to clarify a point. The Open University in Scotland's research is attributed to the Open University as a whole, rather than being separate, distinct and resting in the figures for Scotland.

**Jamie Hepburn:** Indeed. I note that the Open University in Scotland, which I have regular dialogue with, is a valued part of the landscape of higher education in Scotland.

I join Michael Marra in acknowledging the achievements of our universities. We can talk about those achievements in generic terms, but all those achievements rely on the individual contributions of people who are working day in, day out on research in various disciplines. I, too, thank those individuals.

That research allows our nation to make significant breakthroughs on some of the biggest challenges that we face and on the opportunities that we have. Scottish researchers are driving innovations in how we treat cancer and dementia, they are developing solutions that address the climate emergency and child poverty and they are bringing new knowledge that transforms our healthcare, technology, environmental sustainability and more. Of course, they have also played a critical role in reorienting and gearing much of the research activity during the Covid-19 period to ensure that we responded to the challenges that we have faced. It is therefore unsurprising that the REF results show that almost 90 per cent of our impact is judged to be outstanding or very considerable.

I say to Kaukab Stewart that I have seen first hand how Scottish research at the University of Glasgow has changed lives. I visited the Research into Inflammatory Arthritis Centre Versus Arthritis, where I met world-leading researchers who are advancing our understanding of the causes of rheumatoid arthritis, which affects more than 400,000 adults in the UK and more than 44,000 in Scotland. That underlines the impact that research can have on people's lived experience. It also speaks to the partnership approach that Michelle Thomson spoke of. I have seen examples of that world-leading research at all the institutions that I have mentioned.

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

**Jamie Hepburn:** Yes, I will take a brief one.

**Stephen Kerr:** The minister has a tremendous responsibility, because it is in his stewardship to see that the numbers quoted this morning from Universities Scotland about the real-terms cut of 41 per cent to the research budget over 10 years is reversed. Will the minister tell us what he will do to fight much harder to ensure that that investment in Scotland's future is increased on his watch?

**Jamie Hepburn:** I will come to talk about the figures, but I guess that that was a reference to the recent research excellence grant awards. That process has always been competitive—that has not changed—and the nature of any competitive

process means that some will benefit more than others. I want to place on record that that model was shaped in consultation with the sector.

I was about to make a point about the impact of Brexit, which Kaukab Stewart and Michael Marra mentioned. That is of concern to me. I assure all members that this Government is absolutely committed to ensuring that there are no barriers to research. This morning, I was very happy to go to an event at the University of Edinburgh with Una Europa, which is a coalition of universities that stretch across the continent. That underlines the international approach that we take in Scotland. I reaffirm that I very much support that approach and that the Scottish Government values it.

With regard to our research base, I am now able to place on record an issue that has not been mentioned in the debate but that speaks to some of the figures that have been bandied about. For all the points that have been made—I take them seriously—Scotland still ranks seventh among the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries for higher education research and development spend as a percentage of gross domestic product. That is above the EU average and the OECD average, and it is well above the UK average as well.

We are continuing to invest. We have put nearly £300 million into research and innovation for 2022-23, which is an increase over the previous fiscal year. Last year, we spent £3 million on our saltire research award, which supported 200 projects between Scotland and Europe. All that contributes towards a wealth of research activity and enables universities to leverage additional resource. That, in turn, enables Scotland, which has 8 per cent of the UK population as I mentioned, to win around 13 per cent of the UK's project-based research funding.

Scottish institutions win 12 per cent of the overall research grants and contracts from EU Government bodies that are secured by the UK. Over the period 2014-2020, Scottish organisations won €874 million from horizon 2020—an EU research and innovation funding programme—which is around 11 per cent of the overall UK winnings under that programme. We are punching above our weight.

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

**Jamie Hepburn:** If I am able to, I will in a moment.

The horizon 2020 programme is a particular area of concern right now, because we have a UK Government that is ready to take us out of it. That programme delivered nearly €900 million of investment from 2014 to 2020 to Scotland. That is above the UK's performance.

Presiding Officer, do I have time to take an intervention?

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

**Michael Marra:** The minister's point about us punching above our weight is well made. Earlier, I made a point about the declining trend in that regard. I highlight the University of Dundee's performance in biomedical sciences: it is the number 1 university in the whole of the UK for biomedical sciences. Life sciences will drive the future of the Scottish economy. Dundee is better than all but Cambridge and Oxford.

The remaining issue, which has been raised by Professor Iain Gillespie, is that that performance was actually punished. It resulted in a cut to the research excellence grant to the University of Dundee. What does the minister have to say to universities that have performed outstandingly—astonishingly, in fact—and have had their resources cut as a result?

**Jamie Hepburn:** I think that it is silly to talk about universities being punished. We have a competitive system. Institutions put forward their work, it is assessed under the framework and grants are awarded. That is reflected in the overall uplift in the quality of research that we have seen. That is something to be celebrated, and I would have thought that Mr Marra would want to join in that celebration.

I conclude by saying again that I am enormously grateful for all the activity in our academic institutions that is undertaken across the length and breadth of the country. We should be proud of that effort. We should talk at every opportunity about that effort. So much work is going on that is to be welcomed, and I encourage all members to get out to their local institutions to see some of it for themselves. I can certainly tell you, Presiding Officer, that I make it a core part of my activities to go out to celebrate all of Scotland's wonderful research carried out by our academic institutions.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you very much, indeed, minister. I can assure you and those in the chamber that I will be attending the University of the Highlands and Islands graduation ceremony in the coming days.

That concludes the debate.

*Meeting closed at 17:58.*

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